THE CENTURY MANIFESTO

Twelve volumes · One continuing argument

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

FIRST COLLECTED PUBLIC DISCUSSION EDITION

November 2026 · A4 print and Google Docs edition

About this edition

The Century Manifesto is a twelve-volume inquiry into how people, institutions and societies might become fairer, more accountable and better able to learn from their mistakes. It considers difficult moral questions without assuming that disagreement is disloyalty or that every proposal has already earned a place in law.

This first collected public discussion edition brings together the current working manuscripts of all twelve volumes, incorporating the revised editions of Volumes II and III. It is intended for readers who want to examine the reasoning, challenge assumptions and offer counterarguments. It should not be mistaken for existing Australian law, professional advice or a fully costed political platform.

The collection has been developed from original essays, previous manuscripts and editorial assistance, including AI-assisted reconstruction. Some first-person connecting passages and unsettled positions still require explicit author confirmation. Research references are retained at the end of the collection where available, and the separate editorial review records the outstanding verification and publication questions.

Nothing here asks the reader for obedience. The invitation is to understand the proposed reasoning, demand evidence where it is missing, and identify alternatives that protect human dignity and improve real outcomes. This invitation applies to the Manifesto itself.

How to read the collection

Read the volumes in order if you want to see how the arguments build: foundations; culture and education; rights; accountable power; the economy; opportunity; justice; housing; infrastructure and the environment; migration; technology; and the method for reviewing the entire system. The chapters can also be discussed individually using their stable volume and chapter numbers.

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THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME I

Foundations Of The Century Philosophy

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

Why I Am Writing This

When we were kids, we didn't need permission to be curious. We asked who, what, when, where and, probably the most annoying one for our parents, WHY? We'd ask why something worked, then why that answer was true, then why the next bit happened. Eventually somebody would say, 'Because that's just how it is.' But was that ever really an answer?

I think somewhere along the way we lose a bit of that. Life gets busy. People get hurt. We become adults, learn how unfair the world can be, and sometimes we stop asking questions because it feels easier not to. Or we worry that if we ask something obvious, we'll be treated like we're stupid. I don't want that. I want us to get back some of the curiosity we had as kids, but bring all the experience and wisdom we've gained as adults along with it.

That's really what this whole manifesto is for. Not to make everybody agree with me. I'd rather somebody read it, tell me exactly where they disagree and explain why, than finish it and think they have to repeat everything I've said. I'm one cog in something a lot bigger. I'm not an economist, lawyer, engineer and teacher all rolled into one person. I couldn't be, and I don't need to be. That's why we have each other.

And when I say there are no stupid questions, I don't mean every answer is right or that every idea deserves to become a law. I mean let somebody ask. You might know something they've never been taught. Their question might show exactly where the explanation stopped making sense. If we take the time to explain it another way, maybe we both learn something. How else do we expect people to keep up when the world never stops changing?

'I don't know' is perfectly honest. Nobody knows everything. The part that frustrates me is when 'I don't know' becomes the end of the conversation. Why not say, 'I don't know yet. Let's find out'? That's the difference between closing a door and opening one.

There are ideas in here people will disagree with, especially when we talk about prisons, welfare, money, rights and what we expect of one another. Some of those ideas might not work. That's the point of putting them on the table. I want to weigh up the good and bad, not just the bit that sounds nice. If a better solution comes along, I'd rather have that than spend the rest of my life defending a bad idea because it was mine.

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails. And that includes this book.

I want these pages to be read as an invitation to work through a difficult problem, not as a demand that every reader arrive at the same conclusion. A disagreement can reveal an error, but it can also reveal that two people are protecting different things. Before deciding who is wrong, I want to know what each person is afraid of losing and what they believe a better society should provide.

We hear 'that's just how things are' so often that sometimes we forget somebody made a decision somewhere along the line. Maybe it was the right decision at the time. Maybe it still is. But how

would we know if we never ask? I don't want to throw away the good things people before us built. I want to understand what they were trying to achieve, then see whether we can build on it.

The world is made of interconnected systems; familiarity alone isn't a reason to keep them unchanged.

I believe one of the greatest challenges facing society is that we have become so accustomed to the systems around us that we sometimes forget to question why they exist, who they serve and whether they could function differently.

We inherit economic structures, political institutions, social expectations, traditions and ways of organising our communities. Many of these systems developed for legitimate reasons. Some were created to solve problems, others to improve efficiency, and some emerged through competing interests rather than deliberate planning.

But the existence of a system doesn't automatically justify its continuation.

Something being familiar doesn't mean it is fair. Something being efficient doesn't mean it is beneficial to everyone involved. And something being difficult to change doesn't mean changing it is unnecessary.

At the same time, I don't believe we should dismantle functioning systems simply because they are imperfect.

The goal should be to understand what a system achieves, identify where it fails and explore whether its outcomes can be improved.

This is the foundation of the Century Manifesto.

I want to examine society as a collection of connected systems rather than a series of isolated political arguments.

Housing influences employment. Employment influences financial security. Financial security influences education, healthcare and personal opportunities. Infrastructure shapes where people live. Government policy influences business decisions, while those decisions influence workers, consumers and the environment.

These relationships don't mean that every problem has the same cause or that everything can be solved through one political ideology.

They mean that decisions have consequences extending beyond the immediate issue being discussed.

If we want to improve society, we must become better at understanding those connections.

This edition records a moment in the development of the ideas. It isn't a completed ideology, a formal party programme or a claim that every difficult question has been resolved. Its value lies in the questions it preserves, the commitments it clarifies and the standards by which those commitments can be tested.

One thing I keep coming back to is maintenance. We understand that a car, a building or a road can be well designed and still need inspecting, repairing and improving. Why do we sometimes act as though a law or institution should stay exactly the same just because it worked when it was first introduced?

A policy might solve a problem for one generation and create a new one for the next. That doesn't mean the people who designed it were fools. It means circumstances change. I'd rather we investigate why something was built, protect what it still achieves and fix the parts that aren't

keeping up. The same goes for my own ideas. If I get something wrong, I want a future reader to see what I was trying to achieve and why the evidence made us change course.

Inheriting progress without inheriting complacency

I don't see modern society as a mistake that needs to be demolished. Generations of people built roads, hospitals, legal rights, schools, systems of exchange and ways to protect one another that are better than many of the alternatives they replaced. Some of those changes were fought for by people who never lived to see their benefits. Respect for that work is one reason to investigate how our systems now perform. It isn't a reason to stop improving them.

Suppose a public service works correctly for nine people but consistently leaves a tenth unable to use it. We haven't established that the service is worthless, and we haven't proved the excluded person's complaint is unreasonable. We have found something worth investigating: what the rule achieves, why a particular group is excluded, whether the exclusion is justified and whether the remedy would damage a benefit everyone else depends on. That is more useful than saying either that the whole institution is corrupt or that the person should accept it.

A law can have been written for good reasons and later become outdated. A restriction may protect people from real harm yet be enforced in a needlessly harsh way. A program may show a successful annual performance figure while leaving the person using it no better off. These are different kinds of failure. A solution depends on which one we are actually dealing with.

If a proposed reform can't explain what it improves, which safeguards it retains and what it risks losing, then it isn't ready simply because I find its intentions admirable. The same applies to defending existing arrangements. Their age and familiarity don't establish their effectiveness.

That is why the Century philosophy begins with questions rather than an election promise. Every generation receives some answers from the generation before it. We can be grateful for them without pretending that gratitude prevents us from asking whether those answers still work. The more serious the proposed change, the greater our responsibility to understand what the old arrangement was doing before we remove it. The same standard applies to my ideas. If I want society to learn from its mistakes, I have to be prepared to do that in public myself.

CHAPTER 02

The Manifesto, the System and the Work of Building It

I want to clarify something before we get too far into the bigger arguments. I have written a lot of this by explaining my thoughts in conversation, and I have learned how easily that process can change the way an idea sounds. Something that makes perfect sense in my head might come back to me as a formal paragraph that says roughly the same thing but doesn't feel like what I was trying to say.

That's not just a writing problem. It's exactly the sort of communication problem I want the manifesto to help with. We can use the same words and still mean different things. We can agree on a goal but argue over how to get there. Sometimes I need another person to repeat my idea back so I can work out what I actually meant. And sometimes that person will point out a problem I genuinely hadn't considered.

I don't want anybody to read this and treat every paragraph as a law I'm demanding we adopt tomorrow. Some parts are the foundation of what I believe. Some are suggestions. Some are uncomfortable questions. I want to explain why I am asking them, not just put a polished answer on a page. And I want people to tell me when they think I've got something wrong. I'd rather we work it out than stop talking.

I don't want to inherit somebody else's political worldview and simply repeat it. I want to understand enough about politics, economics, history and philosophy to develop my own. That means challenging people I agree with, trying to understand people I disagree with, and accepting that some of my current beliefs may change.

The point isn't to appear perfectly consistent by hiding every tension. Real policy involves competing interests, imperfect evidence, limits on money and time, and consequences nobody can predict with certainty. A serious framework should make those tensions visible enough to examine.

An ordinary resident can identify a flooded road, an unsafe pedestrian crossing, a confusing welfare letter or a school process that is failing their child. They may not know the correct engineering specification or legislative clause. That doesn't make their observation meaningless. At the same time, observing a problem doesn't prove their first proposed remedy is affordable, lawful or safe. Both propositions can be true.

I want disagreement to improve the idea. A person who says, 'That proposal would leave people without transport,' may be contributing something I missed. A specialist who says, 'That bridge can't take those loads,' has identified a constraint. And a person living with the consequences may notice that the specialist's proposed detour can't be used by somebody with a mobility impairment. The strongest outcome comes from connecting those perspectives, not crowning one of them as the only voice that matters.

I have been learning that there are three related things in this project, and confusing them can make a promising conversation collapse before it starts. The first is the manifesto itself: the developing record of the questions I ask, the experiences and examples that brought me to them, and the positions I hold at a particular time. The second is the Century System: the work of connecting those ideas so their consequences can be examined together. The third is implementation: the detailed laws, institutions, budgets, safeguards and tests through which particular proposals might one day operate.

Those layers depend on each other, but they are not interchangeable. A moral principle is not a costed proposal. A possible institutional design is not an existing law. A thought experiment is not a promise to impose it on anybody. If somebody tells me that an idea needs a budget, a legal mechanism or a workable way to prevent abuse, that is a serious challenge. It identifies work that must be done before implementation. It does not always answer whether the objective itself is worth pursuing.

The reverse is just as important. I cannot defend an idea that would violate basic dignity or require arbitrary power by claiming that the practical details can be solved later. Some problems are not missing paperwork. They are conflicts with what the whole philosophy is supposed to protect. The distinction between an unresolved mechanism and an unacceptable moral consequence must be made openly.

I do not want to take an idea about society, force it into the boundaries of current political institutions, discover that it will not fit neatly, and conclude that the idea was worthless. Existing institutions are themselves open to evaluation. But neither do I want to pretend that imagining a different arrangement removes the constraints of resources, human behaviour, safety or logic. There may be new ways to organise cooperation, yet a different system still has to feed people, protect them, remain accountable and survive the predictable failures of imperfect human beings.

The manifesto therefore needs room for ideas at different stages of development. Some are convictions I am prepared to defend, some are possible directions, and some are questions whose answers I have not settled. When a passage changes from one of those categories to another, readers should be able to understand why. Smoothing over uncertainty would make the writing easier to sell, but much less useful to challenge.

The twelve-volume structure is an attempt to give that inquiry room to develop. It begins with its ethical foundations, moves through humanity and rights, examines power and the economy, follows consequences through work, justice, housing, infrastructure, migration and technology, and eventually returns to the method by which the entire system can be tested. This is a proposed reading architecture, not proof that the project is finished. An argument belongs where it can be properly understood, with enough connection to the rest that it does not become an isolated opinion.

I want readers to be able to open one book and understand its question. I also want somebody who reads the whole series to see why a decision about wages might affect housing, why a policy about criminal justice might depend on education and opportunity, or why public control of an essential service raises questions about democratic oversight. The point of the structure is to keep the connections visible, not bury people beneath a catalogue of topics.

This also means the record must outlast any one draft. If I change my opinion, the earlier position should not disappear as though I had never held it. A future reader ought to be able to see what changed, what evidence or reasoning mattered and what difficulties remain. Being open to correction is only meaningful when correction can actually be seen.

CHAPTER 03

One Cog in Something Greater

I say I'm one cog because I genuinely don't believe one person can have every answer. Picture how much has to happen just for you to buy your groceries. Farmers, drivers, workers, roads, electricity, shops and people paying for it all. Everyone's doing something different, but the whole lot is connected. Why would fixing our country be any different?

I don't consider myself the person who has all the answers. I'm one cog in this beautiful world, trying to contribute what I can to something much larger than myself.

There are people better equipped than me to calculate budgets, design policies, manage public services, build infrastructure, analyse data or solve technical problems. Their expertise matters, and we should use it. But expertise should be part of a collective effort, not a reason for everyone else to stop asking questions.

My contribution is to question, explore, connect ideas, challenge assumptions, and encourage people to consider what we might achieve if we took greater collective responsibility for one another. I can help start a conversation without pretending I can personally finish every part of it.

I don't need to be the best economist to ask what our economic priorities are for. I don't need to be a government expert to ask whether institutions are serving the people they are supposed to represent. I do need to listen when someone with relevant expertise explains why a proposal is impractical, unaffordable, ineffective or likely to cause harm.

The goal isn't to replace expertise with opinion. It is to bring values, lived experience, public questions and technical knowledge into the same process. Experts can help determine how to achieve an objective; expertise alone doesn't decide what society ought to aim for, whose needs matter, or which trade-offs are acceptable.

I believe we should be able to pursue our own ambitions without losing sight of the people around us. Individual success matters, but so do the conditions that make success possible: education, health, stable communities, infrastructure, opportunity, trust, and people willing to help when someone falls behind.

Collective responsibility doesn't mean everyone is responsible for everything, or that personal responsibility no longer matters. It means recognising that we have both personal responsibilities and shared responsibilities, and that neither can always be fulfilled without the other.

I don't want to dictate every answer. I want to help start the conversation that brings us closer to them.

I often describe society as a machine made up of countless cogs, each contributing to the movement of something much greater than themselves. I use this comparison because I believe we sometimes forget just how connected our lives really are. Food does not simply appear on supermarket shelves. Somebody grows it, somebody processes it, somebody transports it, somebody manages the store, and somebody maintains the roads, electricity and infrastructure that make those things possible. Every part depends upon another. The same applies to education, healthcare, construction, business, government and even our justice system.

These systems do not exist independently. They are connected through the people, resources, knowledge and effort that keep our country functioning. When I talk about collective responsibility, this is what I mean. I do not believe we should be building a country where everyone’s primary

motivation is simply to accumulate as much money as possible. Money has a purpose. Profit has a purpose. Incentives are necessary to encourage people to work, innovate, take risks and contribute. I am not arguing that we should eliminate these things.

I am arguing that they should serve a greater purpose. The objective of an economy should be to sustain and improve the society that makes the economy possible. A successful country should not only be measured by how much wealth it generates, but by what that wealth achieves, how it is distributed, whether people have meaningful opportunities and what future generations will inherit. A shared purpose does not require identical people Not every cog in a machine performs the same function. Some carry enormous loads. Others perform smaller but equally necessary tasks. Some require maintenance, and some cannot function in the same way as others.

People are far more complex than machines, and I do not want this comparison to suggest that someone's worth depends on their productivity. The comparison is about interdependence. An elderly person receiving care is still part of our community. Someone with a disability may contribute differently or require ongoing support. A young person may need education and guidance before developing their abilities. Someone who cannot contribute economically should not lose their inherent dignity. This is why I believe we must assess circumstances rather than apply the same expectations blindly.

Where someone can participate, we should create meaningful opportunities and encourage them to do so. Where barriers exist, we should investigate them. Where someone genuinely cannot participate, we should provide appropriate support. Where someone knowingly and repeatedly rejects reasonable responsibilities despite having genuine opportunities, I believe proportionate consequences deserve consideration. The difficult task is establishing those distinctions fairly, rather than simply assuming we know somebody's circumstances.

The machine is an image for our dependence on one another, not a description of how a human being should be treated. This distinction matters enough to repeat in a different way. If a gear in an engine stops working, someone may replace it. If a person becomes ill, grows old, lives with disability or cannot find work, their fundamental worth does not disappear. The fact that a community needs contributions does not entitle it to classify people as defective parts.

I also do not think that being a contributor requires somebody to become extraordinary. A person who maintains a road, delivers a meal, teaches a skill, cares for an elderly neighbour or notices a problem others missed may make a difference that never appears in a grand national calculation. Other people may need support for much of their lives. They are still people entitled to respect, safety and a voice. The challenge is to develop expectations that recognise capacity and responsibility without making economic output the condition for belonging.

Unity must never become unquestioning obedience There is an enormous danger in giving governments the power to decide what everyone should contribute and how society should operate. A system created with good intentions can still become oppressive. If a government controls employment, essential resources, public information and individual opportunities without sufficient oversight, it could become extraordinarily difficult for citizens to challenge abuses of power. That is not what I want. I want a common national purpose developed through democratic participation, transparent evidence and continuing public discussion.

There should be room for disagreement, different political beliefs, independent journalism, professional criticism and new ideas. When I say there are no dumb ideas, I mean that people should not be discouraged from contributing simply because they lack qualifications or struggle to explain themselves. Every suggestion can be examined, even when the evidence eventually shows it will not work. An idea deserves a fair hearing, not automatic acceptance.

A shared purpose must therefore allow different ambitions and different kinds of knowledge. One person may understand the numbers. Another may know what happens when the system fails a particular family. Neither kind of knowledge can automatically replace the other. Technical questions should be answered with technical evidence; public values and the real experiences of those affected must still shape the decisions those answers support.

When I ask everyone to see themselves as one cog in something greater, I am asking us to remember the people whose efforts and needs make our own lives possible. I am not giving a government permission to turn human beings into instruments of a national plan.

CHAPTER 04

The Pothole Principle

Here's a simple one: you hit a pothole, the council patches it, and six months later there's another hole in the same place. Was the patch a waste? Not necessarily; somebody had to make that road safe. But if we never ask why the ground keeps failing, we'll be paying for the same job forever. Now think about how often we do that with people and public services.

Consider something ordinary: a pothole. It is dangerous and inconvenient. At face value the task is straightforward—make the road safe and repair the damage. Filling it can be the right immediate response. But the repaired surface doesn't necessarily tell us why that section failed. Water may have penetrated cracks. Drainage may be deficient. Heavy vehicles may have imposed repeated loads. The underlying pavement may be deteriorating, or the surface may have aged beyond the stage at which a simple patch can last.

The difference between the visible defect and its causal conditions matters. If the weakness remains, another defect may appear in the same place. If we rebuild every road in response to a shallow isolated pothole, we waste money. If we patch a failing foundation indefinitely, we may also waste money—and create avoidable dangers. Responsible maintenance begins with the seriousness of the immediate hazard, then uses the evidence available to choose an intervention matched to the problem.

This is the pothole principle: treat immediate harm while investigating the conditions that make it likely to return. It isn't a promise to find one secret cause behind every failure. Difficult problems often have many contributing causes. The task is to distinguish symptoms, mechanisms and contributing circumstances rather than assume that the most visible feature explains the whole event.

A natural world comparison, with limits -

The Grand Canyon and Uluru help explain why this way of thinking is appealing. Sediments can accumulate, become rock over geological time, and later be altered by uplift, weathering, flowing water and erosion. The Grand Canyon’s changing landscape and Uluru’s exposed sandstone aren't formed by the identical processes that create a road pothole. Nor is a mountain simply a large pothole in reverse. The comparison is a lesson in cumulative change, not a claim of scientific equivalence.

Both natural and engineered materials respond to physical conditions. Repeated forces, the movement of water, changes in temperature, material properties and time can transform what initially appears stable. We have constructed road surfaces that experience intense, concentrated use within much shorter human timescales. Understanding the mechanisms allows engineers to improve materials, drainage, foundations and maintenance schedules rather than relying upon repeated superficial repairs.

Imagine forcing heavy rain and floods through the same channels of the Grand Canyon, over and over. The water finds a way through, carries loose material away and gradually wears down the weaker areas. A pothole isn't a miniature Grand Canyon, and roads don't break apart through exactly the same processes, but that idea helped me understand how a little problem can keep growing. A crack opens in the road, water gets in and weakens the layers underneath. Cars and trucks keep putting weight on that same spot. The damaged pavement can flex, crack further and

lose pieces of asphalt, until you've got a hole that collects even more water. Then the next lot of traffic and rain can make it worse again. It's a cycle.

I also kept wondering about the grooves in our tyres, but not because I thought they grip by hooking into cracks. I'm thinking about the loose material left behind once the road has already started falling apart. Could those grooves pick up small stones or fragments and flick them away as thousands of wheels pass over the same damaged section? Tyres can pick up loose stones, so it is worth asking whether that happens here too. But I don't know how much it contributes to a pothole getting bigger, if at all, compared with water getting underneath, the road flexing and repeated loads from cars and trucks. That's a question for engineers to test, not a fact I'm going to pretend I've proven. So what are we actually fixing? The hole we can see? The drainage? The road underneath? Or the conditions that keep making it worse?

A philosophy that asks other people to examine their assumptions must be willing to examine its own. An inaccurate analogy should be improved instead of defended out of pride. The point is to discover how a process really works—not to win an argument about the first explanation we offered.

The road beneath the social surface

Imagine a student whose engagement has declined. Calling the child lazy may describe an adult’s frustration but explains little. The student may have an unmet learning need, inconsistent teaching support, fear of embarrassment, family instability or a classroom approach that doesn't suit them. None of these possibilities proves what is wrong for that particular student. They explain why investigation matters before a label hardens into policy.

Or consider a person unable to find stable work. Their choices still matter, but so might transport, affordable housing, local vacancies, qualifications, disability access and the cost of training. A welfare system that focuses only on whether a person has submitted enough applications may overlook the barrier that repeatedly prevents employment. Equally, a system that never asks whether support is helping someone make progress may unintentionally create long-term dependence. The point is to distinguish different reasons for the same visible outcome.

A hospital struggling with overcrowding offers another example. Extra beds could help, but demand, staffing, ambulance delays, discharge services, preventive care and demographic change might also be relevant. An intervention at only one point can move the pressure elsewhere. Sometimes the best response requires coordination between institutions rather than more expenditure inside one department.

These examples don't tell us what policies to adopt. They establish a standard of inquiry. We should understand what is happening, identify the mechanisms involved, examine the alternatives and make our uncertainties visible. That protects us against the comforting but mistaken idea that the first obvious solution must be the right one.

From a patch to a public decision

The immediate danger still matters. If a pothole is putting drivers at risk, making the road safe can't be delayed until we have commissioned a perfect study. But if crews repeatedly patch the same failing section, it is reasonable to ask whether a more substantial repair might avoid future closures and expenditure. Neither response is automatically the correct one. A minor isolated defect may need nothing more than ordinary maintenance. A failing road base might need drainage, reconstruction or a different traffic-management plan.

And here's another problem: what if it's one of the busiest roads in the area? You can't just shut it down whenever you feel like it. Closing a quiet street might inconvenience a few hundred people, but closing a major route could disrupt thousands of drivers, passengers, deliveries and businesses, especially when all that traffic is pushed onto nearby roads. Those are illustrative numbers, not a traffic count for a particular road. That pressure can make a quick patch look appealing because it gets the road open again. But if the patch fails and we keep having to close the road, what have we actually saved? I want us to compare the disruption from doing several small repairs with the cost of one longer, properly planned repair. Could we do the work in stages, use off-peak closures or provide better alternative routes? The workers need safe access too. Sometimes the temporary patch is still the right answer, but at least explain the whole trade-off, not just the repair bill.

That distinction leads to a practical choice: retain the current maintenance schedule, increase inspection frequency, rebuild the affected section, or investigate whether traffic loads and the surrounding network are contributing to the failure. Each has an upfront cost, an expected service life, disruption to road users and risks if the assumptions are wrong. Engineers should quantify those factors where possible. Residents can identify recurring locations and the consequences of closures. Elected representatives must then justify priorities among competing needs.

The same reasoning helps with social services, but only up to a point. A person isn't defective pavement. Human agency, emotions, rights and unequal power can't be reduced to material fatigue. The useful part of the analogy is examining conditions before repeatedly treating a visible symptom. Its limit is that an institution owes people duties that aren't captured by the cheapest technical fix.

Imagine a young person being told to lodge more job applications without anyone asking whether the available vacancies are reachable by public transport. Counting additional applications may satisfy a performance requirement while leaving the actual barrier unchanged. It is like counting patches while ignoring why the road keeps failing. The response should first check the facts; an analogy isn't evidence that the same solution always applies.

The lesson is not that every recurring social problem is secretly one simple engineering problem. It is that visible symptoms can tempt us to measure the action we took rather than the improvement we achieved. A repaired road is useful if it stays safe. An employment programme is useful if it helps people overcome real barriers and reach meaningful work where possible. A justice response is useful if it protects people now and helps reduce the likelihood of future harm. Each requires different kinds of evidence, and none should be judged by analogy alone.

There will be occasions when the only responsible immediate action is a temporary fix. Someone in danger should not be left waiting while we debate causes. But there will also be occasions when repeating the temporary fix is itself a decision—with costs that extend into the next year, the next budget or another person's safety. I want the Century approach to make both responsibilities visible: respond to harm, and keep asking why the harm continues.

CHAPTER 05

Basic Dignity and the Value of Human Life

A machine doesn't run because every cog is the same size. Some people work with their hands. Others teach, care, organise, invent or keep things going when somebody else can't. That's not an argument that our lives are literally machines. It's a way of recognising that we depend on contributions we often don't see.

Values are commitments to be tested, not slogans that settle every trade-off.

I want to be careful with the word value. Someone can be valuable to their community without being profitable. Think about somebody spending an afternoon sitting with an older person who would otherwise be alone. That time might not earn either of them a dollar, but it still matters. On the other hand, even that afternoon needs a place to happen and perhaps transport, staff or supervision. We can't pretend good intentions eliminate costs.

This is what I mean when I say that different cogs contribute differently. Some people can work full-time. Some can offer a few hours or a conversation. Some need care and may be unable to contribute at all. None of that makes them disposable. Our responsibilities should reflect capacity and opportunity, not one compulsory measure of productivity.

People are often capable of more than the opportunities they have been given allow them to demonstrate. A person struggling at school, work or home shouldn't automatically be assumed to be lazy, incapable or unwilling to contribute. Different people learn, communicate, create and work in different ways. A fair society should make room for that difference while still being honest about what a role or situation requires.

This doesn't mean pretending everyone has identical abilities or that every outcome can be equal. It means trying to discover people's strengths before judging their potential, providing genuine opportunities, and recognising that contribution can take different forms.

People deserve dignity, fair treatment and protection under the law. Basic rights shouldn't be casually traded away because a group is unpopular or a political argument is emotionally powerful. Where rights or legitimate interests conflict, the task is to understand the actual conflict and design a proportionate response rather than automatically declaring one side the winner.

Communication is a shared responsibility. A speaker can't predict every interpretation, and another person's hurt doesn't automatically prove harmful intent. Yet we should make reasonable efforts to communicate clearly, understand different needs, clarify mistakes and take the effects of our words seriously. The standards we expect from others should apply to ourselves.

The purpose of a service isn't merely to complete tasks or satisfy a procedure, but to improve the conditions of the people it exists to serve. Reliable standards, individual dignity, reasonable prevention and fair accountability should be visible in ordinary practice, not only in policy statements.

The cog must turn, but not everybody turns it in the same way

When I call myself one cog in a larger machine, I don't mean that everybody must be made identical or that government owns the person. I mean that the things we depend on require real people, real resources and continuing effort. Food must be grown, collected and delivered. Roads must be maintained. Trucks don't arrive at shops because somebody wrote an inspiring political speech. If

we want a society where everyone can have opportunities, we need people who are prepared to contribute to making those opportunities possible.

This is why I talk about collective responsibility as something more demanding than agreeing that compassion sounds good. I want us to ask what each of us can reasonably offer, what support makes that offer possible, and whether our institutions reward useful work instead of allowing the greatest rewards to collect automatically at the top. Some people will contribute through paid work, enterprise, training or public service; others through raising children, providing unpaid care, volunteering or forms of contribution that aren't recorded in a payroll system. And some people will need protection when they can't contribute in a conventional way. Calling all of these situations the same would ignore reality.

My strongest view is that someone capable of taking part shouldn't be able to demand unlimited collective resources while knowingly rejecting every reasonable opportunity. My equally important test is whether the offer is actually reasonable. A government must not invent an impossible standard, label people uncooperative when they can't meet it and then use that label to abandon them. The cog metaphor is useful for explaining dependence. It isn't a licence to judge a human being as a broken component whose dignity disappears when production slows.

A place in the machine doesn't have to mean a job

I use the image of a cog because I want to explain how society depends on people doing different things. I don't want that image turned into a reason to treat a person as a broken component when they can't work. A cog is a comparison, not a definition of human worth. Some people keep the economy moving directly: they farm, build, transport, manufacture, teach, run restaurants, operate shops and deliver care. Others provide unpaid care, study or help their communities in ways no payslip captures. Some require assistance with ordinary daily living, including people who can't participate in employment or volunteering at all.

My argument about responsibility has to account for all three. If someone wants to work but needs an accessible workplace, different communication, flexible hours, a suitable education pathway or specialist support, the first task is to examine and remove reasonable barriers. If they can't undertake employment, contribution may look different. If their circumstances make even that unrealistic, they still deserve assistance appropriate to their needs. I am not proposing a national scoreboard where a government decides who has worked hard enough to deserve being treated as human.

This is also where the idea of a collective machine becomes dangerous if used carelessly. The people who assess a person's capacity may be wrong; governments may underfund support and then label the resulting nonparticipation a personal failure. Any proposal that makes assistance conditional must require a real offer, individual assessment, accessible information, independent review and consequences that don't destroy basic safety. I want to reward effort and create opportunity, not turn the word 'contribution' into another form of prejudice.

When somebody needs help, giving everybody precisely the same response may not be fair. Someone with limited English, a hearing impairment or little access to digital devices may need a different method of receiving information. The underlying right to a fair process can remain equal even when the practical assistance differs. This principle matters for public authorities, but it also challenges businesses and community groups to ask whether the service they have designed can actually be used.

Consider an aged-care facility. A task can be marked complete because a scheduled check happened, even if a resident's actual concern remains unanswered. I am not claiming that staff who follow

procedures don't care, or that an outside visitor knows the full operational picture. Staffing constraints, clinical responsibilities, privacy and handover arrangements may explain what is being observed. But those limits make respectful feedback more important, not less. A feedback pathway should help establish what the resident needed, whether the concern was passed on, who was responsible for following up and whether the outcome improved.

This also illustrates responsibility according to power. A resident can't be expected to redesign staffing systems. A frontline worker may not control funding or rosters. Management and regulators have different powers and therefore different duties. Complaints shouldn't simply travel downhill until the least powerful person bears the blame. The point is to find the part of the system capable of correcting the failure.

For me, the starting point has to be that basic human dignity is not something we earn by working, paying tax, holding the majority view or being easy to care for. People have different abilities, opportunities and needs. Someone who requires lifelong assistance does not owe society a proof of profitability before receiving humane treatment. Nor does a person lose all moral significance because they have done something wrong.

Dignity does not require pretending that every person has identical needs. A fair process might require a different form of communication for someone who cannot understand a standard letter. Equal access to safety might require more support for one person than another. Treating everybody exactly the same can sometimes preserve an inequality rather than correct it. Yet different support must be justified by relevant need, not by stereotypes or assumptions about who deserves kindness.

There is a difficult boundary here that I cannot responsibly hide. In the wider manifesto I have considered the possibility of capital punishment for especially severe offending, and I am open to confronting the arguments against it. That idea creates a direct tension with a commitment to inherent human dignity, the possibility of wrongful conviction and the limits of state power. I have not resolved that tension merely by calling one value dignity and the other accountability. If society is ever to claim the power to take a life as punishment, it would need a moral justification that cannot be replaced by calculations about prison costs. This volume establishes the conflict; the justice discussion must examine it properly rather than pretend it has already been settled.

In practice, the way we treat people when it is difficult is often the clearest test of our principles. The person receiving care, the worker under pressure, the child unable to find the right words, the unpopular dissenter and the person in custody all present different obligations. They do not have identical claims to every freedom or privilege. They do, however, make it impossible for us to define human worth simply as the benefits another person can extract from them.

CHAPTER 06

Freedom, Accountability and Duty of Care

People should have meaningful freedom to make choices, build a life, speak, believe, associate, work and pursue ambitions. Freedom isn't the absence of every obligation. Choices can affect other people, and rights work best when paired with responsibility, fair rules and accountability.

Responsibility shouldn't be used as an excuse to ignore barriers people can't reasonably overcome alone. Equally, support should be designed to help people participate and build independence where possible, not assume that people are helpless or remove their agency.

Responsibility should reflect what a person or institution could reasonably know, influence and control. Those with greater power to shape a system should face stronger obligations to explain decisions, accept scrutiny and prevent avoidable harm. Those with less power shouldn't inherit institutional obligations by default.

Systems should be capable of being reviewed and changed. Keeping something simply because it is familiar isn't a sufficient argument; abolishing something simply because it is imperfect isn't sufficient either. Keep what works, fix what can be improved, and replace what consistently fails — after honestly assessing the evidence and consequences.

This is why I believe we must assess circumstances rather than apply the same expectations blindly. Where someone can participate, we should create meaningful opportunities and encourage them to do so. Where barriers exist, we should investigate them. Where someone genuinely cannot participate, we should provide appropriate support. Where someone knowingly and repeatedly rejects reasonable responsibilities despite having genuine opportunities, I believe proportionate consequences deserve consideration. The difficult task is establishing those distinctions fairly, rather than simply assuming we know somebody’s circumstances.

Here is a contradiction I have to confront. If the state defines a single national interest, what happens when somebody disagrees with the definition? What if the government calls a lawful critic unhelpful to the movement? What if a small group controls the meaning of 'contribution' and uses it to deny support to political opponents? A society that silences a cog for not turning in the approved direction has confused cooperation with obedience.

I reject that result. A common purpose should be drafted through transparent deliberation, periodically reviewed, contested through elections and protected by rights that neither a popular leader nor an angry majority may casually discard. People should be able to pursue their own lawful lives, beliefs and businesses, criticise the plan, oppose their government and campaign for a different plan. Those aren't defects in the machine. They are methods for discovering when the machine is hurting people or wasting resources.

The deeper question is which things can realistically be held in common. A population may accept shared commitments to safety, accessible knowledge, clean water, sound infrastructure, basic dignity, a workable economy and a liveable environment. It may disagree sharply on ownership, taxation, immigration, policing, social obligations or environmental priorities. Our framework should accommodate that disagreement rather than disguise it as unanimous consent.

The information people need to make a collective decision

I believe public decisions should be accompanied by usable information: what problem is being addressed, the evidence, the cost, the alternatives not chosen, the consequences for rights, who

gains, who loses, and the date on which the decision will be reviewed. Publishing a thousand technical pages that ordinary people can't understand isn't enough. We need clear summaries and access to the underlying material, with genuine exceptions for privacy and security subject to external checks.

But being equally informed isn't the same thing as everybody knowing the same facts to the same depth. An engineer will still know things about a bridge that an ordinary motorist does not. A parent may know things about a child's experience that a government analyst can't infer from an average. The goal isn't to eliminate expertise or independent judgement; it is to reduce unnecessary information gaps and give people a fair chance to question the reasons behind power.

I suspect a population capable of checking claims for itself may be harder to mislead, including through foreign propaganda or private political manipulation. That is a hypothesis, not a guarantee. Foreign interference can exploit the very platforms on which information is shared. Domestic sources can mislead too. A public education programme, independent journalism, protected whistleblowing and multiple independent sources of evidence matter because government can't be allowed to appoint itself the only authority on truth.

I believe freedom matters because a life directed entirely by others is not a meaningful opportunity to become ourselves. People should be able to pursue ambitions, hold unpopular beliefs, make lawful personal choices and disagree with the society around them. But no person exists outside the consequences of their decisions. Freedom to act does not imply freedom from criticism, obligations voluntarily undertaken, or lawful accountability for harms caused to others.

Collective responsibility has to be more precise than telling everybody to do their share. What could this person reasonably know? What choice did they actually have? Were the expectations explained? Was the service or opportunity genuinely accessible? What consequences would be imposed, and could those consequences undermine the basic needs the system exists to protect? These questions are especially important when a powerful organisation judges somebody with far fewer resources than itself.

I do not believe every requirement is automatically coercion. Families, workplaces and communities rely on people keeping reasonable promises and accepting proportionate responsibilities. Yet there is a serious difference between encouragement and using control over food, shelter, liberty or medical care to force compliance. A system can call itself supportive while leaving a person with no realistic right to say no. Its intentions do not erase the coercion in its methods.

The duty of care becomes stronger when somebody has greater knowledge, authority or control over a risk. An elected government, a large company, an employer and a frontline worker may all have responsibilities, but not identical ones. It would be convenient for leadership to praise collective responsibility while blaming workers or citizens for failures they could not fix. It would be equally convenient for individuals to ignore reasonable obligations by pointing only to the system. Neither is adequate.

This is why I want both compassion and accountability. We should understand the conditions affecting a decision without automatically excusing it. We should expect more where people have the ability and opportunity to do more, while protecting those whose circumstances make that expectation unfair. And we should never allow a public aim, however appealing, to become a reason for unlimited authority over private lives.

CHAPTER 07

The Century Approach to Evidence

I sometimes say 'there are no dumb ideas.' By that I mean that a suggestion should be heard before the speaker is mocked or excluded. A young person, somebody without a degree or somebody who communicates differently might recognise a practical problem that a professional has missed. Their contribution can become the beginning of a better design. It doesn't follow that every suggestion is equally accurate, ethical or affordable. An unsafe idea should be challenged with reasons. An idea that violates basic rights may have to be rejected. And an attractive idea with disastrous secondary costs shouldn't be adopted just to make the proposer feel valued.

This is also why I hesitate to call every political mistake corruption or stupidity. Public choices often involve competing goods. A leader may make a decision that seems reasonable with the available evidence, then discover costs nobody anticipated. That doesn't exempt them from scrutiny. It makes written reasoning, independent evaluation and honest correction more important. Politicians should have to explain the decision; citizens should have to examine more than a headline before condemning everyone involved.

What if I proposed a perfectly cooperative economy and it needed extensive surveillance to determine who was helping? What if it encouraged productive work but imposed cruel decisions on people with fluctuating capacity? What if protecting nationally owned services required barriers that raised household prices or reduced useful investment? These wouldn't be minor inconveniences to explain away. They would be warnings that my preferred design is failing the very values it was built to serve.

We need the courage to try, and the humility to stop. A country should be able to retain a successful public service, reform a harmful business rule, abandon an abusive programme and reconsider an economic proposal without making every decision a battle for ideological victory. A living manifesto must show how that process works, including how the author can be wrong.

One of the mistakes I want to avoid is treating every sentence as if it makes the same kind of claim. When I say that people deserve dignity, I am expressing a moral commitment. When I say a road is damaged, I am reporting something that could be observed. When I suggest a particular cause for that damage, I am making a factual claim that requires investigation. When I ask whether a different policy might work, I am proposing a question, not announcing the answer. Confusing those categories can make a persuasive story look like proof when it is not.

My own examples are especially vulnerable to that mistake. A pothole helps explain why repeated repairs may not address underlying conditions, but the same physical processes do not govern public services or human behaviour. An individual family experience can reveal a communication problem, but it cannot prove that every family responds the same way. A map showing overlapping social patterns cannot, by itself, identify who committed an offence or why. A theory about entertainment and young people's behaviour is worth investigating without being treated as established causation.

There is also a danger in using numbers without understanding what they measure. If an organisation counts the number of calls answered, it may ignore whether the problem was resolved. If a school reports only examination results, it may miss students who never gained fair access to learning. Numbers are not the enemy. They help us notice patterns and test claims that good intentions cannot test by themselves. But a statistic becomes meaningful only when we understand the definitions, the people not captured by it and what other explanations remain possible.

I do not want ordinary citizens excluded from discussion because they lack specialist qualifications. Equally, I do not want public opinion to overrule tested physical evidence simply because a technical explanation is inconvenient. The better arrangement is one where experts explain what they know and do not know, affected people can challenge whether the problem has been defined correctly, and public decisions distinguish evidence about likely outcomes from moral choices about competing priorities.

Evidence doesn't mechanically produce one politically neutral answer when different groups value outcomes differently. Governments must sometimes choose between reasonable competing priorities. Decision-makers should disclose relevant assumptions, state who is responsible, give reasons and identify opportunities for lawful review. Where rights are at stake, simple majority preference isn't a sufficient substitute for legal protections.

When evidence shows a decision is failing, revise it. Where an intervention succeeds, investigate whether the result can be repeated elsewhere. Do not allow partisan identity, professional pride or sunk costs to turn correction into an admission of disgrace. Accountability means accepting responsibility for choices and their consequences, while learning enough to make the next decision better.

Why simple metrics can mislead

The easiest things to count aren't always what matters. A hospital can shorten average waiting times by excluding complicated cases. A school can improve test results while neglecting inclusion. A road authority can report more patches completed while the same pavement keeps failing. Businesses can reduce measurable costs by transferring burdens onto workers, families or the environment.

This problem arises when a measure becomes a target and people adapt behaviour to satisfy the measure rather than the underlying purpose. Good oversight therefore uses multiple indicators, checks for unintended consequences and invites the people affected to explain what statistics have missed. Quantitative evidence and human experience should correct one another, not compete for total authority.

The final step is not simply announcing success. It is finding out whether the change actually worked and whether it created new harms. That requires honesty about what would count as failure before an institution becomes attached to its preferred result. A fair review should be capable of recommending that I abandon an idea, not merely change its presentation. If I am going to ask politicians and organisations to explain themselves when a policy fails, I have to expect the same of my own proposals.

Evidence can answer many questions, but it cannot remove every disagreement. We may agree on the cost of an intervention and still differ over whether that cost is justified, especially where rights, risks and unequal burdens are involved. That is where reasons and values must be made explicit. We cannot substitute one for the other. The purpose of evidence is not to eliminate human judgement; it is to give judgement a more reliable foundation.

CHAPTER 08

Ideologies as Materials, Not Blueprints

I believe one of the greatest mistakes we make when discussing politics is treating political and economic ideologies as finished systems that must either be accepted entirely or rejected because of their historical failures. We often judge entire philosophies by the actions of particular governments, political leaders or historical movements without properly examining the principles, institutions and circumstances responsible for their successes and failures. It is easy to blame capitalism for inequality, socialism for authoritarianism, or communism for economic hardship. But how often do we stop to examine why those outcomes occurred, whether they were inevitable, and what we could learn from them?

Capitalism, socialism and communism represent different approaches to ownership, production, economic organisation and the distribution of resources. Democracy and authoritarianism, meanwhile, concern how political authority is exercised, distributed and held accountable. These concepts are not interchangeable, even when they overlap in practice. A government identifying as socialist does not automatically make every action it takes representative of socialist principles. Equally, a predominantly capitalist government does not make every decision according to free-market principles or individual economic liberty. Many capitalist societies provide publicly funded healthcare, social housing, education, welfare and essential infrastructure. These arrangements demonstrate how different economic principles and social priorities can coexist within a functioning society.

Public services do not automatically make an economy socialist, just as the existence of private enterprise does not necessarily make an entire economic system capitalist. Different systems can adopt similar policies for different reasons, even when their underlying philosophies disagree. To me, they can sometimes resemble two sides of the same coin, simply produced by different mints. Society should not be obligated to choose between two supposedly opposing systems without first examining what each can contribute. I do not believe we should automatically dismiss every principle within an ideology simply because a government operating under its name has failed.

However, I also do not believe that good intentions should excuse harmful outcomes. There is an important difference between what an ideology represents, how it is implemented and what it ultimately produces. An idea may begin with the intention of promoting equality, prosperity, freedom or collective wellbeing. Those intentions may still hold value even when particular attempts to achieve them have failed. But that does not mean the methods used to achieve those objectives should be defended indefinitely. We must distinguish between a worthwhile objective, an ineffective method and a fundamentally flawed assumption.

If a system fails because it lacks transparency, we should investigate whether stronger accountability could improve it. If it creates opportunities for corruption, we should examine how political and economic power is distributed, exercised and controlled. If its economic arrangements contribute to exploitation, poverty or unnecessary suffering, we should consider whether those arrangements can be improved or need replacing entirely. And if an underlying principle itself proves incompatible with the rights, responsibilities and wellbeing we want to protect, we must have the courage to challenge that principle as well.

Historical failures deserve serious examination, not automatic dismissal or unquestioning defence. Throughout history, governments operating under different political and economic systems have concentrated power, restricted freedoms and failed to protect the people they were supposed to

serve. These failures cannot always be explained away as the actions of a few corrupt individuals. Sometimes the institutions themselves create opportunities for abuse. Sometimes the concentration of economic and political power makes meaningful accountability difficult. And sometimes the assumptions behind a particular policy or system are simply wrong.

We must be prepared to recognise all three possibilities. My intention is not to defend socialism blindly, nor to condemn capitalism simply because I disagree with particular outcomes. I want to understand what works, why it works, who benefits, who is disadvantaged and what safeguards are necessary to prevent abuse. This is why I disagree with treating socialism or communism as explanations for every failure of government, just as I disagree with blaming capitalism for every instance of inequality, exploitation or poverty without examining the circumstances involved.

Such arguments reduce complex social and economic problems to political labels. They can discourage people from examining potentially useful policies simply because those policies are associated with an ideology they have been taught to oppose. We should be capable of criticising government overreach without automatically labelling it socialism. We should also be capable of recognising the benefits of public ownership without assuming that every form of private enterprise is harmful. Likewise, we should be willing to acknowledge historical abuses committed by governments claiming socialist ideals without pretending that every form of collective economic organisation must inevitably produce the same outcome.

The purpose of political discussion should not be to defend a label at all costs. It should be to understand what society needs, identify where existing systems fall short, and collectively develop better alternatives. We are not living in the same world as the people who first developed many of these philosophies. Our technology, economic capabilities, environmental challenges, scientific knowledge and social expectations have changed considerably. We have developed new ways to communicate, produce goods, distribute resources, educate people and organise entire communities.

Our political thinking should be capable of changing alongside them. I do not want to build a society that blindly follows an ideology simply because somebody centuries ago believed it was the answer. Nor do I want to dismiss their ideas simply because they lived in a different time. I want to examine the problems they were trying to solve, understand the circumstances that shaped their thinking and consider how their principles could be adapted to the world we live in today. An ideology should not be treated as an instruction manual that can never be rewritten.

It should be treated as a foundation upon which future generations can build, question, improve and, when necessary, replace. Every generation inherits systems created by those who came before them. We inherit their achievements, their assumptions, their compromises and their mistakes. But inheritance does not mean obligation. We should not be expected to preserve every institution or tradition simply because it already exists. Nor should we destroy useful systems simply because we disagree with their ideological origins. We have a responsibility to examine what we inherit and determine whether it continues to serve the people who depend upon it.

That responsibility belongs not only to governments, academics or political representatives, but to society itself. I want people to feel encouraged to contribute their knowledge, challenge established assumptions, propose improvements and participate in determining their collective future. Political participation should not be limited to choosing between competing parties every few years. It should also involve education, public discussion, community participation, constructive criticism and meaningful opportunities to influence the institutions that shape our lives. People should be encouraged to understand different political philosophies rather than simply being taught which ones to support or oppose.

A person can recognise the benefits of private enterprise while supporting strong public services. They can believe in individual ambition while also believing that society has a collective responsibility to ensure people have access to essential necessities. They can support a strong government while demanding strict limitations on how that government exercises its authority. And they can recognise the value of collective responsibility without believing that individual rights and freedoms should be sacrificed in its name. These principles do not always have to be mutually exclusive.

Where genuine conflicts exist, we should openly examine them rather than pretending every disagreement can be resolved without compromise. This is particularly important when considering the relationship between government power and public accountability. I believe strong public institutions can play an important role in ensuring access to essential services, maintaining infrastructure, protecting vulnerable people and coordinating resources for the collective benefit of society. But strength must never be confused with unrestricted authority. If governments are granted greater responsibility over economic resources and essential services, citizens must have meaningful democratic power to scrutinise, challenge and hold those institutions accountable.

Independent oversight, transparency, access to information, protection of individual rights and the ability to challenge government decisions must remain fundamental safeguards. The purpose of collective responsibility must never become an excuse to eliminate independent thought, legitimate disagreement or personal freedom. A government claiming to act in the public interest should still be required to demonstrate that its actions are justified, proportionate and accountable. And the same standards must apply regardless of whether that government identifies as socialist, capitalist, conservative, progressive or anything else.

Political labels must never become substitutes for evidence. This is also why the Century system itself must remain open to examination. My vision is not to create a perfect, unchanging political philosophy that future generations are expected to follow without question. It is to establish a foundation that can continually learn, adapt and improve. A system that recognises the value of private enterprise, innovation, individual ambition and financial incentives, while also recognising the importance of public institutions, collective responsibility, social protections and ensuring that prosperity benefits society beyond a fortunate minority.

A system where criticism is not automatically treated as opposition, where historical mistakes become opportunities for learning, and where citizens have meaningful opportunities to participate in shaping the society they live in. But these expectations cannot apply only to the systems I disagree with. If the Century system develops weaknesses, they must be acknowledged. If its institutions become corrupt, they must be investigated and held accountable. If its policies fail to achieve their intended objectives, they must be reviewed. And if someone develops a better approach, their ideas should be considered on their merits rather than rejected because they challenge what I originally proposed.

I cannot reasonably expect other people to question their political beliefs if I am unwilling to question my own. I also recognise that an evolving system must have a clear moral foundation. Adaptability should not mean abandoning fundamental human rights whenever they become inconvenient, nor should collective prosperity become an excuse for discrimination, coercion or unchecked authority. The methods we use to achieve our objectives should remain open to change, but the principles guiding those changes must protect human dignity, equality before the law, accountability, individual rights and our responsibilities towards one another.

Even these principles deserve continued discussion about how they should be understood and applied as society develops. No individual, institution or political ideology should hold a monopoly

over what constitutes progress. Progress requires people to question, investigate, experiment, evaluate and learn. It requires us to recognise that something can have valuable intentions while producing harmful consequences. It requires us to acknowledge that an approach we once opposed may contain ideas worth considering. And it requires us to accept that something we strongly believe in today may need to be challenged tomorrow.

I believe the strength of a society should not be measured by its refusal to change, but by its ability to recognise when change is necessary and respond responsibly. We should understand an idea by what it represents, examine it through what it produces, and develop it through what we learn. Our objective should never be to prove that one ideology was right all along. It should be to create a society that is more capable of recognising problems, understanding their causes and working together to improve the conditions in which people live.

We do not have to abandon the past to create a better future. We have to be willing to learn from it. Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails. And that principle cannot be reserved for the systems we oppose. It must apply equally to the systems we create.

The Century approach should not be reduced to a slogan about mixing the best parts of capitalism and socialism. That would imply that every difficult question has already been answered by choosing a preferred piece from two familiar boxes. I want to go further: to ask what a society is trying to achieve, examine which arrangements actually help, and remain willing to design something different when inherited categories do not describe the problem well.

Nor do I believe every economic method can be separated from the political power required to enforce it. A publicly owned service may offer security and public value; it may also concentrate decisions in institutions that citizens struggle to challenge. A private enterprise may reward ingenuity and adapt quickly; it may also push avoidable costs onto workers or communities. The right questions concern ownership, incentives, access, results and accountability together, not simply which ideological name appears on the sign.

My support for collective prosperity does not cancel individual ambition. My concern about concentrated wealth does not mean productive risk should go unrewarded. My belief in useful government does not mean the state should be the only authority permitted to think or act. Where these aims conflict, I want the conflict examined rather than explained away by choosing a new label. The following volumes will have to earn any proposed economic arrangement through that standard.

CHAPTER 09

Contradictions as Development Tools

I have come to see contradictions differently from how they are often treated in political argument. When somebody points out a conflict in my thinking, I do not automatically want to erase one side so the philosophy looks perfectly consistent. Sometimes the two positions cannot both be right. But sometimes they represent two values that matter, and our first task is to understand exactly where they collide.

Consider freedom and collective responsibility. I want people to have meaningful personal choices, and I also believe society depends on people contributing where they reasonably can. If I make participation compulsory through the threat of losing basic necessities, I may destroy the freedom that makes participation meaningful. If I refuse all expectations, I may leave the costs of essential work to others without a fair way to share them. Calling one side freedom and the other duty does not solve the problem. It tells us what must be protected when examining alternatives.

Or consider stronger public institutions and the danger of concentrated power. I can imagine public enterprises reinvesting their success in shared services, but a system that brings more resources under government control can also give officials more opportunities to favour allies, punish dissenters or hide failure. Independent oversight is therefore not a decorative feature to be added after the economic proposal is written. The requirement to keep power contestable belongs inside the proposal from the beginning.

The conflict between safety and humane punishment is harder still. A person harmed by violence deserves protection and serious recognition. The community may need to confine someone who presents a continuing danger. Yet the person imprisoned remains human, and decisions made by courts and governments can be mistaken. My willingness to consider exceptionally severe punishments cannot be protected from objections about irreversibility, unequal enforcement or human dignity. Those objections are part of the moral substance of the question, not an inconvenient footnote.

These conflicts do not all have the same shape. Some are questions of evidence: what would actually reduce offending or improve an energy network? Others are questions of design: how can transparency be increased without exposing private information? Others reach the foundation of what we believe an individual can never legitimately be forced to surrender. A budget calculation may answer the first kind of question. It does not, by itself, answer the third.

I want to keep a distinction between an honest tension and a contradiction created by careless wording. If two statements appear opposed, perhaps I have not defined a term clearly. Perhaps I have described a limited example as a universal rule. Perhaps I changed my opinion without properly explaining why. Those problems can be corrected. But where two genuine duties cannot both be satisfied, I need to show the reader the strongest case for each and admit what is being sacrificed.

This does not mean placing every opinion on an equal footing. An unsupported factual claim does not become as credible as well-tested evidence because someone believes it sincerely. And a proposal that denies basic protections cannot be made acceptable simply by being called a compromise. What I want is a willingness to examine legitimate differences without treating the act of questioning as disloyalty.

Sometimes two ideas can be reconciled because they operate at different levels. I can support immediate police protection while also believing that education, housing and opportunity deserve long-term investment to reduce the conditions associated with offending. These are not necessarily competing responses. But whether either response works, whether it is proportionate and who pays for it remain questions for evidence and public judgement.

Other conflicts may remain unresolved for years. That is acceptable if I preserve them accurately and keep examining them. It is not acceptable to claim the system has answered a question merely because I can write a neat concluding paragraph. A living philosophy should be able to say, 'I believe these things matter, and I do not yet know how to protect them both.'

The same discipline must apply to the Century philosophy itself. If a foundational commitment is inconsistent with another position I hold, the choice cannot be delegated to a sympathetic editor or disguised with smoother language. I will need to confront it, seek criticism and decide what I can actually defend. The record of that decision should be available to the people whose lives could be affected.

What if I proposed a perfectly cooperative economy and it needed extensive surveillance to determine who was helping? What if it encouraged productive work but imposed cruel decisions on people with fluctuating capacity? What if protecting nationally owned services required barriers that raised household prices or reduced useful investment? These wouldn't be minor inconveniences to explain away. They would be warnings that my preferred design is failing the very values it was built to serve.

We need the courage to try, and the humility to stop. A country should be able to retain a successful public service, reform a harmful business rule, abandon an abusive programme and reconsider an economic proposal without making every decision a battle for ideological victory. A living manifesto must show how that process works, including how the author can be wrong.

CHAPTER 10

The Promise to Future Generations

I am writing from the understanding I have in October 2026. I can't tell somebody living fifty or a hundred years from now exactly what their world will need. So I would rather leave them a way to question and improve my ideas than a set of instructions they feel obligated to obey. If they find a better solution, good. That would mean this framework is doing what it was supposed to do.

I keep coming back to 'give it a crack'. Not because any idea is automatically good, but because you can't improve something if nobody is willing to have the first go. Maybe the idea is missing numbers. Maybe it doesn't account for a law or a real-life problem. Good. Now we know what we need to investigate.

The words 'there are no dumb ideas' are an invitation to participate, not a guarantee that everybody's proposal is safe. People should be able to ask a basic question without being mocked. Then we owe them an honest explanation, including when the evidence says no. It isn't respectful to pretend an idea works just to avoid hurting somebody's feelings.

The danger of changing everything I want this manifesto to demonstrate the enormous complexity involved in changing an established system. A proposal might improve wages but increase prices. Reducing profits might make essential goods more affordable in one area but discourage investment in another. Public ownership might improve national control over essential services but could also introduce inefficiencies, political interference or financial risks. A new welfare system might encourage participation while accidentally disadvantaging people whose circumstances have been misunderstood. Even a proposal designed to protect human rights may create a new power capable of violating them.

This is why I do not believe we should pursue revolution simply because we are frustrated with the present. We must ask what happens afterwards. Who grows the food? Who maintains the infrastructure? How do businesses continue operating? What happens to prices, employment, supplies, international trade and essential services while the system changes? What happens if our preferred solution fails? These questions are not arguments against change. They are part of responsible change.

The nation we leave behind Ultimately, I want to see a country where individual freedom and collective responsibility strengthen one another rather than constantly being treated as opposites. People should have opportunities to build successful lives, pursue ambitions, raise families, establish businesses, create things and contribute in ways that suit their circumstances. But I also want us to recognise that none of those opportunities exists independently of the society supporting them. We inherit the achievements, mistakes, infrastructure, knowledge and sacrifices of generations before us.

We have a responsibility to consider what we will leave behind. That includes our environment, public finances, institutions, relationships and ability to work together. I do not want a country where everybody thinks the same way. I want a country where people with different ideas can work towards a shared future. We are all cogs in something greater. The purpose is not to make every cog identical, or to force every person to move at the same speed. It is to understand how we depend upon one another, what we can improve and how we can create a system where individual effort and collective support produce something worthwhile.

And if somebody sees a better way of making that system work, I want them to speak. Because the purpose of The Century Manifesto is not to establish my ideas as the final answer. It is to encourage us to find better answers together. Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

A long-term view is not a reason to disregard people who need help today. A flooded road, a person without safe housing and a community facing violence all require responses in the present. But present decisions also create the circumstances future people inherit. We can sometimes avoid large future costs by maintaining what already exists. We can also create lasting damage when a short-term saving turns into neglected infrastructure, preventable hardship or an institution nobody trusts.

It would be easy for me to promise a better society and leave the difficult consequences to somebody else. The challenge is to develop changes that can survive contact with ordinary human life: disagreements, financial pressure, political turnover, imperfect evidence and mistakes. The best sign of success would not be that everyone eventually repeats my words. It would be that people have better ways to question the decisions that shape their lives, including decisions made in the name of this manifesto.

That is why I care about keeping a record of how ideas develop. Future generations should know not just what conclusions were written down, but what problems prompted them, what we considered, which warnings were raised and why something was changed. If they discover a better method, I want the record to help them improve on this work without having to repeat its mistakes.

I don’t want to dictate the answers. I want to help start the conversation that brings us closer to them. The Century Principles are my contribution to that conversation. They are not a finished ideology or a claim to superior knowledge. They’re an evolving collection of ideas, questions, and principles that I hope others will examine, challenge, improve, and build upon. If someone can show me a better way of understanding a problem, I want to hear it. If an expert can demonstrate that a proposal won’t work, I want to understand why. If someone with different experiences can show me something I’ve overlooked, I want to take that seriously.

The goal isn’t to prove that I’m right. It’s to contribute to a process through which we can become better informed, make better decisions, and create better opportunities for one another. I’m one cog. So is everyone else, in their own way.

If you can demonstrate that a proposal would do more harm than good, I want to understand it. If you know of an existing service that already does what I am suggesting, show me. If the idea is sound but the method would be expensive, oppressive or impossible to administer, tell me what method would be better. An imperfect argument deserves the chance to be corrected, not the right to be obeyed.

The next question is human rather than mechanical. If our decisions are shaped by experience, education, culture, history and the ways we understand one another, how do we learn to disagree without losing sight of each other's humanity? Before I can ask a society to protect rights or share responsibilities, I need to understand the people whose lives those decisions will reach. That is where the next volume begins.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME II

Humanity, History, Culture And Education

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

The People We Become

We enter a world that already has rules, expectations, languages, histories and inequalities. Before we have had much opportunity to decide what we believe, people around us have begun teaching us what is ordinary, respectable, frightening or possible. Some of those lessons are spoken. Others arrive through the things we see happen to other people.

I do not think that makes us prisoners of our upbringing. It does make me wary of judging somebody as though every person began from the same starting line. In the first volume I argued that dignity does not depend on usefulness and that accountability must take circumstances seriously. The harder question is how those circumstances actually shape the person who eventually stands in front of us.

Influence without inevitability

It's very easy to look at somebody and think you understand why they've made a choice. We all do it sometimes. But how much do we actually know about that person? What happened before we met them? What opportunities did they have? Understanding isn't the same as saying they're right. It's making sure we know what we're judging before we decide what to do about it.

Political identities shouldn't become substitutes for investigating causes, costs and real-world outcomes.

I don't believe politics should be about choosing a team and defending everything it does. Nor should capitalism, socialism, environmentalism, nationalism, immigration policy or any other broad label be treated as a complete answer in itself.

Political labels can be useful shorthand, but they can also pressure people to accept a bundle of positions without examining each one. A proposal shouldn't be dismissed simply because it came from the “wrong” side, and it shouldn't be accepted simply because it came from the side we usually support.

The starting questions should be: What problem are we trying to solve? Who is affected? What is causing the problem? What do we know, and what do we still need to find out? What options are available? Who benefits, who bears the cost, and what happens if we do nothing?

I want to understand political opponents rather than caricature them. People can reach different conclusions because they have different experiences, priorities, information, fears or ideas about fairness. Understanding why someone believes something doesn't require agreeing with them. It makes disagreement more useful.

The aim isn't to split every difference or pretend all positions are equally supported. Some claims are better evidenced than others; some proposals are harmful or unworkable. The point is to judge arguments by their reasoning and evidence, not by team loyalty.

Nobody arrives at an argument untouched by experience. How we were raised, what opportunities were available, the people who supported us, the mistakes we witnessed and the information we encountered all influence how we understand the world. Grief, insecurity, poverty, prejudice and fear may shape behaviour; so can privilege, education and supportive relationships. Those factors don't completely explain an individual. They are reasons to investigate rather than jump straight from an outcome to a judgement about someone's character.

I am interested in why two people can see the same policy and experience it differently. For one, a new reporting requirement is a small inconvenience. For another, it means paying for transport, finding childcare, understanding an unfamiliar form or disclosing personal information to somebody they don't trust. We can't decide whether an obligation is reasonable without examining these differences. Nor can we conclude that a person is incapable of responsibility merely because an accommodation may be necessary.

Where someone has harmed another person, the victim's experience must remain part of the picture. Explanation isn't permission. A person who acts under stress can still need to apologise, repair damage, accept a boundary or face a lawful consequence. My concern is that a response which ignores the causes of behaviour may fail to prevent it from happening again.

A fair objection is that focusing on circumstances can encourage excuses and turn standards into an endless set of exceptions. I think that criticism deserves a proper answer: define the standard, identify legitimate adjustments, test whether access is real and preserve consequences for knowingly refusing responsibilities that a person can reasonably meet. We shouldn't lower every expectation to avoid making a judgement. We should make the judgement more informed.

The person at the end of the problem

We Should Examine the Environment Before Condemning the People Living in It I believe society often concentrates too heavily on the individual at the end of a problem. We see a young offender and ask why they behaved that way. We see a struggling family and ask why they failed to provide enough supervision. We see a disadvantaged community and ask why crime is concentrated there.

We see conflict between nations and immediately decide which side deserves our sympathy. These can be legitimate questions. But they are incomplete. We should also examine what opportunities, pressures, incentives, institutions, historical circumstances and cultural influences contributed to those situations. And when the evidence points towards failures within our own systems, we should be prepared to accept responsibility. That does not mean abandoning individual accountability.

It means recognising that individual responsibility and collective responsibility must exist together. A person remains responsible for their actions. A parent has responsibilities towards their children. A business has responsibilities towards its customers and communities. A government has responsibilities towards the people it serves. And society has a responsibility to examine whether its institutions support or undermine the wellbeing of the people living within them.

None of these responsibilities cancels out the others. We should not ignore harmful behaviour simply because someone experienced hardship. But neither should we ignore hardship simply because someone behaved harmfully. Accountability addresses the action. Understanding examines the causes. Prevention requires both.

There is a danger in turning this view into another stereotype. A child raised in poverty is not destined to offend. A person raised with wealth is not incapable of compassion. Trauma does not make someone dangerous by definition. Equally, an inspiring story about somebody who overcame severe adversity cannot prove that every other person could have done the same thing without assistance.

When I think about fair expectations, I want to distinguish a person's choices from the realistic choices available to them. That is not always obvious. An appointment may seem accessible until we ask how somebody gets there. A school expectation may look neutral until we find that the student cannot understand the instruction. A family may appear neglectful until we learn what support has been offered and what danger the family is already managing.

None of that authorises me to make assumptions on somebody else's behalf. People should be asked about their circumstances rather than assigned a story based on an economic category, identity or postcode. Understanding has to involve listening, not only constructing a clever explanation from outside.

I also do not want this argument to become a competition in suffering. Experience can reveal what a system overlooks, but one person's painful experience is not automatic proof that every other interpretation is wrong. The task is to bring different kinds of knowledge together without stripping anyone of agency.

This is particularly important when harm has occurred. Victims did not volunteer to become an example in somebody else's theory of social conditions. Their safety and experience must remain central. Understanding the person responsible may help prevent another victim. It must not erase the first.

If the people we become are influenced by what we encounter, then the way we speak to one another is more than a social nicety. It can become part of the environment in which confidence, shame, trust and understanding develop. That brings the question into the family, where even genuine love can be difficult to communicate.

CHAPTER 02

Communication, Love and Understanding

Consider how easily a perfectly serious conversation can break down because two people believe the same sentence means different things. One person thinks they have described a fact. Another hears a judgement about their worth. The speaker may be surprised by the reaction; the listener may be hurt that the speaker appears unwilling to understand it.

I believe we need more than the familiar instruction to choose our words carefully. We need to ask what communication is supposed to achieve. If I have explained something but the person receiving it cannot understand me, I have not necessarily completed the task simply because the words left my mouth.

The words we mean and the words people hear

You've probably had a conversation where you thought you were being perfectly clear and somebody took it completely differently. I know how quickly that can become an argument. We can't be expected to predict every interpretation, but surely we can try to understand where the confusion started before making assumptions about somebody's family or character.

I believe that one of the greatest challenges we face as individuals and as a society is learning to understand the difference between what we intend to communicate and what another person actually receives.

We often assume that because we understand our own intentions, other people should naturally understand them too. But communication doesn't work that simply.

Every person interprets the world through their own experiences, upbringing, education, relationships, beliefs and emotional development. Two people can hear the exact same words and arrive at entirely different understandings of what was said.

Neither interpretation automatically proves what the speaker intended. Equally, a speaker's intention doesn't automatically erase the effect their words may have had.

This raises an important question: Should our responsibility end at what we intended to say, or should it extend to making a reasonable effort to understand how our words might be received?

I believe responsibility must involve both.

We can't reasonably be expected to predict every possible interpretation of our words. Such an expectation would make open communication almost impossible. However, we should recognise that our words carry meaning beyond what exists in our own minds, particularly when addressing someone who is vulnerable, dependent upon us or still developing their understanding of the world.

Communication shouldn't simply be about expressing ourselves. It should also involve making an effort to be understood.

Consider the relationship between a parent and a child.

A parent might tell their child that they chose their partner but did not choose their children.

Within the parent's understanding, this may represent a meaningful distinction between romantic commitment and parenthood. They may be expressing that they deliberately selected the person with whom

they wanted to build a life, while their children became part of that life through circumstances they couldn't entirely predict or control.

There is a reasonable interpretation of this statement that is neither cruel nor dismissive.

However, consider the same statement from the perspective of a child.

A child might interpret those words as meaning they were unwanted, that their presence was an inconvenience, or that their parent values their partner more than them.

The parent may never have intended to communicate any of those things.

Nevertheless, the possibility of misunderstanding matters.

A child who has consistently experienced affection, reassurance and emotional security may recognise the intended meaning without difficulty. Another child, perhaps one who struggles to understand affection or has experienced uncertainty about their place within the family, might interpret the statement very differently.

The ability of one child to interpret a statement positively doesn't establish that every child should be expected to do the same.

This isn't an argument that parents should never make mistakes or that every poorly worded statement constitutes emotional harm.

It is an argument that adults hold a particular responsibility when communicating with children because children are still developing the emotional and intellectual foundations through which they understand themselves and their relationships.

I also believe we should distinguish between choosing the circumstances of parenthood and choosing how we respond to the responsibilities it creates.

A person may not have planned to become a parent. They may not have chosen every circumstance surrounding the child's conception or birth. The decisions available to each parent aren't identical.

But the absence of an original intention to become a parent doesn't eliminate the responsibilities owed to a child.

The decisions made throughout a child's upbringing matter. Providing care, remaining emotionally available, offering guidance, protecting their wellbeing and helping them develop independence can all demonstrate commitment.

A parent may not have chosen every circumstance that brought their child into the world, but they can make meaningful choices about how they treat that child.

And I believe those choices deserve recognition.

Love that can actually be recognised

Another important distinction is the difference between being loved, feeling loved and understanding that we are loved.

These experiences are connected, but they aren't identical.

A parent might demonstrate love through financial support, working long hours, providing stability, maintaining a household and making personal sacrifices.

To that parent, these actions may represent undeniable evidence of affection and commitment.

Their child, however, might need something different.

They might need encouragement, physical affection, quality time, emotional reassurance or the opportunity to express themselves without fear of judgment.

The existence of love doesn't guarantee that it will always be recognised or experienced in the way it was intended.

This doesn't necessarily mean that either person has failed.

It means that people are different.

We have different emotional needs, personalities, experiences, abilities and methods of communicating. What feels reassuring to one individual may feel insufficient or confusing to another.

I believe a compassionate society should acknowledge these differences rather than expecting every person to experience relationships in exactly the same way.

Love shouldn't only be measured by how strongly someone believes they are expressing it, but also considered in relation to whether the other person is able to recognise and receive it.

That doesn't mean parents must satisfy every emotional expectation or surrender reasonable boundaries. Children also need guidance, consistency and opportunities to develop resilience and independence.

Rather, it suggests that effective care requires attention to the individual.

We should aim to understand what people need, while also helping them understand the intentions and limitations of those around them.

A person's intention and the effect of their words are different pieces of information. If a worker gives an instruction they believe is clear, but the person receiving it doesn't understand, neither party benefits from immediately deciding the other is stupid or deliberately difficult. We can check what was heard, explain another way and ask whether the person needs more time or a different format. That isn't surrendering the instruction. It is making the instruction usable.

The example of a parent telling a child they chose their spouse but did not choose their children is deliberately uncomfortable. It can be interpreted as a harmless description of how different relationships begin. But a child may reasonably hear a suggestion that they were unwanted. The parent's personal intention matters; the child's possible interpretation matters too. I am not demanding that every parent predict every interpretation. I am asking why, when a small clarification could offer reassurance, we would insist that only the speaker's intended meaning counts.

This principle is easier to state than to live by. Nobody can anticipate every meaning another person might attach to a sentence. It would be unreasonable to demand that every parent, partner, worker or friend communicate with perfect foresight. People also have a responsibility to ask questions when they can, explain what they understood and give others a fair opportunity to clarify.

But responsibility is not always identical between two people. An adult explaining something to a child has more experience and more authority. An employer explaining a safety requirement has more institutional power than a new worker. A care professional has training and obligations the person receiving support may not share. Those differences matter because the burden of misunderstanding often falls hardest on the person with the least power to correct it.

A child should not have to translate every adult's unspoken affection into reassurance. Nor should a parent be told that every disagreement proves they do not love their child. It is possible to

appreciate sacrifice and still ask whether a child knows they matter. It is possible to acknowledge hurt and still recognise that the person who caused it did not intend harm.

What I want is a way of communicating that cares about whether a message has actually reached another person. A person may understand written instructions but struggle with speech. Another may need time to process a question. Another may find a blunt explanation comforting precisely because it is direct. Treating one communication style as the measure of everyone's competence can turn an easily solved misunderstanding into a judgment about character.

I think this matters to schools, workplaces, public services and politics. An institution can publish an explanation, announce a consultation and declare that information is available. Yet if the intended audience cannot understand or use it, that process may satisfy a procedural requirement without creating actual participation. The institution may have spoken; the people have not necessarily been heard.

Communication also requires a willingness to be corrected. If I discover that somebody misunderstood me, the answer cannot always be to repeat myself more loudly. It might be to ask what they heard, what I meant, what they need from me and whether the disagreement remains once the meaning is clear. Sometimes it will remain. That is where communication becomes a deeper question about respect.

CHAPTER 03

Disagreement Without Dehumanisation

There is a difference between misunderstanding somebody and genuinely disagreeing with them. Better explanations cannot remove every conflict, because people may hold different moral priorities even after they understand the same facts. I do not want a society that confuses civility with agreement.

When somebody challenges my opinion, it is tempting to turn the challenge into a story about the person making it. Maybe they are ignorant. Maybe they have never experienced hardship. Maybe they were badly raised. Those explanations are often guesses dressed up as insight. They avoid the more difficult task of addressing the actual objection.

Criticise the argument, not an invented person

Why does somebody disagreeing with us sometimes feel like an attack? I want people to tell me when I've missed something. That doesn't mean they get to insult me or I get to insult them. It means asking what they're actually objecting to. If their point is wrong, explain why. If it's right, maybe we've learnt something.

The same principle applies beyond family relationships.

How often do disagreements become personal before either person has made a genuine effort to understand the other's argument?

Someone expresses concern about a statement, decision or behaviour. Rather than examining the concern, another person assumes the disagreement must originate from personal insecurity, a troubled upbringing, ignorance or some other imagined deficiency.

At that point, the conversation moves away from the original issue.

Instead of examining whether an argument is reasonable, people begin defending themselves against assumptions about their character and circumstances.

I believe this is one of the ways potentially productive conversations become unnecessary conflicts.

Disagreement isn't evidence of personal deficiency.

Someone may challenge an idea because they have experienced something different, recognise a possible consequence, possess information we have overlooked or simply interpret the situation through another perspective.

None of those possibilities automatically makes them right.

But neither does disagreement make them wrong.

If someone questions the way a parent communicates with their child, it doesn't automatically mean that person experienced poor parenting.

If someone questions a government policy, it doesn't automatically reveal their political loyalty, intelligence or moral character.

If someone questions a business decision, it doesn't automatically mean they oppose the organisation or its purpose.

We should respond to the argument being presented before making assumptions about the person presenting it.

This requires intellectual discipline, emotional maturity and a willingness to accept that our first interpretation may be incomplete.

Humour, criticism and reciprocal responsibility

I strongly believe people should retain the freedom to express themselves, disagree, joke, challenge accepted ideas and communicate in ways that reflect their individuality.

Humour, including dark humour, can help people explore uncomfortable subjects, cope with difficult experiences and expose contradictions.

However, freedom of expression doesn't mean that every expression will be understood as intended.

A joke may be recognisable to one audience while appearing insulting to another. An exaggerated statement may be interpreted literally. An attempt to challenge an idea may be received as an attack on someone's identity or experiences.

When misunderstanding occurs, we should have the opportunity to clarify our intentions.

But clarification also carries responsibility.

Saying something was intended as a joke explains why it was said. It doesn't automatically mean another person was unreasonable to dislike it.

Likewise, feeling offended doesn't automatically justify retaliating with personal insults or unsupported assumptions.

I believe we should apply the same standards to ourselves that we expect from others.

If I criticise someone for making assumptions about my personal life, I should be willing to examine whether I have made similar assumptions about theirs.

If I expect someone to consider how their words might affect others, I should apply that expectation to my own communication.

If I believe someone has misunderstood me, I should first attempt to clarify the misunderstanding rather than immediately concluding that they are acting in bad faith.

Accountability should be reciprocal, not something we demand only when it benefits our argument.

This doesn't mean every disagreement requires endless explanation, nor that individuals must tolerate harassment or abuse.

People should be free to establish boundaries and disengage from conversations that are no longer constructive.

But we should distinguish between protecting ourselves and attempting to punish someone simply because they disagree with us.

I value direct language, difficult questions and humour, including humour about subjects people find uncomfortable. I don't want every badly received joke treated as proof of malice. But calling a statement a joke doesn't prove everybody was unreasonable to dislike it. The listener may identify a consequence the speaker missed. The speaker should have a meaningful opportunity to clarify. Neither should turn that moment into a licence for personal attacks.

A fair disagreement moves in a sensible order. Identify the actual words or conduct. Ask about context where context matters. Explain the problem without inventing a stranger's upbringing, intelligence, family situation or intentions. Allow a response. Then decide whether the issue is a misunderstanding, an honest disagreement, repeated disrespect or something serious enough to

require protection. We can't always follow every step when somebody is threatening or endangering others; safety can require immediate action.

I have to meet this standard myself. It would be hypocritical to complain about someone making assumptions about me while I casually make assumptions about a whole gender, political group or generation. Frustration may explain a sweeping remark; it doesn't make the sweep accurate. I want readers to challenge my generalisations as firmly as I challenge theirs.

The real test isn't whether we can sound polite in an easy conversation. It is whether we can still distinguish an argument from the person making it when we care deeply about the outcome. People may withdraw from abusive interactions. Nobody owes an aggressor unlimited conversation. But disagreement alone shouldn't be treated as a character defect.

I believe one of the greatest qualities a person can develop is the willingness to question their own understanding. We should be able to discuss capitalism, socialism, religion, nationalism, democracy and competing political philosophies without automatically treating disagreement as hostility. Ideas should be examined rather than worshipped. We should ask what each philosophy attempts to achieve, what problems it identifies, where it succeeds, where it fails and what consequences emerge when its principles are implemented.

We should also be willing to consider uncomfortable perspectives without abandoning our moral principles. Understanding why someone holds a belief does not require adopting that belief. Listening does not require agreeing. And disagreement does not have to mean hatred. I want a society where people are encouraged to talk, question, debate and challenge one another with the genuine intention of learning. Not every conversation will produce agreement.

It shouldn’t have to. Sometimes the greatest achievement of a discussion is simply understanding why another person sees the world differently. I also believe this principle should apply to the systems we support. Someone who believes in capitalism should be willing to examine its failures. Someone who believes in socialism should be willing to examine its failures. Someone who believes their country represents freedom should be willing to question whether its actions have always respected that principle.

And someone who wants to change society should be willing to question whether their proposed changes might create new problems. No ideology, government, movement or individual should be exempt from scrutiny. Including my own ideas.

I also need to distinguish understanding from emotional submission. I can listen to a person, understand the history behind a belief and still conclude that their proposed action would harm others. They may do the same with me. A demand that another person understand us must never become a demand that they abandon their judgement.

There are limits to conversation. Somebody facing threats, persistent harassment or coercion should not be told they must keep explaining themselves until the other person is satisfied. Defending a right to debate is not the same as obliging everyone to remain in every debate. The deeper legal boundaries between criticism, offence, threats and harassment belong to the next volume, which examines competing rights directly.

What this chapter establishes is a habit of interpretation. Before deciding a person is an enemy, ask what they actually believe. Before claiming they have proved something, ask what evidence they offer. Before declaring that every interpretation is equally valid, recognise that factual claims can be tested and some conduct has consequences regardless of intention.

Religion and identity provide a particular test of this principle. I can challenge a belief or a practice without making the person raised within it my enemy. Equally, someone who has been taught never

to question a tradition deserves the opportunity to examine it without intimidation. A society does not become tolerant by requiring every inherited belief to remain beyond criticism.

This habit matters not only in arguments about current policy. It changes how I want to understand the people who came before us, including people whose choices I cannot excuse. The historical record becomes much less useful when I reduce everyone to the heroes and villains of a story I already know.

CHAPTER 04

History as an Instrument of Learning

I find it strange how easily humanity can condemn people who fight and die for their country, beliefs or causes we do not understand, while celebrating others who fought and died in the name of freedom. Throughout history, nations have justified invasions, conquest and intervention by claiming to know what was best for others. We have celebrated conquerors, built monuments to military victories and glorified the expansion of empires, sometimes overlooking the people who suffered under them.

We condemn oppression when we recognise ourselves as its victims, yet history shows how easily societies can justify similar actions when they believe themselves to be on the righteous side. And how often have claims of freedom, progress, civilisation or national security existed alongside the pursuit of wealth, resources, territory and power? I am not arguing that every war is the same, that every cause is justified or that everyone who fights deserves equal moral approval.

There is a difference between defending people and deliberately harming innocent civilians. But I believe we must learn to separate understanding someone's motivations from agreeing with their actions. Understanding is not endorsement. Empathy is not the abandonment of accountability. If we refuse to understand why someone believes what they believe, how can we expect to recognise the conditions that produce conflict? If we only study history from the perspective of those who won, how can we understand those who suffered?

And if we believe our own society is incapable of repeating the mistakes of the past, haven't we already begun overlooking the warning signs? People often say humanity is doomed to repeat history. I understand why. We continue to see conflict, exploitation, inequality, competition for resources and struggles over political power. The technology changes. The governments change. The names and borders change. But many of the underlying human motivations remain familiar.

Fear. Greed. Pride. Survival. Belonging. Security. Power. However, I do not believe repetition is inevitable. I believe education, curiosity and open discussion give us the opportunity to recognise these patterns before they become disasters. We should not need to experience every historical tragedy ourselves to understand why it should never happen again. We can learn through history, testimony, literature, education, debate and the experiences of others.

We should study not only what happened, but why it happened, what people believed at the time, which systems enabled it and how the consequences shaped the world that followed. And we should examine history from multiple perspectives, including those of people who were overlooked, defeated or denied a voice. That is how history becomes more than a collection of dates, wars and famous individuals.

It becomes a tool for understanding humanity.

I do not want this to be mistaken for the view that every side of a conflict was equally justified. An invasion, an act of resistance and the deliberate killing of civilians are not morally interchangeable simply because each group could describe its own actions as necessary. Understanding motives may help us explain events; it does not settle whether the conduct was defensible.

History is particularly dangerous when it becomes a contest over who gets to be proud. Nations often teach their achievements, innovations and sacrifices because those stories help people understand the society they have inherited. But pride becomes misleading when the same story treats other people's suffering as background scenery. A history of a military victory that never

examines whose homes were destroyed is incomplete. So is a history that records only suffering and denies people the choices, achievements and resistance through which they changed their circumstances.

One of my concerns is the way modern arguments flatten historical people into versions of ourselves. We cannot assume everybody in the past had access to the information, language or institutions we possess now. But an honest account of historical conditions must not turn into the belief that victims did not suffer because injustice was considered normal. Context is necessary for explanation and insufficient as an excuse.

I want historians, teachers and citizens to ask who created a record, who could speak publicly, what institutions had power to preserve their version of an event and what other sources are available. A government report, the testimony of someone harmed, a worker's letter and a later historical analysis can each reveal something different. None should be accepted uncritically, and none should automatically be discarded because it complicates a preferred narrative.

Progress should not depend on another tragedy

Some of humanity's most important protections and reforms have emerged in response to terrible events. Wars, atrocities, exploitation and injustice have sometimes forced societies to confront practices they previously accepted or ignored. We have developed new legal protections, challenged systems of oppression and strengthened international conversations about human rights and responsibilities. But I find something deeply troubling about this. Why must we so often wait until people have suffered before we recognise a problem?

Why do we sometimes require a catastrophe before cooperation becomes possible? I am not suggesting that suffering is necessary or desirable. Nor am I suggesting that violence, terrorism or destruction should ever be encouraged as a means of achieving social progress. I am questioning why we cannot apply the same determination to preventing suffering that we sometimes demonstrate after it has already occurred. If we know poverty, inadequate education, exploitation, harmful environments and social exclusion can contribute to suffering, why should we wait until their consequences become severe before responding?

If we know that conflict can emerge from fear, misinformation, inequality and competition for resources, why should we not invest more effort in understanding and addressing those conditions? Not every tragedy leads to progress. Some produce further hatred, repression and instability. Progress depends on how society responds. We should not need another tragedy to remind ourselves that other people matter.

The belief that history repeats itself can make us complacent in a different way. If conflict is inevitable, why work to prevent it? I would rather treat recurring patterns as warnings that deserve examination. The same fear, ambition or struggle for resources can produce different outcomes depending on institutions, choices and available knowledge. Human nature alone does not determine a country's laws or fate.

A useful historical education should leave me with more questions and more responsibility. Why did a particular institution appear? What problem did people say it would solve? Who benefited? Who was excluded? When did its purpose change? What happened to people who challenged it? And if we would condemn an outcome today, can we identify the decisions that made it possible rather than simply declaring ourselves morally superior to those who lived through it?

The history of empires is a particularly difficult test of that approach. Their actions can create institutions and connections that later groups use for purposes the rulers did not intend. How should

we understand those unexpected outcomes without giving powerful empires credit for the courage of the people who fought them?

CHAPTER 05

Empire, Trade and Unintended Change

I have been interested in a contradiction within the history of empire. A government may pursue power, wealth or strategic control and establish systems designed to strengthen its own authority. Later, people living within those systems may use some of the same tools to organise against it. The outcome can be different from what those in power intended.

I do not mean that conquest is secretly an act of generosity, or that suffering was a necessary price for progress. To say an institution had an unintended consequence is not to say that it was justified. I am trying to understand how institutions outgrow the purposes of the people who create them.

British imperial history gives us examples worth examining. Expansion connected places through administration, trade, migration, education, communications and transport. These were never neutral connections. Many were imposed through violence or unequal power, and imperial systems could direct resources and economic advantage towards the centre of the empire. Colonial authorities were not primarily building a political network so colonised peoples could choose independence.

Yet people are not passive material that an empire can rearrange without response. People who had their own languages, political traditions, communities and intellectual histories encountered those structures and sometimes used them, resisted them or transformed them. A railway intended to move commerce and officials could also move organisers. A communications network used by authorities could carry criticism of those authorities. A school or legal institution intended to reproduce the assumptions of empire could become a setting in which those assumptions were challenged.

That observation must be handled carefully. It would be wrong to claim that Britain gave people the idea of freedom, or that resistance began only once imperial institutions arrived. Colonised societies had political traditions, thinkers, organisers and movements of their own. And the presence of a railway does not establish that it caused independence. At most, it gives us a mechanism to investigate among many others.

India illustrates why this distinction matters. Railways and communications expanded under colonial rule and were tied to economic and administrative priorities. Historians have examined their role in trade, market integration, control and political mobilisation. But Indian independence was the achievement of people and movements who challenged imperial authority; it was not a gift produced by a benevolent railway timetable.

The same caution applies to the American Revolution. British colonial governance and disputes over power and taxation formed part of the conditions in which resistance developed. But that does not mean Britain intended to produce an independent United States. Nor does the story of colonial independence erase the enslavement, dispossession and exclusion that continued within the new country.

The claim also has limits. Not every institution created through conquest produces useful connections. Some destroy knowledge, lives, communities and opportunities that cannot simply be restored. The existence of a later benefit does not allow us to subtract those losses from a moral ledger and declare the original harm worthwhile. We cannot know with confidence what would have developed in a world where that conquest never occurred.

This is where I connect historical reasoning with the Century approach introduced in the first volume. We cannot judge a decision only by what its author wanted. We need to examine mechanisms, outcomes, affected people and alternatives. But the standards of evidence and human dignity must apply to the interpretation of history as much as they apply to a modern government proposal.

I want this discussion to leave the reader with a question, not a celebration of empire: if power creates institutions that people later use to challenge it, how do we design institutions now that are genuinely open to correction without requiring future generations to fight for that right? That question leads directly to Australia's own history, where the first responsibility is to listen to peoples whose continuing knowledge and authority did not begin with colonisation.

CHAPTER 06

First Nations and Stewardship

Australia is not a place whose history began when British institutions arrived. Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived with their own political, cultural, linguistic and knowledge systems long before colonisation. They do not form one interchangeable community with one opinion, one experience or one proposed future.

I want to be careful here because it is very easy to use First Nations peoples as symbols in an argument written mainly for somebody else. A discussion about the environment can reduce them to a romantic picture of nature. A discussion about national identity can reduce them to an inconvenient chapter in the past. Neither approach recognises living peoples with different communities, interests, disagreements and aspirations.

The histories of dispossession, exclusion and harmful government policies matter because the consequences of institutional decisions can continue after their original language or legal form changes. Recognition of those histories is not an instruction that every person born today must personally accept guilt for what someone else did. It is a recognition that a society inherits institutions and consequences as well as achievements.

History and civic responsibility

We inherit a country with achievements and injustice in its history. Pretending either side doesn't exist won't help us. I want us to be able to look at what happened, who was affected, what obligations remain and which responses are justified, rather than turning history into another argument nobody is allowed to question.

I believe society should learn from people who came before us without pretending every old decision was right. Australia has benefited from institutions and knowledge built across generations, and its history also includes dispossession, exclusion and policies whose effects don't disappear simply because a modern law changes its wording. Recognising both isn't an attack on everyone living now. It is a way of understanding the conditions we have inherited.

Questions involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must include accurate history, present legal obligations and the voices of communities directly affected by proposals. Different communities and individuals don't necessarily agree on one policy, and nobody should be reduced to a symbol in someone else's political argument. Consultation must be more than asking for approval after decisions are made. Equally, a principle such as recognition doesn't by itself tell us how to design every funding model, service or constitutional reform; each requires explanation and scrutiny.

Civic belonging shouldn't depend on everyone having the same ancestors or customs. People bring different backgrounds, beliefs and experiences to Australia. Shared public responsibilities can include obedience to fair law, respect for the rights of others, meaningful democratic participation and freedom to question government. We should examine harmful conduct individually rather than treating ethnicity, religion or origin as a substitute for evidence. These are principles of equal treatment, not a demand that people abandon their identities.

If I believe the Century philosophy should be guided by the people affected by decisions, then that principle applies particularly strongly here. I cannot claim to know what a particular Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community wants simply because I have read a few essays, heard a political

argument or noticed a practice I admire. Local knowledge, cultural authority and informed participation are not decorative additions to a policy designed elsewhere.

Land and water stewardship provide an example. Different communities hold different kinds of knowledge about Country, Sea Country, seasons, environments and responsibilities. There may be lessons that can contribute to contemporary environmental management, but it would be wrong to lift those practices out of their cultural relationships and treat them as universally transferable techniques. Proper collaboration means asking who holds the knowledge, what they want shared, how it may be used and what authority they retain.

It is equally important that Indigenous people are not required to agree with one another for their voices to matter. People within communities can have different views about recognition, development, land use, economic opportunities, government programs and constitutional or institutional change. I would be contradicting my own belief in freedom of thought if I demanded that every member of a community adopt one official position before they deserve to be heard.

I do not want these acknowledgements to become a substitute for practical questions. If a proposal affects a place, who has been involved from the beginning? What local evidence is available? Who makes the decision? What is being promised? Who receives the benefits or carries the risks? What mechanisms exist to correct mistakes and challenge unfair outcomes? Those questions apply across the Century System, including the later volumes on democracy, regional development, the environment and belonging.

A society can learn from its history without requiring people to abandon their cultures or identities. And it can recognise continuing injustice without assuming that every proposed remedy is beyond question. Respectful scrutiny and meaningful participation should reinforce one another.

CHAPTER 07

Multiculturalism, Religion and the Freedom to Question

Learning From Other Cultures Without Abandoning Our Freedoms

I believe multiculturalism is about more than simply allowing different cultures to coexist within the same society. To me, multiculturalism should be an opportunity for humanity to exchange knowledge, question traditions, challenge harmful systems and develop better ways of living together. It isn't about accepting everything another culture does, nor is it about expecting everyone who enters our society to abandon their identity and adopt ours. It's about learning from one another, keeping what works, improving what doesn't and rejecting practices that cause unnecessary harm. I think religion provides an interesting example of why this matters.

When someone follows a religious tradition, such as women being expected to cover their faces while men are not, but cannot explain why that expectation exists, I think it raises important questions about how people inherit their beliefs. That doesn't automatically mean the person is oppressed, that their religion is inherently harmful or that they shouldn't be allowed to practise it. But I do think there are implications worth examining. If someone has grown up being taught that a particular practice is simply the way things are, without ever being encouraged or permitted to question it, how much opportunity have they really had to develop their own understanding?

And if questioning those traditions results in punishment, rejection, threats or isolation, then we are no longer discussing religion alone.

We are discussing individual freedom.

I don't necessarily see the individual as the problem. I see the systems and environments that shape what individuals are taught to believe. This applies to every society, including our own. People are influenced by their families, communities, governments, religions, education and cultural expectations. Many of the things we consider normal are simply the things we have grown up surrounded by. That is why I believe cultural exchange is so important.

Why Exposure to Different Cultures Matters

Imagine if people weren't allowed to travel, migrate or experience societies outside the ones they were born into. Generations could continue living under the same systems, following the same expectations and passing down the same beliefs without ever discovering that another way of life was possible. How would someone question a tradition if they had never been exposed to an alternative? How would they know that other communities organise their families, relationships, governments or religious practices differently? And how could societies improve if they continually rejected ideas simply because they originated somewhere else? Multiculturalism creates opportunities for people to encounter different ways of thinking. It allows individuals to compare their experiences, question assumptions and discover practices that may improve their own lives.

This doesn't require someone to abandon their religion, heritage or identity. They might continue believing in the same religion while reconsidering certain cultural expectations. They might retain their traditions while rejecting the parts they believe are harmful. Or they might discover something from another culture that they want to incorporate into their own life.

The important part is that they have the freedom to make those decisions.

I believe people should be able to grow beyond the limitations of the systems they inherited without being forced to abandon everything that makes them who they are.

What History Can Teach Us

Throughout history, the movement of people has resulted in the spread of knowledge, technologies, religions, languages and cultural practices. British colonialism is one example of how different societies were brought into contact, although frequently through conquest, exploitation, violence and the suppression of existing cultures. I don't believe the horrific things committed under colonialism should be justified simply because cultural exchange eventually occurred. The suffering was real, and the positive consequences do not erase the harm. However, we can recognise that these historical encounters contributed to the development of the interconnected and multicultural societies we know today. Australia itself has been shaped by Indigenous cultures, British colonisation and generations of migration from across the world.

Our society isn't the product of one isolated culture. It has developed through the interaction of many different peoples, ideas and experiences. I also look at contemporary conflicts and oppressive practices across different parts of the world and wonder what future generations will learn from them. I hope humanity can eventually move towards greater freedom, understanding and cooperation rather than continuing cycles of violence, cultural domination and punishment. But I don't believe suffering should be treated as a necessary step towards progress. We have the opportunity to exchange knowledge peacefully. We can learn from one another without conquest. We can introduce new ideas without erasing existing cultures.

And we can question harmful traditions without treating every person raised within those traditions as responsible for them. I believe this is one of the responsibilities of a multicultural society. Rather than repeating the mistakes of the past, we should use the knowledge we've gained to build something more inclusive, fair and humane.

Accepting Cultures Does Not Mean Accepting Harm

I want to make an important distinction. Supporting multiculturalism does not mean I believe every cultural or religious practice should automatically be accepted. There must still be standards protecting individual freedom, safety, dignity and fairness. For example, I don't see an inherent moral problem with someone having multiple wives or multiple husbands, provided everyone involved is a consenting adult, understands the arrangement, has equal rights and is free to leave. Why should a relationship automatically be considered unacceptable simply because it differs from the traditional relationship structure our society recognises? There may be legal, financial and family responsibilities that need to be considered, but those are questions we can examine rather than reasons to reject the idea outright.

The same principle applies to religious clothing. If a woman genuinely wants to cover her face because of her beliefs, I believe she should generally have that freedom. But if she doesn't want to, I also believe she should have the freedom to refuse without facing violence, intimidation, abandonment or punishment. Forcing someone to wear religious clothing and forcing someone to remove it can both undermine personal choice. The question should not simply be whether the practice belongs to a particular religion. It should be whether the individual has meaningful freedom in deciding to participate. But then there are practices such as stoning someone to death or using violence to punish people for their beliefs, sexuality, relationships or rejection of religious expectations.

I don't believe those actions become acceptable simply because they are defended as cultural or religious traditions. Freedom of religion should never mean unlimited authority to harm another person. The same reasoning applies to the treatment of animals. If a culture or religion has particular practices surrounding the slaughter of animals, I believe we should examine whether

those methods meet appropriate animal-welfare and ethical standards. We should apply those standards consistently, including to practices already accepted within our own society. If a better and less harmful method exists, we should be willing to consider it. The purpose shouldn't be to single out particular religions or cultures. It should be to reduce unnecessary suffering while respecting people's freedoms wherever possible.

Children, Religion and the Limits of Parental Authority

I believe parents should have the right to teach their children about their religion, culture and traditions. Parents naturally pass down their beliefs and experiences, and I don't see anything inherently wrong with that. A parent should be able to explain their religion, share its teachings, celebrate religious holidays, introduce their child to community traditions and explain why those beliefs matter to them. But that right must remain within reasonable boundaries of safety, fairness and respect for the child as an individual.

Children are not possessions.

They are people developing their own understanding of the world. And while parents have a responsibility to guide and protect them, I don't believe that gives parents unlimited authority to determine what their children must believe. If a child begins questioning their religion, they should not be physically punished for doing so. If they express doubts, they should not be belted, threatened, humiliated or made to feel that they are no longer worthy of their parents' love. If they eventually decide that they don't believe in the religion they were raised within, they should not be emotionally neglected or abandoned because of that decision. Parents can disagree with their children. They can explain why they believe their religion is important.

They can continue teaching their values and establish reasonable, age-appropriate boundaries. But there is a difference between guiding a child and using fear or punishment to enforce belief. I also recognise that children develop independence gradually. A young child participating in family religious activities is not necessarily being coerced. But as children mature and develop their own beliefs, their ability to question and make personal decisions should be increasingly respected. The responsibility of a parent should be to prepare their child to become an independent person capable of making informed decisions. Not to ensure that their child remains an unquestioning extension of their own beliefs. This principle should apply equally across all religions, cultures and non-religious households.

A Christian child, Muslim child, Jewish child, Hindu child, atheist child or any other child should receive the same basic protection. I don't believe freedom of religion can exist meaningfully without also recognising the freedom to question, reject or leave religion.

Multiculturalism Should Work Both Ways

I also think we need to be careful about how we describe cultural integration. If we say that other cultures can contribute to our society only when they fit everything we already believe, then we risk turning multiculturalism into another form of forced conformity. Our own society isn't perfect. Australia has traditions, laws, institutions and social expectations that deserve questioning just as much as those of any other country. We shouldn't assume that because something is already accepted here, it must automatically be the fairest or most ethical option. For example, if another culture has a family arrangement, community practice, approach to caring for elderly people or way of supporting one another that produces positive outcomes, why shouldn't we learn from it?

And if our society provides stronger protections for individual freedoms in certain areas, why shouldn't those ideas also be shared?

Cultural exchange should be a two-way process.

It should allow everyone involved to contribute to the development of society. That doesn't mean abandoning common laws or removing protections. A multicultural society still needs shared foundations that protect people from violence, exploitation, coercion and discrimination. But those foundations should exist to protect individuals, not simply preserve whichever traditions happen to be dominant. I believe we should evaluate practices according to their consequences, fairness and compatibility with individual rights rather than rejecting them because they are unfamiliar. A tradition shouldn't automatically be protected because it is old. And an unfamiliar idea shouldn't automatically be rejected because it is new.

Understanding People Without Excusing Harm

Another part of this is recognising the difference between understanding why someone believes something and agreeing with what they believe. If a person grows up in a society where questioning religion is discouraged, I don't think it's reasonable to assume they have been exposed to the same opportunities, experiences and perspectives as someone raised in a more open environment. That doesn't remove their individual responsibility for their actions. But it helps us understand how certain attitudes and behaviours develop. And if we understand the conditions producing those beliefs, we have a better opportunity to challenge harmful practices without condemning entire populations.

I don't believe we should judge every individual from a particular country or religion according to the actions of its government, religious authorities or extremist groups.

People are individuals.

They may agree with some traditions, reject others or privately question beliefs that they don't feel safe expressing publicly. Treating entire populations as though they all think alike only reinforces division. I believe multiculturalism can help break down those assumptions by allowing people to interact directly rather than relying entirely on what they've been told about one another. But that exchange must also be supported by education, meaningful dialogue, equal rights and the freedom to disagree. Simply placing different cultures together doesn't automatically create understanding. We need to build the conditions that allow understanding to develop.

Our Responsibility to Future Generations

Ultimately, I don't believe humanity should remain trapped within the beliefs and systems of the past simply because previous generations accepted them. We have access to more knowledge, more perspectives and more opportunities for cultural exchange than many generations before us. That gives us a responsibility to consider how our choices will affect those who come after us. I don't want future generations to inherit a society that refuses to change because people are frightened of unfamiliar ideas. But I also don't want them inheriting a society where harmful practices are excused because people are afraid of questioning another culture. We need to be capable of doing both. Respecting cultural identity while challenging harm.

Protecting religious freedom while defending the freedom to question religion. Recognising the importance of families while protecting children from abuse and coercion. Accepting different relationships and lifestyles where genuine consent and equal rights exist. And examining our own society with the same critical standards we apply to others. I believe multiculturalism offers an opportunity to build something greater than any one culture could achieve by remaining isolated. Not because every culture has all the answers, but because each has different experiences, perspectives and lessons to contribute. The goal should not be for one culture to conquer, replace or

dominate another. It should be for people to learn from one another and develop better systems together.

We are individuals, not simply representatives of the traditions, religions or societies we were born into. We should have the freedom to preserve what we value, question what we don't understand and change what we believe is wrong. And we should extend that same freedom to others. That is what multiculturalism means to me. Not unrestricted acceptance of everything. Not forced assimilation. Not abandoning our laws, freedoms or responsibilities. But creating a society where different people can contribute to collective progress while maintaining the fundamental protections that allow everyone to live safely and freely.

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

And most importantly, make sure the generations who come after us inherit a society with more opportunities, more understanding and greater freedom than the one we inherited.

A central lesson of history, for me, is that the people who hold power to describe another community can shape how everyone else understands that community. Formal records are one source of that power. Entertainment and everyday storytelling are another.

CHAPTER 08

Media, Stereotypes, Humour and Context

Most of us encounter people we will never personally meet through the stories we watch, hear and read. That is part of what makes media valuable: it opens the imagination beyond the limits of an individual's immediate world. But it also gives creators unusual influence over the images through which unfamiliar groups may be understood.

I think the argument about representation can become unhelpfully simple. Some people treat any exaggerated character as unacceptable. Others insist that because the character was intended as a joke, there can be no genuine issue to discuss. Neither is enough. I want to examine the conditions under which a character can be funny, complex and meaningful while still carrying an unfair burden for the community others associate with them.

When one character stands for too many people

Consider Apu from The Simpsons. Apu is portrayed as an intelligent, hardworking businessman who owns and operates the Kwik-E-Mart. He has a family, relationships, responsibilities, personal struggles and qualities that make him considerably more complex than a simple stereotype. He also happens to be the subject of numerous jokes. Some of those jokes involve his ethnicity, accent and cultural background. Others involve his occupation, customers, relationships or the absurd situations that regularly occur throughout the show.

Not every joke about Apu is necessarily racist, and not every joke involving a cultural difference should automatically be interpreted as an attack on that culture. However, we also have to consider how those jokes are interpreted by audiences. For many viewers, particularly those with limited exposure to Indian communities, Apu became one of the most recognisable Indian characters in mainstream Western television. The problem is not necessarily that Apu exists or that he is portrayed humorously.

The problem arises when one character becomes a significant part of how an entire community is recognised and understood. When people repeatedly associate a particular accent, ethnicity and occupation with one fictional character, those characteristics can become cultural shorthand. Apu may be an intelligent, hardworking and complex character, yet some audiences may remember little more than an exaggerated Indian convenience-store owner. This does not mean everyone interprets him that way, nor does it mean the character cannot hold positive meaning for Indian audiences.

It demonstrates how the same representation can produce different outcomes depending on who is watching, what they understand and what other experiences they have had. To understand this problem, I believe we should consider how the same situation might look from another perspective. Imagine The Simpsons was originally an Indian television programme, set entirely within India, featuring predominantly Indian characters. Now imagine Cletus was one of the only white characters regularly appearing in the programme.

Cletus is hardworking, owns land and provides for his family. These are positive characteristics. However, he is also portrayed through exaggerated stereotypes involving ignorance, poverty, incest and rural life. Within The Simpsons, these characteristics form part of his comedic identity. Most audiences understand that Cletus does not represent all white people. Why? Because white people have countless other characters representing them across mainstream Western media.

We can be portrayed as intelligent or ignorant, wealthy or poor, compassionate or cruel, successful or unsuccessful. We can be heroes, villains, scientists, business owners, criminals, parents, teachers

or ordinary people. No single character is expected to represent the entirety of our culture. But imagine growing up in a society where Cletus was one of the only white characters you regularly saw on television. Imagine people associating your accent, appearance or cultural background with his behaviour simply because they had little exposure to anyone else like you.

Suddenly, the same jokes could carry a different social meaning. Not necessarily because the jokes themselves have changed, but because the surrounding representation has. A stereotype becomes more influential when society has fewer alternative perspectives through which to understand the people being portrayed. This is why I believe we need to examine representation within the wider media environment rather than judging every character or joke in isolation.

I do not believe that discussing harmful stereotypes means we should stop making jokes about cultures, identities or differences. Humour is an important part of human communication. It allows us to question society, challenge authority, acknowledge uncomfortable realities and sometimes find common ground through our differences. People should be able to laugh at themselves, their communities and the absurdities of everyday life. But defending comedy does not mean every joke should be immune from criticism.

Equally, recognising that a joke has offended someone does not automatically establish that the person telling it had racist intentions. I believe we make a mistake when we treat intention, interpretation and consequence as though they are always the same thing. A joke created with good intentions can still unintentionally reinforce harmful assumptions. A joke created with malicious intentions can sometimes be interpreted differently from what its creator intended.

Even a character originally developed through racist stereotypes could become meaningful to people who see positive qualities or a form of representation within that character. Someone who rarely sees their culture represented in mainstream entertainment may appreciate seeing a character who shares their accent, heritage or experiences, even if that portrayal is imperfect. They might find inspiration in the character's intelligence, work ethic, relationships or achievements.

That does not automatically justify prejudiced intentions, but it demonstrates that audiences are not passive recipients of whatever message a creator intended. People interpret stories through their own experiences, identities and understanding of the world. The same character can be offensive to one person, comforting to another and simply entertaining to someone else. We should be capable of acknowledging all these interpretations without automatically assuming that one person's experience invalidates another's.

The point of comparing Apu and Cletus is not to argue that Cletus represents every white person, or that one joke is identical in all circumstances. It is to shift the frame. When a culture already appears across a broad range of leading roles, its audience has other stories that can complicate a stereotype. When a minority group is rarely visible, one familiar figure may carry far more weight than a writer intended.

This is partly an issue of numbers and partly an issue of power. Who chooses the characters? Who gets to tell the stories? How are those characters marketed or imitated by audiences? And what happens when somebody's real-life identity is reduced to the most repeatable joke about the nearest fictional resemblance? These are questions about outcomes, not automatic verdicts on the character or every person who enjoys the programme.

This takes us beyond whether a joke may be told. It raises a more difficult question: how do we preserve humour and creative freedom while acknowledging that jokes do not exist outside culture, history and unequal representation?

Humour, Offence and Context

Humour can do many things at once. It can relieve pressure, expose absurdity, make people feel welcome, challenge powerful institutions or make cruelty socially acceptable. The intention behind a joke matters, but it does not predetermine how the joke will work in every situation.

The audience matters too. Somebody may recognise a reference that another person misses entirely. An exaggerated stereotype may be understood by one viewer as a criticism of prejudice, and by another as a simple description of a real group. It is tempting to decide in advance that one of these interpretations must be the only legitimate one. I think that is exactly the kind of shortcut the Century philosophy asks us to question.

The freedom to portray imperfect people

I believe this principle extends far beyond comedy. A filmmaker may genuinely want to celebrate a minority culture but unintentionally portray that community through a narrow collection of stereotypes. An advertisement may intend to promote inclusion while reducing an entire group of people to a symbolic gesture. A television programme may attempt to challenge prejudice but accidentally reinforce the very assumptions it intended to criticise.

Alternatively, a portrayal created without much consideration for representation may unexpectedly provide people with a sense of belonging. This is why I believe we must distinguish between what someone intended to communicate and what their work actually communicates to different audiences. We should question both without immediately reducing the discussion to accusations of racism or demands for censorship. There is also a difference between portraying a stereotype and encouraging people to believe that stereotype represents reality.

A fictional character should be allowed to have flaws, behave badly, make mistakes and be ridiculous. Minority characters should not be expected to remain morally perfect simply because they belong to a historically underrepresented community. That expectation can become another form of unequal representation. If we genuinely want equality, we should allow people from different backgrounds to be portrayed with the same range of complexity, individuality and imperfection as everyone else.

The solution is not to make every minority character a positive role model. The solution is to create a world in which no single character is expected to represent an entire community. I believe these same principles apply to people living with disabilities, different religions, sexual orientations, gender identities, socioeconomic backgrounds and other experiences that may be misunderstood or underrepresented. If a person’s only exposure to disability comes from fictional characters portrayed as helpless, dangerous or incapable, that representation may influence their assumptions about disabled people.

If their only exposure to a particular religion comes from stories about extremism, they may begin associating an entire faith with the actions of a minority. If people experiencing poverty are consistently portrayed as lazy or irresponsible, audiences may overlook the social, economic and personal circumstances contributing to their situations. These assumptions can influence how people treat others in everyday life, even when they do not consciously recognise where their beliefs originated.

But the opposite is also possible. Positive and nuanced representation can introduce audiences to experiences they previously misunderstood. It can encourage empathy, challenge assumptions and help people recognise shared humanity across different backgrounds. Media has the capacity to reinforce prejudice, challenge prejudice or do both simultaneously. And sometimes the outcome depends as much on the audience as it does on the creator.

Look deeper than the first reaction

This brings me back to one of the principles I believe society should practise more consistently. We need to stop judging things exclusively by what appears on the surface and start questioning the systems, circumstances and consequences surrounding them. When someone criticises a fictional character, we should not immediately assume they want to destroy comedy or censor creative expression. We should ask what concerns they are raising and why those concerns exist.

Equally, when someone defends a controversial character, we should not automatically assume they support racism or prejudice. Perhaps they recognise qualities, experiences or personal meaning that others have overlooked. Both perspectives may contain legitimate observations worth understanding. We should be asking deeper questions. What was the creator trying to communicate? What historical and cultural circumstances influenced the portrayal? What other representations were available to audiences at the time?

How might people from different backgrounds interpret the same material? Could the portrayal reinforce existing assumptions, challenge them or produce unintended consequences? And perhaps most importantly, are we judging the actual character and the context surrounding them, or are we judging an oversimplified version of what we believe they represent? These questions do not guarantee that everyone will reach the same conclusion. Nor should they.

The purpose of critical thinking is not to force society into agreement, but to encourage people to develop better-informed perspectives. I do not want a society in which every controversial joke becomes grounds for condemnation. But I also do not want a society in which legitimate concerns about representation are dismissed simply because someone intended to be funny. Both approaches discourage understanding. We should be able to acknowledge harmful consequences without automatically assuming malicious intentions.

We should be able to recognise positive outcomes without excusing genuine prejudice. And we should be able to appreciate imperfect representations while still advocating for greater diversity, accuracy and opportunity. For me, improving representation does not mean eliminating every stereotype or preventing people from laughing at cultural differences. It means creating more opportunities for different people to tell their own stories and ensuring audiences have access to a wider variety of human experiences.

It also means encouraging audiences to recognise that fictional characters are individuals, not definitive examples of the communities they belong to. One Indian convenience-store owner does not represent India. One rural white farmer does not represent white people. One disabled character does not represent everyone living with a disability. And one person's interpretation of a fictional character does not automatically represent the experience of an entire community.

Humanity is far too diverse and complicated to be understood through isolated portrayals. I believe the responsibility for improving representation should be shared between creators, media organisations, educational institutions and audiences. Creators should consider the wider implications of their work without being expected to predict every possible interpretation. Media organisations should provide opportunities for a greater variety of stories and perspectives. Education should help people recognise stereotypes, distinguish fiction from reality and question the messages they encounter.

And audiences should accept responsibility for examining their own assumptions rather than automatically treating entertainment as an accurate reflection of the world. Ultimately, I believe the greatest danger is not simply that people encounter stereotypes, but that they accept those

stereotypes without questioning them. We cannot fully control how every story will be interpreted, and we should not expect every piece of entertainment to educate society perfectly.

But we can encourage a culture of curiosity, reflection and responsibility. A society that understands context is better equipped to distinguish humour from hatred, criticism from censorship and representation from reality. That is why I believe we must always look deeper. Not simply to determine whether something is right or wrong, but to understand why it exists, what it communicates, how it affects people and what we might learn from it.

Because understanding a message requires more than listening to what is being said. It requires questioning what is being heard, what is being assumed and what might be left unseen.

This does not mean that every public controversy is merely a misunderstanding. A repeated pattern of exclusion or a campaign directed at real people may deserve serious criticism. Nor does it mean that the offended person is entitled to dictate the intentions of a stranger. We need to examine both what was done and the circumstances in which it was received.

There is another danger in the desire to improve representation: making minority characters flawless. If every member of an underrepresented community is required to be wise, kind, successful and above ridicule, they are not being treated as fully human characters. They are carrying an impossible public-relations obligation. Real equality should allow personality, contradiction, embarrassment, heroism and failure across a whole range of stories.

The stronger answer is not to remove every imperfect character but to expand who can tell stories and what kinds of lives can appear. More varied representation reduces the pressure on any one fictional person to explain an entire culture. Better media literacy helps viewers recognise the gap between a fictional joke and a fair belief about real people.

Some disagreements will remain. I do not believe that a joke should be prohibited merely because it offends, and I do believe people should be able to criticise the same joke. The proper legal limits and safeguards require a more precise discussion of rights than this chapter can provide. Here I am defending the social habit of looking deeper before turning either the joke or its critic into a caricature.

If media helps shape how people interpret others, education has to do more than tell students which conclusion they should reach. It must help them identify assumptions, weigh evidence and ask questions they were never expected to ask.

CHAPTER 09

Education for Critical Thought

One of the clearest ways to improve the society we inherit is to teach people how to understand it. That sounds obvious, yet education is often discussed mainly through grades, credentials and employment outcomes. Those things matter. We need people with dependable knowledge, and some work cannot safely be performed without rigorous standards. But knowledge becomes more useful when a person can ask why it matters, where it came from and what would make it unreliable.

I remember the kind of question children are famous for asking: why? Why does the road go there? Why is a rule written that way? Why can this person do something while another cannot? Those questions can be exhausting, but they are also the foundation of understanding. If we teach children that curiosity is welcome only until it slows an established procedure, we risk training them to obey systems they have never learned to examine.

Keep the questions alive

Think about being little and annoying your parents with questions. Why is the sky that colour? Why does the car move? Why can't I do that? Why does that person get treated differently? You don't come into the world knowing which questions are 'sensible'. You ask because you want to understand. And somebody answering you properly can change what you believe is possible.

I think adults sometimes forget that. We expect somebody to know something because we learnt it years ago. We say, 'How do you not know that?' But what if they were never taught? What if the first explanation didn't make sense? What if a disability, a different learning style or a bad experience made it harder to ask the next question?

A question tells us where someone is starting from. That is useful information. If somebody asks me a question about an engine that seems obvious, I can laugh at them, or I can find out what they do understand and build from there. They might not know what a part is called, but maybe they understand what happens when you turn the key. That's a place to start.

The same goes for politics. Somebody might not know what a budget deficit is or how a law gets passed. That doesn't make their concerns about housing or healthcare worthless. Explain the missing bit in a way they can understand. If they keep asking why, brilliant. Eventually we might discover something the expert explaining it hadn't considered.

And if we don't know the answer? Say so. Then find somebody who does, look for evidence and come back. I don't want 'I don't know' to be the end of learning. I want it to be the beginning.

Education shouldn't have an age limit in our minds. We gain wisdom by living, but we can also become resentful, exhausted or convinced we've heard it all. I want this manifesto to bring a bit of that child back— the one who wasn't embarrassed to ask why—without throwing away the judgement adults need to check whether an answer is actually right.

This doesn't mean no standards, no exams or no wrong answers. A teacher has to correct mistakes. What matters is doing it in a way that helps someone try again, rather than making them afraid to ask another question.

This chapter is close to the heart of the whole thing. I remember being a kid and wanting to know why. Kids ask questions adults think they should already know. But how are they supposed to know if nobody has taught them? And why should that change just because they get older? I don't want an education system that leaves people embarrassed to learn.

I believe communication, emotional understanding and constructive disagreement deserve greater recognition in our approach to education.

We spend considerable time teaching young people how to read, write, calculate and understand the physical world.

These are essential skills.

However, young people must also navigate relationships, misunderstandings, competing values, emotional uncertainty and disagreements that can't always be solved by identifying one objectively correct answer.

These abilities shouldn't be assumed to develop equally or automatically.

Families, schools and communities can help young people learn how to express their needs, recognise different perspectives, question assumptions, establish boundaries and resolve conflict without immediately resorting to personal attacks.

This doesn't require teaching children that every opinion is equally correct.

It requires helping them distinguish between facts, interpretations, intentions, consequences and personal values.

For example, a child should be able to understand that someone may have good intentions while still making a harmful decision.

They should also understand that experiencing hurt doesn't automatically establish that another person intended to cause it.

Both lessons matter.

I would support exploring age-appropriate communication and conflict-resolution education as part of broader personal and social development. Such programmes should be evidence-informed, adaptable to different developmental and communication needs, and evaluated for their actual benefits rather than assumed to work because their intentions sound positive.

The objective shouldn't be to create people who never experience offence or disagreement.

The objective should be to develop people who can communicate clearly, disagree thoughtfully, recognise mistakes and respond constructively when misunderstanding occurs.

These principles should also inform professional environments, community services and public institutions.

A support worker, teacher, employer or public official may believe they have communicated clearly. Yet the person receiving that communication might have misunderstood an instruction, felt unable to ask questions or needed information presented differently.

Rather than automatically interpreting that difficulty as unwillingness or incompetence, we should consider whether communication itself could be improved.

This is particularly important when working with children, older people, people with disabilities and individuals who may depend on others for care or support.

Respect doesn't always mean treating everyone identically. Sometimes it means recognising that different people need different forms of assistance to participate on equal terms.

I want schools to help young people ask good questions and make sense of competing information. A child should learn to tell an observation from a rumour, a moral judgement from a scientific claim, and an honest error from a deliberate lie. They should know that changing their minds when new

evidence appears isn't weakness. Nor should the lesson become 'all opinions deserve equal weight'. Some answers are demonstrably better supported than others. The skills include checking sources and explaining why.

Education isn't only academic study. Curiosity appears when a mechanic diagnoses an engine, when an artist solves a composition problem, when a support worker finds a communication method or when a student questions why a rule exists. A broad education should expose people to those different kinds of thinking. Not everyone will enjoy every subject or qualify for every profession. The point is to give people meaningful chances to discover and develop capacities before narrowing their possible futures.

The strongest obstacle is practical: teachers have limited time; curricula are crowded; families have different expectations; programs that promise emotional growth can become vague or intrusive. I wouldn't introduce an enormous new subject without examining its timetable, training needs, cost and evidence. Some changes could be taught through existing literacy, civics, health and classroom practice, with adaptations for different communication needs. A pilot should assess whether students can apply the skills to real disagreements, not merely repeat vocabulary on a test.

I also want children to learn that the beliefs shared at home can be respected without becoming immune to questions. A school should not exist to turn children against their families or religions; nor should it teach them that asking for reasons is disrespectful. The same freedom to inquire should be available to children from religious and non-religious households, with regard for their age and developing independence.

Education continues after school

And this brings me back to education. I believe education is one of the most important investments humanity can make. Not simply education that teaches people to memorise information, pass examinations or follow instructions, but education that teaches people to think independently, investigate evidence, recognise connections, understand consequences and question their own assumptions. We often describe things as common sense simply because they are familiar to us.

But what seems obvious to one person may be completely unfamiliar to another. We were all children once. Every one of us needed somebody to explain something, answer a question or help us understand a concept we had never encountered before. Why should that responsibility suddenly disappear when we become adults? Why should somebody be ridiculed for asking a question simply because another person already knows the answer?

A society that discourages questions because something is supposedly obvious risks creating generations of people who follow rules, repeat beliefs and accept institutions without understanding why they exist. And when people do not understand the systems governing their lives, how can they meaningfully participate in improving them? Education should not simply prepare people to function within the society they inherit. It should also prepare them to understand, question and improve that society.

This is also why I believe political disagreement has an important role in social progress. Different political perspectives can challenge assumptions, reveal weaknesses in arguments and prevent people from surrounding themselves exclusively with ideas they already agree with. The political left and right should be capable of questioning one another, examining evidence and contributing to a broader public understanding. Neither side has a monopoly on morality, intelligence, evidence or good ideas.

And neither side should be beyond criticism. Disagreement should not exist merely to defeat somebody else, humiliate an opponent or prove that one political identity is superior to another. It

should provide an opportunity to discover what we may have overlooked. If somebody challenges my beliefs with credible evidence or a stronger argument, I should be willing to reconsider my position. That does not mean abandoning my principles whenever somebody disagrees with me.

It means recognising that my understanding, like everybody else's, is capable of being incomplete or mistaken. I do not want a society where everyone thinks exactly as I do. I want a society where people are equipped to think for themselves.

Critical thinking is not a polite name for refusing to believe anything. It requires the ability to compare sources, understand uncertainty, recognise a sound argument and admit that expertise may tell us something our first impression cannot. An expert should be questioned on evidence, not dismissed merely because they are an expert. Equally, expertise does not entitle someone to be immune from scrutiny or to make moral decisions on behalf of everyone affected.

There is a difference between asking a student to memorise a historical date and asking them to consider why a decision was made, what different witnesses recorded and what consequences followed. We need factual literacy to do the second task well. I am not arguing that every school day should become an unstructured political discussion. Basic reading, numeracy, history, scientific understanding and practical competence are tools people need before they can evaluate difficult claims.

The same applies to digital literacy. A person who can operate a device may still be unable to recognise misleading information, an algorithmic recommendation or an answer that sounds confident but has no adequate source. As tools change, schools and adult education need to help people maintain independent judgement rather than simply learn the latest interface.

I would also like us to be more honest about how education is evaluated. Better test scores may indicate learning, but they do not necessarily tell us whether a student can use knowledge in an unfamiliar situation, explain a mistake, cooperate with someone different or challenge a misleading claim. The difficulty of measuring those abilities is not a reason to ignore them. It is a reason to avoid pretending one number captures the whole purpose of a school.

The next step is to recognise that students themselves are different. When we discover that people have many ways to reason and create, a fair system must allow more than one route to competence without making all standards optional.

CHAPTER 10

Creativity Is Not One Kind of Talent

When we call someone creative, we often picture a painter, musician, performer or writer. Those are real forms of creativity, but I do not believe they own the word. The mechanic who hears an unfamiliar engine noise and finds a way to diagnose the fault is using imagination. So is a support worker who discovers a better way to make a person feel understood. So is somebody developing a business to meet a need nobody else has properly addressed.

Different abilities, meaningful standards

Education and social expectations should make room for more than one way to learn, think, create and contribute.

One of the central ideas behind the Century Manifesto is that human ability can't be measured through one narrow definition of success. Not everyone is academically gifted. Not everyone is physically talented. Not everyone is naturally artistic, mechanically minded, socially confident or comfortable managing people.

But that doesn't mean people who lack one particular strength have nothing valuable to contribute. I believe society often defines creativity too narrowly. We readily recognise creativity in musicians, artists, designers and performers. Yet creativity also exists in engineering, caregiving, entrepreneurship, problem-solving, public policy, technology and countless other fields.

A mechanic finding an innovative solution to a difficult repair problem is exercising creativity. A support worker developing a better way of communicating with someone is exercising creativity. An entrepreneur identifying an unmet community need is exercising creativity. A person questioning an established political system and proposing a different approach is also exercising creativity.

These abilities take different forms, but they all involve applying knowledge, imagination and judgement to produce something useful or meaningful.

That distinction matters because young people can begin judging their own worth against abilities they haven't developed or were never naturally inclined towards. Someone who struggles academically may believe they lack intelligence. Someone who can't draw may believe they aren't creative. Someone who has difficulty communicating may believe they have nothing important to say.

These assumptions can prevent people from discovering abilities that develop under different circumstances. I want education to do more than assess how well someone performs against standardised expectations.

It should help people discover their strengths, develop weaknesses where possible, acquire practical knowledge and understand the opportunities available to them. This doesn't mean abandoning academic standards or pretending everyone has the same capabilities. Different professions require different competencies, and some requirements exist for important reasons.

Rather, it means providing different pathways through which people can develop and demonstrate those competencies. TAFE, apprenticeships, practical experience, mentoring, traditional education and alternative learning methods should all have meaningful roles. The objective isn't to guarantee that everyone succeeds.

It is to avoid deciding someone's future before they have had a reasonable opportunity to explore their potential.

Fairness doesn't require making everyone the same. It requires recognising meaningful differences without automatically treating those differences as inferiority.

Some jobs require particular physical abilities, technical knowledge, qualifications or safeguards. Recognising human differences doesn't mean placing someone in a role they can't safely perform. A fair opportunity pathway should explain the competencies required and offer realistic ways to develop or demonstrate them. There's no dignity in promising that everybody can become anything regardless of capacity or available resources. There is also no dignity in denying someone a chance before discovering what they can do.

I want schools, employment services and employers to recognise different strengths: mechanical, interpersonal, artistic, analytical, practical, organisational and caring. Creativity exists in the workshop, office, kitchen, classroom and care facility, not just in traditional creative industries. The important test is whether these routes lead to useful skills, confidence, meaningful participation and further choices.

The discussion behind this chapter began with a simple observation: people can appreciate creativity in work they cannot personally perform. I do not need to be a rapper to understand that writing and performing music requires practice, imagination and judgement. I do not need to be a hairdresser to recognise the skill involved in giving somebody a result they value. The fact that I am better at seeing problems in a system than at producing a painting should not automatically remove me from the world of creative thought.

If we really believe that, the question changes. Instead of asking every young person to discover the same strength, we can ask how schools, families, mentors and communities might help them identify different strengths and explore what those strengths can become. The goal cannot be to label a child as 'the practical one' at ten years old and close off every other possibility. People develop, change their interests and discover capacities through opportunities they were never given before.

I want education to provide foundations, not cages. Some people need formal study, some thrive with apprenticeships and others learn through supervised practice, mentoring or different communication approaches. These pathways should remain demanding where safety and competence require it. A builder still needs to build safely. A caregiver still needs to protect the people depending on them. An alternative method of learning should be a route to a meaningful standard, not a disguised lowering of that standard.

I also want us to avoid valuing people only by their future productivity. A young person who has not found a talent is not a failed investment. A person who cannot work is not an empty cog. The first volume established that human dignity comes before the calculation of economic contribution. Here I am arguing that education should widen genuine opportunities while preserving that basic principle.

There is a relationship between creativity and the economic ideas developed later in this series. Public education and essential support can provide a foundation from which people explore their abilities; enterprise and individual initiative can give those abilities new applications. But neither a collectivist slogan nor a market incentive automatically guarantees a fair opportunity. What matters is whether the pathways actually exist and whether people can use them.

A society will still require doctors, nurses, builders, carers, engineers, artists, teachers, cleaners and people prepared to do difficult or unpopular work. I am not suggesting everybody can simply follow a passion and expect society to arrange itself around the result. I am suggesting that the variety of real contributions is larger than the labels we often teach children to admire.

If we want future generations to question and improve what they inherit, we need to pass on more than a list of approved answers. We need to show them how knowledge, institutions and beliefs themselves developed.

CHAPTER 11

Preserve and Teach the Process of Change

A society that can question its systems needs a record of why those systems were built. Without that record, we may preserve a failed practice because we cannot imagine an alternative, or remove a necessary protection because we have forgotten the harm it was designed to prevent.

This is a practical problem as much as a historical one. Rules do not arrive from nowhere. A school policy may have been written after a particular incident. A safety procedure may reflect injuries that workers fought to prevent. A welfare requirement may have been created to address abuse, then become unreasonably difficult for people it was meant to assist. Before choosing whether to keep, fix or replace something, I want to know what purpose it once served and whether that purpose is still being achieved.

Teach the reasons, not just the conclusions

I hope that over the next hundred or two hundred years, humanity continues developing a deeper understanding of itself and the consequences of its decisions. However, progress is not inevitable. Societies can regress. Majorities can be wrong. Popular beliefs can become harmful, and well-intentioned reforms can produce unintended consequences. History demonstrates that public acceptance alone does not establish whether something is morally right. This is precisely why we must protect independent thought, freedom of expression, human rights, democratic participation and the ability to question authority.

We should not expect everyone to accept a new position simply because society has declared it correct. We should encourage people to understand the reasoning, examine the evidence and participate meaningfully in the discussion. That process requires education, transparency, patience and time. It also requires something that I believe society frequently undervalues: documentation. When we change a law, introduce a policy, reform an institution or replace an existing system, we should preserve the reasoning behind those decisions.

Why was the original system created? What problem was it intended to solve? What evidence justified changing it? What alternatives were considered? What consequences were anticipated, and what actually happened? Were the original objectives achieved? Did the changes create new problems? Who benefited, who was disadvantaged and what lessons were learned? This information should not disappear simply because the people responsible for making those decisions are no longer in power.

Future generations deserve to understand our successes and failures, not merely inherit our conclusions. We should never erase or conceal history simply because society has moved beyond certain beliefs or practices. Understanding why previous generations made particular decisions is essential to recognising whether those decisions were reasonable, misguided, harmful or appropriate for the circumstances of their time. Without that understanding, future generations may repeat mistakes that could have been avoided.

They may also dismantle useful protections simply because they no longer understand why those protections were introduced. Preserving historical knowledge does not mean defending every historical decision. It means allowing society to learn from the past rather than repeatedly rediscovering the same lessons. Of course, I do not believe the answer is endless discussion without action. Society must still make decisions. Governments must introduce policies, institutions must

perform their responsibilities and individuals must accept that no solution will ever be completely perfect.

Sometimes decisions must be made with limited information, particularly when delaying action would allow immediate harm to continue. But taking action should not mean abandoning critical thinking. We should respond to immediate problems while continuing to investigate their causes. And once decisions are implemented, they should be followed by evaluation, accountability and a willingness to change direction when new evidence demands it. A policy should not be considered successful simply because it was introduced with good intentions.

Its success should be measured by what it actually achieves, what it costs, whom it affects and whether its benefits outweigh its consequences. This requires a society willing to distinguish between the purpose of an institution and the quality of its operation. We should be able to question laws without being accused of supporting the behaviour those laws were designed to prevent. We should be able to question policing without opposing public safety.

We should be able to question military decisions without condemning every person who serves. We should be able to question healthcare policies without disregarding patients, medical professionals or the moral concerns of others. And we should be able to question our government without automatically opposing everything it does. Questioning a system is not the same as wanting to destroy it. Sometimes the answer is to preserve what already works.

Sometimes it is to improve safeguards, clarify legislation, provide better training, strengthen education or introduce independent oversight. Sometimes the problem lies not within the policy itself, but in its implementation, funding, enforcement or the culture surrounding it. And sometimes the evidence may demonstrate that the existing approach is fundamentally incapable of achieving its intended purpose. In those circumstances, replacing it may be necessary. But we should reach that conclusion through investigation and evidence, not simply because we dislike the people, institutions or political movements associated with it.

A living record of improvement

A society where people recognise that their actions have consequences, that institutions influence those actions and that even well-intentioned decisions can cause harm. A society where curiosity is encouraged rather than dismissed, disagreements become opportunities for understanding and mistakes become opportunities for learning. A society where accountability is not simply about finding somebody to punish, but also about preventing the same harm from happening again.

We cannot predict every consequence of every decision. No government, institution or individual possesses enough knowledge to anticipate every possible outcome. But we can improve our ability to recognise patterns, evaluate risks, identify failures and respond when something goes wrong. And the more people understand how society works, the more capable they become of recognising when something is wrong, questioning why it is wrong and contributing to a solution.

That is why I continue returning to education. Because a society that understands its systems is better equipped to hold those systems accountable. My goal is not to convince everybody to agree with me. It is to encourage people to question what they believe, understand the institutions and circumstances surrounding them and recognise that there is almost always more to a problem than what appears on the surface.

The systems governing our lives were created, developed and changed by people who came before us. Many exist for legitimate reasons, even when their flaws are apparent. But their existence does not place them beyond criticism, just as their failures do not mean everything about them should be

discarded. We inherit not only the achievements of previous generations, but also their mistakes, compromises, assumptions and unfinished work.

It is our responsibility to continue questioning, testing, documenting and improving what we inherit. Not for the sake of change itself, but for the people who must live with the consequences. We should never stop at asking who is responsible for a problem. We must also ask what allowed the problem to occur, what could have prevented it, what other systems contributed to it and whether our proposed solution risks creating another problem in its place.

Because building a better society is not simply about finding better answers. It is about teaching ourselves and future generations to ask better questions. We should not measure progress solely by how many laws we introduce, how many institutions we establish or how many problems we claim to have solved. We should measure it by whether people's lives are genuinely improving, whether preventable harm is being reduced, whether rights and responsibilities are being respected and whether society is becoming more capable of recognising and correcting its own mistakes.

A better society is not one that believes it has finally discovered every answer. It is one that remains willing to learn. One that can recognise the value of what previous generations created without treating their decisions as beyond question. One that can acknowledge the failures of its institutions without abandoning the legitimate purposes those institutions serve. One that understands that protecting people and questioning authority are not opposing responsibilities, but often essential parts of the same responsibility.

And one that recognises that true accountability does not end when somebody is punished. It continues until we have examined what happened, why it happened and what can reasonably be done to prevent it from happening again. That is the society I hope we continue working towards. Not a society without disagreement, mistakes or difficult decisions, but one that is better equipped to understand and respond to them.

Because the people who inherit our decisions deserve more than our good intentions. They deserve systems that have been questioned, tested, improved and held accountable. Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails. And above all, never stop asking why.

This standard also has to apply to the Century Manifesto. If I change my mind, the older position should not disappear as though I never held it. A reader should be able to understand what I believed, what evidence or criticism challenged it and why the later wording changed. A living philosophy should be capable of correction without falsifying its history.

I want the distinction between explanation and endorsement to be clear. Recording how a harmful policy was justified does not mean accepting its justification. Recording how a movement emerged does not mean praising everything its members later did. Teaching historical context should make moral judgement better informed, not impossible.

The same care is required when an idea arrives through conversation. Some of the essays that inspired this volume began as discussions in which another voice helped explain a theory I was developing. That explanation may be useful, but it cannot automatically become my settled belief. I need to decide whether it represents what I meant, whether it goes too far and what further evidence is required.

Institutions need the same willingness to expose their history of decisions. If a public authority says a program has been successful, what did success mean at the beginning? What evidence was recorded? What concerns were raised? Were those concerns answered? Did a change improve the actual service or merely make the reports look better? People cannot participate meaningfully when they are shown only a conclusion and denied the reasoning behind it.

We inherit achievements and failures from people who were different from us but no less human. We need the confidence to learn from them and the humility to accept that later generations may correct us in turn. That is not an argument for standing still. It is a reason to make changes carefully, openly and with enough memory to understand their consequences.

The people we become are shaped by experiences we did not choose. Yet our choices can change what others inherit. We communicate imperfectly, disagree about values, tell complicated stories and bring different abilities to the same society. Recognising that shared humanity does not settle every argument about what should be permitted, required or protected. It makes those arguments unavoidable. Cultural exchange gives us opportunities to question what we inherited without requiring us to surrender the parts of our identity we still value.

The next volume therefore moves from understanding people to the rights and freedoms we owe them. If people differ in their beliefs, identities, needs and circumstances while sharing equal dignity, how can a society protect individual liberty and fair treatment when those rights come into conflict?

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME III

Human Rights, Freedom, Identity And Equality

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

Rights as Inherited Protections

In the first volume I began with dignity. In the second I asked how our different histories, beliefs and experiences shape the people we become. Neither question is finished. But they bring me to a question with consequences beyond philosophy: if every person has basic worth, what protections do we actually owe one another when our interests or beliefs collide?

The revised second volume also asks what happens when a person begins questioning a belief inherited from family, culture or religion. Understanding why people believe something is not enough if we do not also protect their ability to examine it. The next question is whether our institutions protect the believer and the person who no longer believes with equal seriousness. That is a rights question, not simply a disagreement about culture.

I cannot begin by pretending that I have discovered rights for the first time. People before us argued, organised, sacrificed and suffered so that certain freedoms would not be left entirely to the goodwill of a ruler, employer, neighbour or majority. A right matters most when it protects somebody whom the person in power would rather not protect.

The achievement we inherit

I talk a lot about freedom, but I also talk a lot about responsibility. Sometimes those two things pull in completely different directions, and I don't think we're doing anybody any favours if we pretend there's an easy answer every time.

I want people to live their own lives, hold their beliefs, make mistakes, disagree and have a fair go. I also want people protected from violence, exploitation and people misusing power. So who gets to draw that line? What happens when a government starts deciding that something is 'for our own good'? And who do we go to when it gets that decision wrong?

I keep coming back to the fact that rights weren't invented in this manifesto. People before us fought for them for a reason. We need to understand that history before we decide we can improve anything. I might think a particular consequence is justified for somebody's actions, but that doesn't mean my first reaction should become the law. It has to survive the same questioning as everything else.

Sometimes people talk about rights as though somebody just wrote a list and everybody agreed. We know that's not how history worked. People were hurt, excluded and denied basic freedoms, and others fought to change that. I want to improve how rights work in real life without pretending those lessons never happened.

I don't believe that dignity, freedom and equality began with my ideas. Humanity has built protections through struggles, failures, negotiations and an enormous amount of suffering. The

Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 is an important statement of those aspirations. It includes protections for liberty, expression, belief, equal treatment, education and social security, alongside recognition that people have duties towards their community. It should be treated with respect, but also described accurately: the Declaration isn't itself an Australian constitutional bill of rights or a treaty that automatically gives each person a directly enforceable remedy in an Australian court.

Legal instruments aren't interchangeable. International treaties can create obligations for countries; their domestic enforceability depends on the relevant Australian legal framework. Commonwealth legislation, state law and constitutional protections work in different ways. Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 protects specified rights and requires relevant public authorities to act compatibly with them and properly consider them. It permits demonstrably justified limitations in a free and democratic society. This is an existing approach worth studying, not a mechanism I have invented.

I want to ask what a stable foundation should mean in practice. If a government changes after an election, it should be able to alter housing programs, transport priorities or administrative procedures. It shouldn't be able to announce that an unpopular minority no longer deserves equal dignity because it has the votes. That is why I favour strong limits on arbitrary power and serious scrutiny of changes affecting basic rights. Yet I recognise the difficulty: someone must define the rights, interpret conflicts and determine how much authority courts, parliaments and independent reviewers should hold. Protecting people from majority abuse shouldn't create a new institution that can never be questioned.

A workable design would distinguish fundamental guarantees, ordinary laws used to implement them and the administrative procedures that deliver them. Where a proposed restriction affects a right, the institution should identify the actual harm it intends to prevent, consider less intrusive alternatives, publish reasons where lawful and provide avenues for independent challenge. When circumstances change, the method may be reviewed without discarding the human dignity behind it.

The strongest objection is that entrenched rights can make necessary reforms slow or transfer contested decisions away from elected representatives. I accept that risk. The answer isn't to leave vulnerable people wholly dependent on political popularity; it is to design review, parliamentary accountability and accessible remedies together. The exact form remains a constitutional and public question, not a concluded blueprint.

A right that can be used

What good is being told you've got a right if you can't afford to challenge somebody who ignores it? A person might know they were treated unfairly but have no clue where to go, what to fill out or how they'll survive while they wait. That's the part I want people to think about: not just the rule, but the person trying to use it.

Imagine being told that you have the legal right to challenge an official decision, but you can't understand the letter explaining it. The appeal must be lodged online, you have poor internet access, the time limit is short and the process seems to require professional advice you can't afford. The right may exist formally, yet the practical opportunity to use it is limited. This matters because the institutions that hold power usually understand their own procedures much better than the individual affected.

I want a person's ability to exercise a right to be part of how we measure whether that right is protected. That doesn't mean the government must win every legal case for the applicant, pay every

legal expense or accept every complaint. It means an ordinary person should be able to discover what decision was made, the central reasons, how to correct factual errors, what evidence they may supply and where an independent challenge can go. Explanations should be accessible for people with different languages, communication needs and disabilities, with appropriate privacy protections.

Victoria already has relevant institutions and processes, including human-rights duties under the Charter, the Victorian Ombudsman, the Equal Opportunity framework and avenues through courts and tribunals. These have different jurisdictions and powers. Their existence should be acknowledged before proposing another oversight body. The useful investigation is whether the person with a problem reaches the right service, receives a fair hearing and obtains an effective remedy without impossible cost or delay.

A proposed Century assessment would follow a complaint from beginning to end. Can the person identify the responsible agency? How long does the response take? Do decisions give understandable reasons? Are similar cases treated consistently? Can urgent harm be prevented while a review occurs? Who pays the administrative cost, and does the process unfairly burden frontline staff? A system with very low complaint numbers might be excellent, or it might simply be inaccessible. We would need further evidence to tell the difference.

A fair objection is that every extra review can produce expense, delay and opportunities for people to repeatedly challenge decisions without sound grounds. I don't think that concern is imaginary. Proportional triage, clear timeframes, help resolving simple mistakes quickly and safeguards for vexatious conduct may all be necessary. However, speed can't be the sole measure of justice. An agency that processes errors quickly is still making errors.

I want to make a distinction that is easy to lose when political arguments become emotional. A moral right is a claim about how people ought to be treated. An international declaration may express an important common standard. A treaty can place obligations on a country. An enforceable legal right depends on the laws and institutions that give somebody a way to rely on it. These things are connected, but I cannot truthfully describe them as identical.

A letter stating that an appeal is available means very little to a person who cannot understand its instructions, cannot reach the office, has nowhere safe to live while waiting or cannot pay for necessary advice. The right may be recognised in a document and still fail a practical test. An institution does not become fair merely because it has written down a complaints procedure.

But I must resist the opposite error as well. The existence of a right does not guarantee that every complaint is well founded or that every requested remedy must be granted. A fair process has to protect the person making a complaint and the person or institution accused. It should offer intelligible reasons, a chance to correct mistakes, appropriate urgency, privacy and independent challenge where warranted. Those protections can be costly. The cost should be examined openly rather than used to assume the protections are unnecessary.

The Century System should begin its study of rights with existing safeguards, not announce a replacement constitution before learning what current institutions already do. In Victoria, the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities offers one concrete example of rights duties and justified limitations. Federal, state and international rules do not all operate in the same way. I am interested in where they work, where they conflict, where a remedy is inaccessible and what evidence would show an improvement.

Human dignity belongs at the beginning of the argument. But the point of this volume is to ask how that promise changes the decisions a government, community and individual are allowed to make. If

somebody claims a restriction is justified, the burden should not be on the person losing freedom simply to accept that claim.

CHAPTER 02

Meaningful Freedom and Personal Responsibility

I want the freedom to disagree, to choose my own life and to make decisions other people might never make for themselves. That includes decisions that are ordinary to me and strange to somebody else. But a society cannot function on the promise that every individual preference overrides every other person's needs. Freedom has meaning partly because other people have it too.

The first distinction I want to keep is between a personal choice that other people dislike and conduct that actually violates another person's rights. They are not the same. Disapproval is not evidence of harm; nor does calling something a personal choice erase coercion, abuse or danger.

Belief, refusal and the person behind the choice

I don't think a government should decide what somebody must believe. People can find meaning in religion, choose not to believe at all, or change their minds. The hard part is where belief becomes conduct that affects other people's freedoms. We need to be careful about that line instead of lumping everyone together.

I believe people should be free to practise a religion, reject one, change their beliefs and express their convictions without being treated as less deserving of legal protection. I also believe the freedom to practise must include the freedom not to be forced to practise. A person voluntarily wearing religious clothing and a person refusing that clothing should both be protected. The important issue is whether there is meaningful choice, not whether the belief is familiar to the majority.

This is where simple slogans fall short. Something can look like a free choice from the outside while being sustained by threats, isolation, dependency or economic pressure. The reverse is also possible: someone may choose an unfamiliar practice with conviction, while outsiders assume they must be oppressed. I don't want a system that automatically treats a religious identity as evidence of coercion. Nor do I want legitimate concerns about forced conduct dismissed because they arise inside a family or community. We need evidence of what is actually occurring and protection that the affected person can access safely.

The same principle applies beyond religion. Adults ought to have substantial freedom over their personal beliefs, private lives and bodies, while laws legitimately restrict conduct that violates another person's rights. A person must be free to criticise a religious institution, including strongly, without that criticism automatically becoming an attack on every believer. A believer should likewise be free to defend their tradition through lawful expression. Threatening a person, imposing violence or discriminating unlawfully are separate questions from agreeing or disagreeing about doctrine.

How might this work in practice? A person seeking to leave a controlling arrangement needs confidential advice, access to shelter where necessary, protection against threats and a fair legal process. They shouldn't first have to persuade the state that their entire culture is defective. A person who chooses to remain shouldn't face blanket bans merely because outsiders dislike the practice. Agencies must investigate individual circumstances and give reasons for intrusive intervention.

A critic may argue that apparently neutral policies can miss the structural power that makes consent hard to establish. I agree this is a serious problem. Legal definitions of coercion must be informed by people with relevant experience, and remedies must not depend entirely on a frightened person

making a perfect disclosure. But we also need safeguards against false assumptions, profiling and overreach. Both problems are real.

A choice that remains a choice

The discussion of multiculturalism in Volume II leads me to a further distinction. It is one thing to inherit a practice; it is another to have the practical freedom to decide whether to continue it. A person can take pride in the religion of their family and still disagree with one of its traditions. They can decide that the tradition remains meaningful after questioning it. They can change their mind more than once. Freedom needs to protect each of those possibilities. Otherwise our praise for personal choice only applies to people who make the decision we prefer.

Take religious face coverings. I do not believe a woman wearing one should be automatically classified as oppressed because somebody else does not understand her reasons. Nor should a community be allowed to treat her refusal as disobedience deserving humiliation, violence, intimidation or isolation. A rule that forces all women to cover and a rule that forbids every woman from covering can both deny an individual a choice. Neither can be defended merely by saying that the people making the rule know what is best for her.

Meaningful consent cannot be read from clothing alone. I want us to ask whether an individual can express disagreement, obtain information, seek help, support themselves if necessary and make a different decision without being threatened. But I also recognise that public institutions sometimes require identification, occupational safety or communication arrangements. Those practical requirements should be explained, narrowly tailored, respectful and open to reasonable accommodation where possible; they should not become an excuse to treat one religion as automatically suspicious.

I cannot assume that a person who cannot immediately explain a custom has no independent judgement. People from every culture repeat things they were taught without giving the matter much thought. The warning sign is not unfamiliarity, nor an imperfect explanation of a belief. It is a system of punishment or coercion that makes genuine examination unsafe. This distinction must apply equally to religious communities, secular families, workplaces and political movements. All of them can demand conformity; all of them can also provide meaning and support.

Freedom without compulsory agreement

The language of 'one nation working together' can be uplifting, but it can also become dangerous if public agreement is measured by obedience to those currently in office. I want common standards of care, evidence and responsibility. I don't want a law that treats a person who rejects my economic vision as less entitled to legal protection. The ability to say 'I disagree with what our government calls progress' is part of the freedom that makes progress correctable.

An institution may require lawful conduct, taxes where due and compliance with safety rules. It can't fairly demand political loyalty as a condition of being treated humanely. Nor should somebody who chooses a lawful self-sufficient life, runs a private enterprise or advocates an alternative economic system be classified as unwilling to serve the country simply for disagreeing with a public programme.

I accept that collective decisions sometimes require rules not every person supports. Roads, courts and emergency services can't operate on individual opt-in from every resident. That is why the relevant distinction is between a law made through accountable processes and an ideology enforced as a test of belonging. The Century freedom test should ask: can people challenge the national goal,

inspect the evidence behind it, organise alternatives and retain protections if the majority rejects their argument?

I believe this distinction matters whenever a community shares a national purpose. If I want people to contribute to one another's lives, I cannot make agreement with the Century philosophy the test of whether they belong. Somebody should be free to advocate capitalism, socialism, another model or no political label at all. People should be able to refuse a voluntary project and criticise a public institution without being classified as enemies of the community.

Compulsory duties can still be legitimate. Paying lawful taxes, observing safety requirements and respecting the legal rights of others are not necessarily optional simply because a person disagrees. But a duty requires a defensible purpose and a proportionate method of enforcement. Refusal to support the governing ideology is not the same as refusal to obey a law that protects people from actual harm.

The problem becomes even harder when money and support are involved. I want a society where people who are genuinely able to participate are encouraged to do so and where responsibilities are not shifted endlessly onto the same few people. Yet a person may be unable to work because of illness, disability, caring responsibility, lack of available employment or barriers no individual can fix alone. If I ignore those realities, my language of responsibility becomes punishment directed at circumstance.

I also need to remember that an apparent choice is not always a free choice. An employee may be able to resign in theory but cannot afford to go without wages. A person may stay in an abusive household because leaving seems to endanger their housing or children. An adolescent may agree to something under pressure from people they depend upon. Law and policy have to consider actual power, not merely the existence of a signature or the absence of a visible threat.

Meaningful freedom therefore has two sides. It limits what others may force upon us, and it asks whether people have realistic ways to exercise the choices they are said to possess. It does not follow that government must provide every desired outcome. It does follow that a system claiming to guarantee liberty should examine whether its rules make that liberty unusable for some of the people living under them.

CHAPTER 03

Sex, Gender and Context

I believe the debate around sex and gender often becomes less useful the moment people decide they must prove that one concept makes the other irrelevant. That is not how I want to approach it. The questions are related, but the answer to one does not automatically settle the other.

A person's identity should not be treated as a claim that they possess no biology. Equally, talking about biology is not a reason to dismiss the person's identity, capacity or worth. The distinction should help us choose the right information for a decision, not supply a new excuse to reduce somebody to a category.

Different questions require different information

I believe everyone deserves the same fundamental rights, dignity, opportunities and protection under the law, regardless of their sex, gender identity or personal circumstances. But I also believe equality is often misunderstood. Equality does not necessarily mean treating everyone identically in every situation. It means examining the circumstances and determining what treatment is genuinely fair. Biological sex, gender identity, physical characteristics and personal experiences can all be relevant in different contexts. The important question is not whether differences exist, but when those differences actually matter and how society should respond to them.

I don’t believe we should make these decisions based on fear, prejudice or political slogans. We should examine the evidence, understand the purpose of our existing systems and consider whether better alternatives are possible. Biological sex and gender identity are related, but they are not interchangeable. Biological sex involves characteristics such as reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, hormones and physical development, although these characteristics do not present identically in every individual. Gender identity concerns a person’s understanding and experience of their gender, while gender also involves social roles, expectations and cultural understandings. Recognising these distinctions does not mean dismissing either one.

It means understanding which information is relevant to the situation. A person’s gender identity may be relevant when discussing their identity and social participation. Their reproductive biology may be relevant to certain medical decisions. Their physical characteristics may be relevant to particular sporting competitions. Different questions require different considerations. And acknowledging those considerations should never become an excuse to deny somebody their humanity. I believe transgender people deserve the same fundamental rights as everyone else. They should be able to work, study, access services, participate in their communities and live without discrimination or harassment. But I also recognise that certain circumstances create competing interests.

Women’s sporting competitions, for example, exist partly to provide meaningful competitive opportunities where sex-linked physical differences affect performance. Protecting those opportunities matters. At the same time, transgender athletes should not automatically be treated as threats to the integrity of sport simply because they are transgender. Both considerations deserve to be taken seriously. I don’t believe the answer is to ignore biological differences. But I also don’t believe the answer should automatically be exclusion.

I do not think we help anybody by treating every physical or social difference as either irrelevant or decisive. Certain reproductive characteristics matter to particular healthcare questions. Particular physical characteristics matter in some forms of sport. Personal identity matters in how people

understand themselves, are addressed and take part in society. A service should not demand an intimate medical history when it has no legitimate need for that information.

The same logic ought to work in other debates. We make distinctions between adults and children because capacity and safeguarding change across development. We set disability-access requirements because buildings built around one narrow assumption of ability exclude people. We recognise that some kinds of employment have genuine physical or safety requirements while rejecting the idea that a person's value comes from meeting them. Difference is not automatically discrimination, and equality is not a demand to pretend every context is identical.

I still have to ask what evidence supports a proposed distinction. If the decision concerns one particular type of competition, what performance or safety characteristics are actually relevant? If the decision concerns a toilet or a public waiting area, what does it have to do with athletic advantage? If it concerns a clinic, which medical information is necessary for safe treatment? A rule borrowed from the wrong context is unlikely to become fair simply because it sounds consistent.

The strongest objection to this contextual approach is that exceptions can be administratively complicated. People need clear rules and should not be left at the mercy of whichever staff member is on duty. I agree. But clarity cannot be the only measure of justice. The obligation is to design rules that are understandable, consistently applied, supported by evidence and open to review where they cause harm.

The foundation remains unchanged: being transgender, cisgender, a woman, a man or somebody whose circumstances do not fit a familiar category does not determine whether a person deserves basic protection. What it may change, in particular settings, is the information needed to design a fair arrangement. That is the difference I want this book to hold onto.

CHAPTER 04

Sporting Fairness and Opportunity

Sport is one of the clearest examples of why equality and identical treatment cannot always be the same thing. A competition is designed to recognise performance under agreed conditions. But sport is also a community activity: it gives people friendships, purpose, discipline, joy and a place to belong. A system that protects competition while forgetting participation can fail people. A system that prioritises inclusion while ignoring genuine competitive differences can fail them too.

I have played in mixed-gender teams. Those experiences matter to my thinking, although they do not prove that every level of sport could use the same model. Local participation, elite competition, physical-contact sport and events built around precision or strategy can create very different questions.

The purpose of categories

The responsibility is to identify where differences materially affect fairness and develop proportionate rules around those circumstances. Are We Asking the Wrong Questions About Sport? Whenever transgender athletes become the subject of public debate, the conversation frequently turns into an argument about which category somebody should be allowed to enter. But I wonder whether we are overlooking a much larger opportunity. What if we reconsidered how sporting competitions are structured in the first place? Different sports measure different capabilities. Strength, endurance, speed, coordination, precision, strategy, teamwork and technique all contribute differently depending on the activity.

Even within individual sports, the physical characteristics that matter can vary enormously. So why should we automatically assume that every sport requires the same approach to sex and gender? Perhaps some sporting categories should remain because they serve an important competitive purpose. Perhaps other sports could support open or mixed competitions. And perhaps new formats could be developed that create additional opportunities without undermining existing ones. I am not suggesting that every sporting category should disappear. I am suggesting that the purpose of those categories should be examined rather than simply accepted as permanent. What If We Created More Opportunities?

I come from small communities where opportunities to participate in sport are often shaped by the people available. I've played in mixed-gender teams, and those experiences have influenced how I understand cooperation, competition and participation. When people genuinely want to participate, they often find ways to work together. Different players bring different strengths. Some contribute through speed, others through strategy, physical strength, coordination, determination or teamwork. Basketball is an interesting example. Different positions utilise different combinations of physical attributes and skills, yet those players work together toward a shared objective.

That doesn't mean basketball positions could simply replace sex-based divisions. Height, strength, speed and other physical characteristics can still affect competition across every position. But it does demonstrate something important. Sport already recognises that people contribute in different ways. Could we take that principle further when exploring alternative competition structures? Could some competitions be organised around ability, weight, skill level or other relevant characteristics? Could mixed competitions become more common where they are safe and competitive? Could protected categories and open divisions operate alongside one another? These ideas would need testing. Some might succeed, while others might reveal problems we hadn't anticipated.

But I believe exploring those possibilities is more productive than assuming the existing system is the only conceivable solution.

Protected opportunity is part of fairness

I also recognise a significant problem with simply suggesting that every sport should become an open competition. An open category does not automatically produce equal opportunity. If particular physical characteristics create a substantial competitive advantage, an open category could make it harder for some athletes to compete successfully. And even in sports where physical differences are less significant, historical inequalities in funding, participation, training and opportunity can still affect outcomes. That means women's sporting categories may serve purposes beyond simply separating athletes by physical characteristics. They can protect opportunities for participation, progression, recognition and achievement.

I don't want the pursuit of inclusion to accidentally undermine those opportunities. But I don't want the protection of existing opportunities to become an excuse for refusing to explore alternatives either. The challenge is to improve the system without simply transferring disadvantage from one group to another.

Healthcare is not a certificate of humanity

Another concern I have is the tendency to reduce sporting eligibility to medical treatment. Hormone replacement therapy can affect characteristics relevant to physical performance, but the extent and significance of those changes depend on the individual, their development and the sport concerned. I don't believe somebody should be required to undergo medical treatment simply to prove their gender identity is legitimate. Medical decisions should be based on personal healthcare needs and appropriate professional advice. Competitive sporting eligibility is a separate question. If a sporting organisation believes certain physiological characteristics create a meaningful competitive advantage or safety concern, it should explain that reasoning with relevant evidence.

The existence or absence of medical treatment alone should not become a moral judgement about who somebody is. We must distinguish a person's right to live as themselves from the separate question of what makes a particular sporting competition fair.

I think it would be a serious error to describe women's sport merely as an administrative obstacle to be removed. Categories can preserve competitive opportunities, pathways to professional achievement, funding and public recognition. Some advantages can matter even when an athlete trains and competes in good faith. If a proposed open division leads to the disappearance of an effective protected category, I cannot call that automatically fair.

But I also cannot assume that the only alternatives are a single existing category or complete exclusion. There may be competitions where mixed teams already succeed, open classes are practical, categories based on relevant ability work better or additional formats could be trialled. Some ideas may fail because too few athletes are available, the costs are unrealistic or a proposed division does not actually produce balanced competition. A failed experiment is evidence to learn from, not a reason to stop questioning every structure.

Sport-specific evidence has to govern sport-specific decisions. There is no responsible universal shortcut from a statement about average physical development to an eligibility rule for every sport, age group and level of competition. Decisions require attention to the actual demands of the activity, safety, performance, the available evidence and uncertainty. Athletes affected by the rules—including women and transgender athletes—need an effective voice in their design.

Some will object that new categories could merely shift exclusion to another place. Others will argue that modifying existing eligibility rules may compromise protected competition. Neither concern disappears just because a policy claims to be inclusive or protective. The test is whether the real opportunity improves and whether a person harmed by the rule can obtain an explanation and challenge unsupported assumptions.

In trying to create new opportunities, I do not want to require unwanted medical treatment as the price of being recognised as a human being. A medical decision belongs in healthcare and informed consent. Eligibility for a particular competition may involve physiology, but that remains a separate question. We should not turn sporting rulebooks into a measure of who is a legitimate person.

CHAPTER 05

Speech, Conscience and Expressive Freedom

In the previous volume I argued that understanding someone's intentions is not the same as approving their actions, and that humour can carry meanings its creator never intended. Here the problem changes. What should people be legally allowed to say? When does speech become coercion or intimidation? Who gets to define the difference, and what protects the critic from the power of the people being criticised?

I think a society that cannot hear uncomfortable questions will struggle to correct itself. The right to criticise public policy matters most when the criticism is inconvenient to those who hold office. A person should be able to question a religion, a corporation, a government decision or even a foundational claim of this manifesto without having to prove that somebody in power likes the question.

Offence is not the whole legal test

I don't think every rude thing somebody says should be treated like violence. But I also don't believe a credible threat is just somebody having an opinion. Where's the line, who gets to enforce it and how does somebody appeal if they get it wrong? Those questions matter more than a slogan about free speech.

I strongly value the ability to question politicians, mock institutions, criticise religion, disagree with fashionable ideas and express ourselves imperfectly. A society that can't tolerate ordinary disagreement is poorly equipped to correct itself. But the right to express an opinion can't mean that a credible threat, stalking, persistent targeted harassment and direct incitement are all harmless simply because words were used. The difficulty is distinguishing conduct that should attract a legal response from expression that should be answered by criticism, debate, social boundaries or ordinary disapproval.

I don't think somebody being offended is, by itself, a complete legal test. That isn't the same as saying accumulated intimidation or targeted hateful conduct is harmless. Context, intention where relevant, the relationship between people, repetition, severity and real-world consequences all matter. An ill-judged joke, a deliberate threat of violence and an organised campaign of harassment shouldn't be collapsed into a single category. Fair rules require defined thresholds and evidence about the behaviour in question, not a government licence to suppress unpopular thought.

My proposal is to require clear explanations of how such rules distinguish genuine protection from unnecessary censorship, and to examine the real-world effects. Can a person criticise an institution without being wrongly treated as threatening its members? Can somebody experiencing repeated targeted hostility receive help before the situation becomes violent? Are complaints resolved fairly? Are decision-makers trained? Is the right to appeal practical? Do rules protect people of different religions, backgrounds and views consistently?

The strongest criticism of my emphasis on speech freedom is that harm isn't always contained in one obvious threat. Repeated messages, social exclusion and coordinated intimidation can silence people long before a physical assault occurs. I accept that. It is why I oppose a simplistic 'only physical violence counts' approach. At the same time, a broad legal category of 'harm' can expand until officials are deciding which criticism is permitted. Evidence, precise drafting, limited powers and review are how we protect both interests.

Different harms require different responses

I want people protected from harassment, threats and violence. I also don't want a government with some vague power to label an unpopular opinion as dangerous whenever it suits. Both worries are real, so any proposed rule has to explain the specific conduct it targets.

A society shouldn't wait for hatred to turn into serious violence before it asks what prevention could have achieved. Discrimination, intimidation and patterns of coercion can push people out of public participation or leave them feeling unsafe in their own communities. I don't consider that acceptable. Yet the mere ambition to prevent hatred can be used to justify sweeping surveillance, censorship or public punishment of people who have expressed unpopular but lawful views. Protection from one abuse must not become a licence for another.

I would begin by separating types of problem. An offensive remark may call for disagreement or education. Discrimination in housing or work may require an enforceable civil remedy. Repeated harassment may justify protective intervention. A credible threat or incitement may require criminal investigation. Serious violence requires immediate victim protection and lawful accountability. These categories overlap at times, but using a single undefined word to describe all of them makes errors more likely.

Prevention may include accessible reporting, school and community education, services for those targeted, conflict resolution where safe, clear workplace standards and police action where conduct crosses a criminal threshold. These are possible approaches, not a universal list of proven solutions. They should be designed with affected communities and assessed for unintended effects. Mediation, for instance, can be inappropriate when one person faces threats or domination; an expectation to 'talk it out' must not become another way to trap someone in danger.

A concrete evaluation would ask whether reported victimisation is falling, whether people feel able to report, whether police and services respond consistently and whether lawful dissent remains protected. Complaint volumes alone are difficult to interpret. More reports could mean more offending or greater trust in reporting pathways. Fewer reports might show improvement or silence. Proper evaluation needs more than one number.

The strongest criticism from civil-liberties advocates is that authorities may broaden restrictions, especially in moments of public fear. The strongest criticism from people facing discrimination is that narrow legal thresholds can leave repeated conduct unaddressed until the damage becomes severe. I want both concerns taken seriously. My proposal isn't absolute permissiveness or unrestricted control. It is clear law, proportionate intervention, genuine services, independent remedies and constant scrutiny of whoever holds power.

Conscience, refusal and civic peace

Freedom of conscience means allowing people to believe, disbelieve, worship, change their convictions and disagree with the majority. Those convictions do not automatically exempt somebody from laws protecting the rights of other people. Nor should a person's religious identity become an excuse to assume they intend harm. A society that respects freedom needs to distinguish the belief someone holds from the conduct they actually engage in.

I do not want a blanket rule saying that offence is always harmless. Persistent harassment can drive people out of workplaces, community spaces and public debate without ever appearing as one dramatic episode. A credible threat can cause real fear even when the perpetrator claims it was only a joke. Incitement can be connected to imminent danger. The practical challenge is to identify the behaviour, evidence, severity and context rather than treat every disagreement as equivalent.

The purpose of legal restriction should be prevention and remedy for identifiable harm—not protection of government from embarrassment. A public official may feel humiliated by a sharp critique; that alone should not create an offence. A citizen may feel disrespected by an offensive joke; disagreement, criticism or a request for an apology may be a more proportionate response than criminal punishment. A person repeatedly targeted with threatening conduct needs more than an instruction to ignore it.

I want the law to be sufficiently precise that people can foresee what it prohibits. Vague terms may give an enforcer too much discretion, especially when political pressure is intense. Rules also need fair investigation, evidence thresholds, opportunities to correct mistakes and review of sanctions. An institution tasked with protecting expression can undermine that purpose if it becomes the sole judge of what counts as acceptable criticism.

The question is not whether expression has consequences. People are free to respond, criticise, avoid a performance or disagree with a speaker. The question is when a public authority may impose an enforceable restriction and what reasons it must give. That difference protects people who are targeted by serious wrongdoing and people who are merely unpopular. I cannot defend one while dismissing the other.

A child is not a parent's belief

Freedom of conscience becomes more complicated when the person questioning a belief is a child. Parents have a legitimate role in teaching their family's religion, values and traditions. They can celebrate religious holidays, take children to community events and explain why a faith matters to them. I do not think those ordinary acts should automatically be described as indoctrination or abuse. Children begin life dependent on adults, and guidance is part of the responsibility of caring for them.

But a child is a person developing an understanding of their own, not a possession whose beliefs must match the household. The right of a parent to offer guidance does not become a right to use violence or emotional cruelty to enforce agreement. If a child asks why a religious rule exists, expresses doubts or eventually chooses a different faith or no faith, those questions should not justify being belted, threatened, deliberately humiliated, abandoned or deprived of care. I want that standard applied without exception to Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, other religious and non-religious families alike.

This does not mean every decision belongs immediately to a very young child. The appropriate independence of a six-year-old and a sixteen-year-old will not be identical. Children gradually develop understanding, responsibility and the capacity to make decisions. Parents still need to provide age-appropriate boundaries for safety, education and ordinary family life. The crucial question is whether that guidance helps a young person become capable of informed judgement or deliberately prevents them from developing it.

A parent may say: this is what I believe, these are the reasons, and I hope you will see value in it. They may disagree firmly with an adolescent's conclusion. Yet there is a difference between sharing a conviction and making a child fear that parental love or basic care will disappear if they do not accept it. A safe family should allow questions without treating them as personal betrayal. The child should be able to learn about other ways of life and eventually make an informed choice, without the family automatically being portrayed as harmful merely because its beliefs are unfamiliar.

I also recognise the dangers of an overconfident state. A government should not take over the role of a parent simply because a family follows a minority religion, teaches traditional values or disagrees with a popular social view. Concern must be directed towards identifiable harm, coercion, neglect,

exploitation and a child's welfare. Responses should be proportionate, protective and open to review. Children should be heard in ways suited to their age, development and circumstances; adults must not turn either parental authority or state authority into an unlimited power over their conscience.

Existing international children's-rights principles already recognise freedom of thought, conscience and religion alongside parental guidance consistent with a child's developing capacities. I want the Century System to learn from that balance rather than pretending to invent it. The practical challenge is supporting children who ask difficult questions while protecting family life from unjustified interference. A society that values independent thought must be willing to protect it when independent thought first appears at the dinner table.

CHAPTER 06

Privacy, Bathrooms and Public Facilities

The same categories that sometimes matter to a competitive sport do not automatically matter when a person needs a bathroom. A sporting competition is testing performance. A public facility exists so people can attend to basic needs with privacy, hygiene, safety and dignity. Treating these questions as though they are interchangeable makes it harder to solve either.

When someone uses an ordinary public facility, I do not believe a stranger should be empowered to demand intimate information about their body simply because of how they look. That would expose people to humiliation and false allegations. But neither do I think worries about privacy should be ridiculed instead of considered. We can ask what a facility is supposed to protect and look for practical improvements.

Design for safety rather than suspicion

I believe debates about public bathrooms require a different approach. Sport is designed around competition. Bathrooms are primarily about access, privacy, hygiene and safety. I don't believe someone should be expected to prove their biological sex, chromosomes, hormone levels or medical history to a stranger simply to use a public bathroom. That would create enormous privacy concerns and potentially expose innocent people to harassment based on their appearance. At the same time, I don't believe people should automatically be dismissed when they express concerns about privacy or personal safety. Those concerns deserve to be understood.

But feeling uncomfortable around someone is not, by itself, evidence that they have behaved inappropriately. Harassment, threats, voyeurism and invasions of privacy should be addressed because of the conduct involved, regardless of the person's identity. And rather than making the entire debate about who should be excluded, perhaps we should also reconsider the design of public facilities. Better private cubicles, secure doors, appropriate supervision where necessary and optional individual facilities could improve privacy and safety for many people. Such alternatives should expand people's choices, not become a way of segregating transgender people. The objective should be safe, accessible and dignified facilities for everyone.

Private cubicles with secure locks, adequate sightlines in shared areas, accessible individual facilities and sensible maintenance may provide more privacy for many different users. A parent accompanying a child, a person with disability, someone requiring assistance, a person with a trauma history and a person who simply wants greater privacy may all benefit from options that do not require public arguments about identity.

I would be cautious about promoting an optional facility that becomes the only place one group is allowed to go. An alternative is only genuinely optional when ordinary access remains available on fair terms. Otherwise a design improvement becomes segregation under a more comfortable name.

The responsibilities of an institution do not end when the building is constructed. The conduct that makes facilities unsafe—threats, harassment, assault, voyeurism and invasion of privacy—should be assessed consistently. A person's identity does not automatically prove innocence or guilt; behaviour and evidence remain central. A fear might be genuine without making the person feared a wrongdoer.

The privacy issue is larger than toilets. Employers, schools, hospitals and public agencies sometimes collect highly sensitive information because a form has always contained a question. I want each request to justify what information is needed, who will receive it, how it will be protected and

whether a less intrusive method would suffice. Data can expose people to harm when stored carelessly or accessed for the wrong purpose.

That principle extends to surveillance. A camera in a busy transport area might help investigate an incident, but it also records people who have done nothing wrong. We should examine who controls the footage, how long it is kept, who can search it, the evidence of benefit and whether better staffing, lighting or reporting could achieve the objective with fewer intrusions.

I do not believe the choice must always be between absolute privacy and absolute public access. Real facilities involve reasonable rules and trade-offs. What I reject is the assumption that an entire group should carry an extra burden without evidence of the conduct supposedly justifying it. If we are serious about safety, we should design for it in ways that make everybody's ordinary life easier rather than turning every person into a suspect.

A public place is not an identity tribunal

The simplest approach is not always the fairest. A bright-line rule may be easier to administer, but it still needs to respond to the actual purpose of the space, the available evidence and the people it affects. Improving physical design can sometimes resolve a conflict that a political slogan only makes louder.

CHAPTER 07

Bodily Autonomy and Reproductive Debate

Bodily autonomy is more than the freedom to say what one believes. It concerns the authority a person has over decisions affecting their own body and health. Few disputes expose the limits of simple slogans more clearly than abortion. People can share a commitment to human dignity and still disagree deeply about the moral status of developing life, the interests of a pregnant person and the point at which law should intervene.

I do not want to conceal that disagreement by treating one side as ignorant or heartless. Equally, I do not want an abstract argument about morality to erase the health, safety, circumstances and independent voice of the person who is pregnant. We have to name the competing interests before claiming to balance them.

Look at the conditions behind a decision

Consider the debate surrounding abortion. I believe women's bodily autonomy is important, as is the wellbeing of potential children. I also recognise that people hold deeply different beliefs about the moral status of a developing fetus, and that these disagreements cannot always be resolved through a single argument. When discussing voluntary abortions involving otherwise healthy pregnancies, however, I believe we should ask more than whether an individual decision is morally right or wrong. We should also examine the circumstances surrounding that decision.

What education did the people involved receive? Was contraception affordable and accessible? Were they taught about sexual health, consent, responsibility and communication? Was sexuality treated as something shameful rather than something requiring understanding and education? What financial, emotional and social pressures might be influencing their circumstances? What support exists for people who wish to become parents? Are housing, healthcare, childcare and employment conditions making parenthood more difficult than it needs to be? And perhaps most importantly, what happens when we change one law without examining the conditions surrounding it?

Restricting abortion does not automatically eliminate unintended pregnancies or the circumstances that lead people to seek abortions. Likewise, expanding access to abortion does not automatically address inadequate education, financial insecurity, relationship difficulties or limited access to contraception. Even a society with comprehensive education, accessible healthcare and strong support systems would continue to face difficult reproductive decisions. Not every abortion results from circumstances that could have been prevented, and no amount of social support will eliminate every moral disagreement. But that does not make prevention, education and support any less important.

We should be capable of discussing the immediate ethical and legal questions while also examining the broader conditions influencing people's choices.

A good analysis cannot assume that every pregnancy was planned or preventable, that contraception never fails, or that everybody had safe access to education and healthcare. It also cannot claim that better information would eliminate every reproductive dilemma. Some situations involve serious medical questions, violence, coercion or severe personal circumstances. Others involve moral disagreements that remain even after the practical circumstances are improved.

I believe education about sexual health, contraception, consent and relationships should be examined as part of prevention and informed choice. If people are shamed into silence or cannot

access understandable information, the society around them has helped create the conditions in which difficult decisions become harder. That does not mean the individual's moral agency disappears. It means judging an outcome without examining its causes leaves out part of the picture.

There is a difference between identifying what might reduce unwanted pregnancies and deciding what the law should permit when a pregnancy already exists. The first can draw on evidence about education, healthcare access and social circumstances. The second includes profound ethical claims about bodily autonomy and developing life. Better preventative systems may reduce some conflict, but they cannot settle the underlying moral disagreement by themselves.

I am not proposing a completed new abortion statute in this chapter. Existing law, medical standards, confidentiality, professional obligations, access to services and the experience of affected people must all be understood before any legal design is proposed. We should also distinguish personal moral beliefs from claims about clinical outcomes. If someone makes a medical assertion, it requires medical evidence; if someone makes a moral claim, they need to defend the value judgement honestly rather than hide it inside a medical-sounding phrase.

The same respect for bodily decisions should lead us to examine consent more broadly. Consent is not simply the moment a person says yes. It is the ability to understand relevant information, decide without threats or manipulation, and change a decision where the law and circumstances allow. Support should make choices more meaningful, not replace the person's judgement with a supposedly superior one made by the state.

I want the Century framework to make space for people who think differently about reproductive ethics without requiring them to abandon their conscience. But no policy can avoid the hard question of whose authority is being expanded, whose freedom is being restricted, and what safeguards exist against error. The fact that disagreement is difficult does not give us permission to pretend it has been resolved.

CHAPTER 08

Adult Consent and Diverse Relationships

The importance of genuine consent also appears when adults build relationships that do not fit the social or legal arrangement most people expect. I have questioned why consenting adults might be prevented from seeking recognition of unconventional arrangements, including plural marriage. I am raising a question about freedom and legal design, not announcing that I have completed a law or decided that every arrangement should be recognised.

I start with the belief that adults should have substantial control over their private relationships. But the word adult is not a complete safeguard, and the word consent cannot carry the entire weight of a difficult legal system by itself.

What a legal relationship actually does

If adults understand what they're agreeing to and nobody's being coerced, why do we place some restrictions on how they arrange their private lives? That's a question worth asking. But consent gets more complicated when money, dependence or power are involved, so I want to examine those problems as well, not skip over them.

I question why the law should prevent consenting adults from seeking legal recognition for some relationship arrangements outside the conventional two-person marriage model. My concern is with personal freedom: if people are adults, understand the arrangement and genuinely choose it, why should the state restrict them without examining what harm the restriction prevents? That is a question, not a declaration that changing the law would be simple or unquestionably beneficial.

Australian marriage law currently defines marriage as a union of two people to the exclusion of all others. The Marriage Act 1961 also contains an offence concerning a married person going through another form or ceremony of marriage. My ethical question about plural relationships doesn't change those legal facts.

Consent must be more than a signature. Unequal income, immigration dependence, social isolation, family pressure and fear of losing children or housing can make departure difficult. A person may formally agree while having little realistic power to refuse. If legal recognition were ever explored, it would need answers about property, inheritance, taxation, family violence, separation, caregiving, children, social-security rules and the rights of each adult. It would need to prevent arrangements in which only one powerful person enjoys freedom while everybody else carries its burdens.

Consider an illustrative household of three adults who say they want formal recognition of their shared commitments. A registry office can't simply add a third signature to a two-person form. What obligations arise if one partner leaves? Who may make decisions during illness? Are inheritances divided equally? Could a person be pressured to accept another spouse as a condition of remaining in the home? What happens if one adult agrees but another does not? Without answers, a declaration of freedom could create new vulnerability.

The strongest argument against my position is that the combination of unequal power and legal complexity could put vulnerable people at greater risk, especially when coercion is hard to prove. That objection is serious enough that I wouldn't treat the proposal as ready for adoption. The counter-question is whether refusing any consideration necessarily protects people better than carefully designed rights, contracts and safeguards. Both questions need expert examination and evidence from relevant experiences. I am willing to leave the precise mechanism open.

The same standard applies to other bodily-autonomy disputes: moral convictions matter, but nobody should disguise them as medical facts or assume the state has unlimited authority over an adult's body. Where other rights or interests are involved, that conflict must be explained specifically. This chapter isn't an attempt to settle every reproductive or medical-ethics question by analogy.

I want to separate the existence of a relationship from the legal recognition of a marriage. Adults can have an arrangement that does not carry the same status, property rules, pension implications or legal duties as marriage. Asking whether the state should recognise it is a distinct question with effects on partners, dependants, creditors and the public institutions that administer family law.

I do not believe saying 'they all agreed' answers the problem of dependency. Someone with access to most of a household's money, property or immigration arrangements may be able to control the choices of another person without using an obvious threat. A spouse may say yes because refusal would leave them homeless, isolated or separated from children. Laws about family relationships have to account for these power imbalances even when everyone is legally an adult.

That does not prove that every unconventional household is exploitative. Conventional two-person relationships can also contain serious abuse, and unfamiliarity is not evidence of wrongdoing. I want standards based on capacity, informed choice, coercion, safety, financial obligations, equal exit rights and the interests of dependants—not on the assumption that majority custom makes one household virtuous and another dangerous.

If legal recognition were considered, the practical questions would be enormous. Which adults may make medical decisions for a partner? How is inheritance handled after a death or separation? How are assets distributed if one relationship ends but others continue? How are child-support responsibilities assigned? How do authorities prevent one partner from using the status of others to control them? What happens if an arrangement becomes coercive after registration?

I also have to consider whether the added complexity would consume resources and create difficult disputes without giving people meaningful protection. That is a serious objection. The answer might be targeted contractual or family-law safeguards rather than a new marriage category; it might be that particular proposed arrangements create risks that cannot be adequately managed. Those possibilities should be investigated, not ruled in or out by ideological instinct.

Existing Australian marriage law is built around marriage between two people and criminalises a married person going through another marriage ceremony in specified circumstances. My inquiry does not turn plural marriage into a current legal entitlement. Any discussion of change needs informed legal analysis and consultation with adults affected by these rules, including people who have experienced coercive relationships.

The same choice, regardless of whose tradition it is

The question is not whether a proposed household belongs to a familiar Australian custom or to a religious community. If a relationship involves several adults, I want the standard to be the same whether those adults are women with one husband, men with one wife or another arrangement altogether. Every participant must be an adult able to consent, informed of their rights, free to decline and able to leave without violence or coercive retaliation. A structure that gives one person freedom to add partners while denying the others a comparable voice would fail the equality principle I am trying to defend.

Even this leaves difficult questions about social pressure, dependent children, immigration status, money and lawful recognition. I am not arguing that cultural origin should exempt anyone from existing Australian marriage law. I am arguing that the moral and legal merits of a possible reform should be assessed through evidence, reciprocal rights, enforceable safeguards and consequences—

not decided solely by whether a tradition is familiar or foreign. I am open to the conclusion that some arrangements cannot be protected adequately under a proposed model. That would need to be demonstrated, not presumed.

For this question, as with the others, a person's freedom should not become another person's prison. I am interested in whether a system can protect authentic choice, not in manufacturing a legal category simply because it looks more radical than the one we inherited.

CHAPTER 09

Equality and Evidence in Public Accusations

Equal treatment is easiest to promise when nobody is frightened or angry. The principle becomes more important when there has been an accusation, a report of harassment or a suspicion that somebody may be dangerous. I want people to be able to raise concerns safely. I also want people protected from being declared guilty because of their identity, reputation or appearance.

The first task is to distinguish a report of what someone saw from a conclusion about why it happened. A person's fear may be real. Their interpretation may still be mistaken. Dismissing every concern would be irresponsible; accepting every assumption as fact would be unfair.

Listen, investigate and correct

If someone genuinely believes misconduct has occurred, they should be able to raise that concern. But the concern should be assessed fairly. There is an important difference between reporting suspicious behaviour and accusing somebody of wrongdoing simply because of how they look. I believe the standard should be consistent. Listen to concerns. Assess the evidence. Investigate where necessary. Protect people from genuine threats. And correct accusations when they turn out to be unfounded. If somebody has been wrongly accused, there should be a willingness to acknowledge the mistake and apologise where appropriate.

That same principle should apply regardless of whether the person is transgender, cisgender, male, female, young or old. Accountability should be based on conduct and evidence, not assumptions about identity.

When legitimate interests collide

One of the greatest problems I see in political discussion is our tendency to turn complicated questions into opposing teams. Women’s rights versus transgender rights. Privacy versus inclusion. Biology versus identity. Safety versus freedom. But I don’t believe every competing interest must become an irreconcilable conflict. Sometimes rights and interests genuinely collide. When they do, we should determine what is being protected, what harm might occur and whether the proposed response is proportionate. We should also examine whether protecting one interest necessarily requires sacrificing another. There will be circumstances where compromises are unavoidable. There will be situations where restrictions are justified.

But those decisions should be transparent, evidence-based, independently reviewable and open to improvement. Neither good intentions nor strongly held beliefs should exempt a policy from scrutiny.

A fair institution should create a way for somebody to report misconduct without demanding that they prove the entire case at the door. It should protect relevant evidence, address immediate danger when warranted, give the person accused appropriate procedural fairness and distinguish safeguarding decisions from final findings of wrongdoing. The exact process will differ between a criminal investigation, an employment complaint, a school incident and an ordinary misunderstanding.

If immediate safety requires an interim step, that step should be tied to an identified risk rather than described as proof that the allegation was correct. The person affected should know as much of the reason and review process as can fairly be provided without compromising a legitimate investigation or placing another person at risk.

I also think society is too quick to judge people collectively. One person's misconduct does not establish the character of everyone who shares their sex, gender, faith, ethnic background, age or nationality. The reverse is also true: identity cannot exempt a person from lawful investigation or accountability. The standards must apply to behaviour, while recognizing that the context of discrimination or power may be relevant to understanding a pattern.

There is no contradiction in defending a person's right to complain and another person's right not to be punished without evidence. Both protect vulnerable people in different circumstances. The challenge is that the system cannot always wait until all facts are known before preventing immediate harm. Its interim actions therefore need to be proportionate and open to correction rather than presented as irrevocable conclusions.

I want apologies and corrections to be part of the culture of accountability. Where an accusation was made in good faith but was mistaken, there may be a duty to correct the record without branding the original reporter malicious. Where a person deliberately fabricated an allegation, that conduct deserves separate scrutiny. Where wrongdoing occurred, protection of the victim should not be diluted by an exaggerated fear of false claims. The evidence should determine which situation we are dealing with.

This connects back to the representation argument of Volume II. Stereotypes can make observers expect different behaviour from people before they have done anything at all. A person whose identity is unusual in a particular setting can become the subject of more suspicion and fewer chances to be understood. A rights framework cannot control every human first impression, but it can limit the official consequences of unfounded assumptions.

Shared standards must examine every tradition

The revised discussion of multiculturalism also asks whether we apply the same moral scrutiny to our own practices that we apply to others. If a tradition involves serious violence, physical punishment or deliberate humiliation of another person, calling it cultural or religious does not make the harm disappear. Equally, the fact that a practice is unfamiliar does not establish harm. Laws and institutions should examine what people actually do and what rights or interests are affected, not use a culture’s name as the evidence.

Consider the treatment of animals. A cultural or religious practice involving slaughter raises real questions about pain, distress and methods of handling. Those questions deserve careful veterinary and welfare evidence. But the same inquiry must include industrial slaughter and ordinary practices already accepted by the majority. If one community is required to minimise unnecessary suffering while another is excused because its method is familiar or profitable, the apparent ethical principle is not being applied consistently. Religious freedom matters, and animal welfare matters; any restriction needs a defensible standard rather than selective outrage.

The same is true of practices that punish people for their relationships, beliefs or decision to leave a community. I do not accept stoning, assault or threats against a person simply because a tradition claims authority to impose them. A person’s right to reject violence should not vary with the religion of the person harming them. At the same time, we must not treat entire faiths or populations as guilty because some institutions or individuals defend those acts. The right approach identifies the conduct, protects the person affected and refuses collective blame.

A shared civic foundation should therefore be strong enough to protect against exploitation but modest enough not to become a demand for everyone to live identically. That is the difficult middle ground between unlimited cultural exception and forced assimilation. It requires the state to explain

why it intervenes, ordinary people to keep questioning their inherited assumptions, and every institution—including the Century System—to accept criticism of its own practices.

CHAPTER 10

Competing Rights: The Century Freedom Test

No philosophy can promise that freedom, privacy, safety, fairness and equal treatment will always fit together without difficulty. Sometimes a restriction protects one person's rights by limiting another person's conduct. Sometimes there is a better design nobody has attempted. Sometimes the available options are all imperfect. I want the Century method to make the conflict visible instead of treating the person who raises it as the enemy.

Before any new restriction is defended in the name of safety, fairness or the greater good, I want people to be shown the actual reasoning. What is being protected? What facts support the concern? What authority is being used? Who loses something, and why should the public accept that loss?

Show the work before making the rule

Before anybody says a restriction is 'for the greater good', I'd like them to show their working. What's the danger? Why would this rule fix it? What else could we try? How does the ordinary person challenge a mistake? If we can't answer those questions, why should anyone trust us with that power?

A restriction should never be defended only by announcing that it makes people safer. I want to know what danger it prevents, whether that danger is supported by evidence, how much freedom the proposal removes, what alternatives exist and how an affected person can challenge an error. If an institution can't answer those questions, it shouldn't demand unlimited trust.

Imagine a council proposal to increase public surveillance in a shopping area after repeated harassment complaints. The objective may be legitimate. But the practical questions begin immediately. Who has access to the footage? How long is it retained? Are there less intrusive improvements in lighting, staff presence, public transport or complaint response? Could certain groups be disproportionately monitored? What independent audit exists? A person shouldn't have to surrender all privacy merely because officials have identified a genuine safety issue.

The process I favour has five linked decisions. First, establish the actual problem rather than beginning with a preferred restriction. Second, identify whose rights would be protected and limited. Third, compare approaches, including less intrusive ones, on effectiveness, cost and likely unintended harm. Fourth, explain the lawful authority, independent scrutiny and remedies. Fifth, publish how the rule will be reviewed and when it should expire or change if it fails to produce the promised outcome.

Sometimes evidence is incomplete and government must still act. In emergencies, a temporary, proportionate measure may be justified while better information is gathered. Emergency can't be allowed to become a permanent excuse for secrecy or indefinite powers. The scope and duration of the measure should remain reviewable.

I want any critic of this manifesto to use the same test against my own proposals. If I argue for additional safeguards but fail to say who enforces them, that is unfinished work. If I propose more choice but can't show how to prevent coercion, the mechanism is unfinished. If I question a law without understanding the victims it was intended to protect, I haven't done enough research.

The practical test

I understand why people prefer clear, universal categories. They are easier to explain, administer and enforce. Consistency is important. But convenience should not automatically determine what is

fair. Equally, I recognise that creating dozens of alternative categories could introduce new problems. Additional competitions require participants, funding, facilities, administration and public support. A poorly designed alternative could create more divisions without providing meaningful opportunities. That is why I believe reform should involve practical trials, consultation with affected athletes, independent evidence and continuing evaluation. We should consider participation, competitive balance, safety, costs, access and the long-term effects of any changes.

If a proposal fails, we should acknowledge that. If it succeeds, we should learn from it. And if existing categories are shown to serve an important purpose, we should preserve them. Progress should be measured by actual improvements, not simply by how different a new system looks. Before introducing a restriction, changing an eligibility rule or establishing a new sporting category, I believe we should ask:

What specific problem are we trying to solve? * What evidence demonstrates that the problem exists? * Which characteristics genuinely affect fairness or safety? * Who benefits from the proposed decision, and who might be disadvantaged? * Could an alternative structure protect existing opportunities while creating new ones? * How would we evaluate whether the change actually works? * Are we protecting a legitimate purpose, or merely preserving tradition because change is difficult? These questions cannot guarantee a perfect answer. But they can help us move away from political slogans and toward responsible decision-making.

Examples of what the test reveals

Imagine a person receives a notice saying their assistance has been reduced because they allegedly missed a required appointment. The notice refers to a code rather than describing which appointment, why it mattered or what evidence was considered. The person says they contacted their provider in advance because a dependent relative needed urgent care. They don't know whether that contact was recorded. Their immediate problem is that they can't afford food and transport, but their longer-term problem is that the system has made a decision they can't effectively understand or challenge.

My proposed approach wouldn't automatically cancel the requirement. It would identify the legislative and administrative rules actually applying, check records, allow the person to supply their account and distinguish an administrative error from a genuine failure to meet an obligation. It would give reasons in accessible language, describe the review pathway and consider lawful steps to prevent disproportionate hardship while the facts are examined. The department and its provider may disagree with the person; their disagreement must be resolved by evidence and a fair process rather than by which side has more paperwork.

The public cost is real: investigation, staff training, translation, review and the potential for delayed decisions. But a review process can also identify recurring errors that are costly to everyone. The outcome to measure isn't simply the number of penalties overturned. It is whether correct decisions are reached promptly, people understand requirements and genuine participation improves without unjustified harm.

A community group holds a meeting about the location of a new place of worship. Residents may disagree about traffic, noise, design and local planning. Those objections should be examined on their merits, just as they would for another development. Criticism of religious beliefs, including strong criticism, can also be lawful expression. But suppose some participants begin repeatedly threatening attendees or using targeted intimidation to make them afraid to return. The question is no longer simply whether the proposal is popular. It is whether the meeting remains a safe setting in which people can exercise their rights.

A proportionate response might involve enforcing meeting rules, protecting access, documenting specific behaviour, making appropriate complaints and involving police where threats or crimes occur. Any legal action would need to meet the law's actual thresholds; officials shouldn't simply declare every passionate objection hateful. Equally, the people affected shouldn't be told to accept credible threats in the name of robust debate. Proper protection preserves the public forum for more participants, not fewer.

This case illustrates why the state must identify conduct rather than infer guilt from identity or point of view. It also illustrates why an unrestricted majority can't fairly silence a minority by force, while a minority can't demand automatic approval of every planning proposal. Equal treatment means fair consideration and safety, not guaranteed victory.

Imagine a vehicle is driven dangerously and impounded under a lawful road-safety power. The registered owner says they weren't driving and need the vehicle to reach work and care for somebody. Their dependence on the vehicle doesn't erase the risk created by the driver, nor necessarily undo the legal grounds for seizure. But it introduces another affected person whose interests the law should be capable of recognising.

A useful review would establish the alleged offence, the power exercised, the evidence available, the owner's relationship to the conduct, the procedural options the legislation provides and whether any statutory discretion or review mechanism applies. It shouldn't promise a remedy that the law doesn't currently offer. If an existing review pathway is inaccessible or consistently causes unjustified harm, that can be raised as a separate legislative reform question, supported by evidence about road safety and third-party impacts.

My objective is twofold: keep effective immediate measures against dangerous driving, and ensure severe state powers can be explained and scrutinised. The strongest risk in weakening seizure powers is preventable road trauma. The strongest risk in treating every seizure as unquestionable is arbitrary or disproportionate deprivation. Policymaking needs to study both, not pick whichever story produces the stronger emotion.

Consider adults seeking recognition of a non-standard household arrangement. Their request may be sincere and freely chosen. Yet suppose one person has no independent money, no secure immigration status and no realistic accommodation if they leave. An official can't infer coercion from the unusual arrangement alone. They also shouldn't declare meaningful consent proved merely because everyone signed the same document while sitting together.

A potential reform would require specialist legal design, confidential access to independent advice and practical exits from coercive arrangements. It must examine children, property, social-security interactions and the interests of everyone in the household. Some protections might be achievable through existing civil arrangements; other requested rights might require legislation. It is possible that no proposed legal design would pass a robust safety and equality test. That is a legitimate conclusion if supported by the evidence.

The underlying freedom principle remains worthy of discussion. But a theory of autonomy that leaves the least powerful adult unable to say no is incomplete. This is precisely why my preferred outcome must remain subordinate to the same rights test I demand from everyone else.

In all four scenarios, there is an immediate practical issue and a deeper design question. The decision-makers have different lawful powers. A person's rights can be affected by an error, by a correctly administered rule that produces avoidable harm, or by another person's wrongful conduct. Each demands a different remedy. The recurring Century question is whether the people with power

can explain what they did, why it was justified, how a person can challenge a mistake and whether the system actually produces the intended protection.

Testing traditions without making identity the offence

I would apply the same Freedom Test to a proposed restriction on religious clothing. What precise public-safety or identification need is being addressed? Is there evidence that the restriction achieves it? Could private identification, appropriate staff arrangements or a narrower rule meet the same need? What happens to people whose freedom to practise a faith is affected, and how can they seek a fair review? If the answer to these questions is merely that a majority dislikes the clothing, the case for coercion has not been made.

I would also apply the test to a complaint that a child is being punished for questioning religion. What has the child experienced? Is there violence, serious intimidation, deprivation of necessary care or a less obvious pattern of coercion? What support does the child need immediately? Could assistance, education or a family-focused response protect the child without unjustifiably displacing parental responsibility? Where intervention is necessary, who makes the decision, what law authorises it and who reviews an error? Protection should not be a disguise for hostility towards a religion; respect for religion should not be a disguise for ignoring a child.

Finally, an ethical rule for animal slaughter ought to describe the welfare harm it is designed to reduce, the evidence for particular methods and whether the rule applies fairly to commercial and religious practices alike. Neither a religious exception nor a blanket prohibition should be asserted without examining necessity, lawful authority, proportionality and less harmful alternatives. The decision may still be difficult. A transparent examination is better than allowing one group's familiar custom to define what counts as normal.

All three examples show why multiculturalism cannot be reduced to a choice between unconditional permission and compulsory sameness. I believe our common foundations should protect the individual while allowing people and communities to learn from one another. Those foundations must themselves be open to review. A person cannot meaningfully contribute to a changing society if they are forbidden to question the tradition they inherited or the new system asking them to change it.

The cases show why proportionality is not simply a polite word for compromise. A person who is genuinely threatening another can be stopped; the state should not pretend that a mild conversation will always be enough. Equally, a law that allows immediate action for a legitimate danger still needs a fair way to correct the consequences of an error. Preventing harm and reviewing power are connected obligations.

I want this process to ask, in order: What specific problem exists? What reliable evidence supports our understanding of it? Which rights and interests are affected? What lawful authority would permit the action? Is there a less restrictive alternative likely to achieve the same protection? What are the likely costs, unequal effects and consequences of error? Who can challenge the decision? How will we know whether it worked, and when should it be reviewed?

These questions are a method, not a machine that produces a single morally correct result. Evidence about a proposal's effectiveness does not settle the value judgement of whether its restrictions are tolerable. Two people can agree on the facts and still disagree about what an institution should be permitted to do. I want both to be able to state their reasoning without misrepresenting the other's position.

The hardest test is the one I have to apply to my own arguments about punishment and contribution. In earlier work I expressed anger at people who commit horrific offences and then

appear unwilling to take responsibility, and I considered whether extraordinarily severe penalties, including a death penalty, could ever be justified. That current question remains open to discussion. It cannot be resolved by saying that imprisonment costs the public money. A financial saving is not a moral justification for taking a human life.

Australia has committed under international law to abolish the death penalty, and no person within its jurisdiction may be executed under the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR. That is a major legal barrier, not a formality a newly imagined system can bypass. There are also ethical questions about wrongful convictions, unequal sentencing, irreversible punishment, coercive 'choices' offered to prisoners and whether execution is compatible with the dignity this manifesto begins by protecting. I must face those objections without making them disappear through editing.

The distinction between liberty, protection and public support matters here. A person convicted of serious violence may lawfully lose freedom of movement and face other justified restrictions. They do not thereby become an object the state can treat without humanity. Conditions for public assistance or additional privileges can be debated, but essential protection against abuse cannot be reduced to a popularity contest or an accounting exercise. Where my older words have blurred these categories, I want the conflict preserved as a question requiring a real decision, not silently polished into agreement.

I do not think there is one universal formula for every rights conflict. Some interests may require categorical protection; other freedoms may be subject to demonstrably justified limits. In each case the institution needs a clear explanation, access to review and a willingness to admit when a rule has produced consequences nobody anticipated.

This is what I mean by keeping what works, fixing what does not and replacing what fails. It also means declining to change something merely to prove that I can. The future of rights should not be a choice between obedience to tradition and obedience to a new ideology. It should be a continuing effort to protect human beings against avoidable harm while preserving their ability to question power.

A future with more than exclusion

I don’t believe women should have to surrender fair competition. I don’t believe transgender athletes should be automatically excluded from opportunities to participate. I don’t believe physical differences should be ignored simply because discussing them is uncomfortable. And I don’t believe somebody’s identity should determine whether they deserve dignity and respect. I believe we should be capable of holding all those principles at once. Sport is about more than winning. It is about participation, dedication, community, improvement, cooperation and the opportunity to achieve something meaningful. If we can create more ways for people to experience those things without undermining fairness, why wouldn’t we explore them?

Perhaps some competitions need to remain separated. Perhaps others could become more inclusive. Perhaps entirely new formats could give different athletes an opportunity to shine. I don’t claim to have a perfect solution. But I refuse to believe that the difficulty of a problem is, by itself, a reason to stop looking for one. The objective should not be to force every person into the same category or to abolish every distinction that exists. It should be to understand why those distinctions exist, determine whether they still serve a legitimate purpose and explore whether we can build something better.

Keep what works. Fix what doesn’t. Replace what fails. Create something better where we can. Because perhaps the future of equality isn’t about pretending we’re all exactly the same. Perhaps it’s about recognising our differences while refusing to let those differences define the limits of what we

can achieve together. And perhaps it's time we stopped asking who needs to lose their place in society and started asking what we could build so more people have a genuine opportunity to belong.

That includes people who retain their inherited faith, people who question or leave it, people whose families organise themselves differently and people who do not fit a majority's idea of normal. Their choices do not remove the obligation to protect others from harm. Nor does protecting others require us to forbid every difference. The aim is not for one culture to win. It is to develop shared protections under which individuals can safely learn, disagree and change.

That brings us to the next problem. A right can be beautifully expressed on paper, and a freedom test can be logically designed, but somebody still has to apply them. Government, courts, regulators, public services and independent bodies all need real powers if they are to protect people. Those same powers can be misused. The next volume asks how a society can build institutions strong enough to serve people without giving them unchecked authority over the people they exist to protect.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME IV

Democracy, Power And Institutional Accountability

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

Democracy Beyond Elections

At the end of the previous volume I asked how rights can be protected when the institutions responsible for protecting them also possess the power to restrict them. That question brings me to democracy. I do not think a free society can be defined only by the fact that its leaders were elected. An election gives people an essential opportunity to choose and remove representatives; it does not make every decision between elections wise, fair or immune from challenge.

I want a government capable of building things, making hard choices and responding to urgent problems. At the same time, I want the person affected by those choices to be able to understand them and, where appropriate, challenge them. These aims can pull against each other. More participation may improve decisions but also delay them; greater efficiency can help public services but can become a convenient excuse to disregard the people those services exist for.

Voting is a beginning

I get frustrated when politics turns into defending a team. Somebody puts forward an idea, the other side attacks it, and before long we're talking about personalities instead of what the policy would actually do.

I don't expect politicians to know everything. How could they? Decisions about roads, health, education, the economy and our rights all involve people who know different things. Sometimes a politician will make a bad decision because they want power. Sometimes they'll get it wrong despite genuinely trying. We should be able to investigate that difference instead of assuming every mistake proves one thing or the other.

That's why I keep asking for transparency. Show us what you're trying to fix. Show us what you know, what you don't know, what the alternatives are and who's going to pay. Tell us why you chose that option. Then let people question it without being made to feel like they have no right to speak because they aren't professionals.

I want us to share a purpose, not hand all our power to one person or one government. Those are two very different things.

Voting matters, but why do we act as though participation ends the moment the ballots are counted? Decisions affecting our lives keep happening for years. I want a way for ordinary people to understand them, question them and see what was done with their concerns.

Elections allow people to choose representatives, reject governments and debate political directions. I don't dismiss that achievement. People fought for voting rights, and democratic institutions are part of the progress this manifesto intends to preserve. But the fact that an election takes place every

few years doesn't mean ordinary people receive clear explanations for decisions affecting them during the years between.

A resident may report a dangerous road, a missing service or a rule that appears unfair. The agency might receive the complaint, send a standard acknowledgement and close the case. That could satisfy a procedure while leaving the person without any understanding of whether the problem was investigated. I am not demanding that every complaint produce the complainant's preferred result. I am asking that relevant concerns receive meaningful consideration and that significant decisions be explained in language people can understand.

Participation must also be realistic. Someone working shifts, caring for relatives, living with a disability, lacking transport or finding formal language difficult may be excluded by a consultation held during business hours and advertised through one government website. Digital submission is useful, but it shouldn't become the only doorway. Councils, parliaments and agencies can use accessible documents, community meetings, interpreters and transparent feedback without pretending that every voice has identical evidence or every suggestion is workable.

The strongest objection is that government can't hold a referendum on every decision. I agree. Representatives and public servants need authority to govern. Participation should improve the quality and legitimacy of decisions, not replace the responsibility to make difficult choices. The public is owed a process capable of listening and giving reasons, not a guarantee that the loudest objection will prevail.

A democratic government exists to represent and serve the population. It should not become an institution that people are expected to serve without question. Elections are essential, but I do not believe voting every few years should be the full extent of our involvement in the future of our country.

I want stronger opportunities for independently organised public consultations, representative citizens' assemblies, petitions, parliamentary review and appropriately designed referendums. This is not a proposal for every citizen to vote on every administrative decision. Modern societies need professionals with specialist knowledge and institutions capable of timely action. But expertise should serve the public, not permanently remove decisions from public scrutiny.

Consultation should not be something a government conducts merely so it can say it listened. Where major recommendations are rejected, publish the reasoning, the evidence and the alternatives that were considered. Explain what a decision is intended to achieve, who is likely to benefit, who will carry the costs and how the outcome will be checked. A citizen is owed serious consideration and an understandable answer, not automatic acceptance of every suggestion.

Sometimes a government will have to make an unpopular decision. Unpopularity alone does not prove the decision wrong, just as popularity alone does not make a decision just. The relevant questions are whether there is credible evidence, legitimate public purpose, fair consideration of alternatives and respect for fundamental rights. Democracy should provide meaningful influence without giving politicians or temporary majorities unlimited power.

The right to be heard is not the right to win

I have often criticised politicians, and some criticism is deserved. Dishonesty, corruption and deliberate misuse of power should face consequences. But this manifesto asks me to apply the same standard to myself: from outside a government department, I don't necessarily see the funding agreements, service constraints, supply shortages, legal duties or difficult choices the people inside are managing. A politician may intend a worthwhile result and still fail to foresee a consequence. An

ordinary resident, a worker or a student may notice the missing piece because they live with it every day.

That is why democracy can't be reduced to elections and press conferences. I want people able to put forward an idea without being ridiculed for lacking the language of an expert. There are no dumb ideas at the point of invitation; there are still bad, unsupported and dangerous proposals at the point of decision. Both halves matter. A public body should acknowledge what people say, test the claim, identify the costs and explain why a suggestion was accepted, amended or rejected. Experts must be able to disagree without silencing the public; citizens must be able to challenge experts without inventing facts.

I believe democracy is strongest when people can contribute their experience, including those who don't hold professional titles or the confidence to speak at a crowded public meeting. That means giving people accessible ways to raise ideas: written submissions, supported communication, interpreters where needed, local discussions, practical examples and sufficient time to understand proposals. If a reform affects disability support, older people, care workers or jobs in regional communities, those people should be heard while decisions are still capable of changing.

When I say there are 'no dumb ideas', I mean that embarrassment shouldn't stop someone from asking a question or identifying a missing part of the problem. I don't mean every proposal must be implemented or that a majority can vote away fundamental protections. A public servant, an economist, a parent, a disabled citizen, a truck driver and a business owner may each identify a different failure in the same policy. I want their contributions compared openly and respectfully, with reasons recorded for what government accepts, changes or rejects.

Imagine a public meeting about a transport change. Somebody asks why a bus couldn't just go down their street. The planner might know the road isn't suitable or that the cost would be unreasonable. The person asking might know something else: there's an older resident on that street who can't walk to the nearest stop. If the planner laughs off the first question, they may never hear the second bit.

That's why I want people to feel able to ask. The answer might still be no, but explain why, show the options and find out what people were actually trying to solve. Then everyone leaves knowing more than when they arrived, even if they disagree with the decision.

I also recognise a danger in imagining that consultation alone distributes power fairly. The people who have flexible working hours, reliable transport, political connections and confidence speaking in public are often better placed to participate than the people carrying the heaviest consequences of a decision. We cannot simply count comments and pretend that the numbers reveal the views of a whole community.

There must be room for independent experts to explain why a proposal will not work, without using that expertise to humiliate people who identify a real problem. A person may not know how to design a bridge and still know that a crossing is unsafe. An official may have excellent technical reasons for rejecting a suggestion and still owe the person an understandable answer. In the second volume I argued that communication is not complete simply because somebody has spoken. Democratic participation should be held to that same standard.

If public participation is to be more than a performance, elected officials must remain responsible for choosing and explaining an outcome. The public deserves meaningful influence rather than ceremonial permission to talk. That leads to a related question: responsibility cannot be equal when power is not equal.

CHAPTER 02

The Relationship Between Power and Duty

I have often used the image of a person as a cog in something greater. That image is about interdependence, not obedience. A cog does not lose its worth because it is small, and a government does not acquire unlimited moral authority because it is large. When one person can affect thousands of lives, the responsibility attached to that person's decisions must increase.

A child, an employee, a manager, a company director, a minister and a government agency can all cause harm. But they do not have the same resources, knowledge, choices or ability to prevent it. It would be an injustice to impose identical expectations on someone who was never given the relevant information and the person who deliberately withheld it.

Power has to earn confidence

Before we can meaningfully discuss the future of our economy, our education systems, our public institutions or the distribution of society's wealth, we must first examine the foundations upon which these systems operate. One of the greatest obstacles to meaningful social progress is not necessarily a lack of ideas, resources or human capability. It is our collective difficulty in establishing and maintaining trust between the people and the institutions responsible for governing them. Governments are entrusted with enormous responsibilities. Their decisions influence how we are educated, how we work, how our communities develop and what opportunities future generations inherit.

With such responsibility should come an equally significant obligation to demonstrate honesty, transparency and accountability. Yet political discussion too often becomes a competition between opposing narratives. Information may be selectively presented, legitimate concerns dismissed, promises exaggerated and uncomfortable evidence overlooked. Political success can become more important than publicly acknowledging mistakes. This does not mean that every politician is dishonest, nor that every disagreement is evidence of corruption. However, the potential for dishonesty, conflicts of interest and manipulation exists wherever power is concentrated. We cannot reasonably expect the public to maintain confidence in institutions simply because those institutions possess legal authority.

Trust should not be demanded by those who govern. It should be earned through their conduct and maintained through their accountability. This is one of the central foundations of the Century philosophy.

A shared purpose is not a licence to control

Throughout history, humanity has attempted to develop systems of government and economics that provide security, opportunity and prosperity for the people living under them. Socialism, capitalism, democracy and other political and economic structures have produced very different outcomes depending on their design, implementation, leadership and circumstances.

I believe there are valuable principles within socialism, particularly the idea that the resources, labour and prosperity of society should contribute towards the wellbeing of the people who collectively make that society possible. But one of the most common concerns surrounding socialist systems is the possibility of corruption, authoritarianism and excessive government control. People point to the Soviet Union or North Korea. These examples are not every possible form of socialism, but they demonstrate real dangers in concentrated power, the suppression of opposition and

institutions that cannot be held independently accountable. I believe these concerns deserve serious consideration rather than dismissal.

A system cannot be judged solely by what it promises to achieve. It must be judged by what happens when leaders become corrupt, institutions fail, laws are misinterpreted or future generations no longer share the intentions of its founders. A system that only works when everyone follows the rules is not a sufficiently protected system. People can be generous, honest and determined; they can also be self-interested, dishonest, exhausted or mistaken. No constitution or economic design can wish that difference away.

I therefore do not propose to eliminate corruption by insisting that everyone become good. I want corruption to become increasingly difficult to conceal. I want mistakes to be discovered early, concentrated power to be difficult to abuse and ordinary people to possess lawful and effective means to demand correction. The objective is not a government that never makes mistakes. It is a government that cannot easily escape responsibility for them.

I can see why people are wary when I describe a society organised around a national goal. A government with too much control over businesses, supplies, employment and information could become an authority few citizens are able to challenge. Historical political labels don't by themselves tell us what protections a modern proposal would contain. What matters is which powers actually exist, how they are limited and whether people can remove or challenge those exercising them.

My proposal isn't that every citizen should obey a single official view. I want a nation capable of deciding priorities collectively while preserving political opposition, independent courts, a free press, peaceful civic organisation, access to different sources of information and human-rights protections. A shared commitment to better infrastructure, social opportunity or environmental stewardship shouldn't require every individual to endorse the same tax policy or party. The power to implement a decision remains with identified officials whose records can be scrutinised. The public has a meaningful voice; it doesn't turn responsibility for unlawful actions into nobody's responsibility.

No immunity for the powerful

Democracy should mean more than voting every few years. People need enough reliable information to make meaningful choices, and they need ways to scrutinise decisions between elections. Governments should explain what problem a policy is meant to solve, what evidence supports it, what it is expected to cost, what alternatives were considered and how success will be assessed. When a policy fails, the public should be able to understand what happened and what will change.

Experts are essential where questions involve law, economics, engineering, health, climate, education, infrastructure or other specialised knowledge. But experts do not remove the need for democratic judgement. Technical analysis can estimate consequences and identify constraints; it cannot alone decide what society should value most or how burdens should be distributed. Public participation is not a replacement for expertise, and expertise is not a replacement for accountability.

Transparency should be meaningful rather than merely procedural. Publishing a large amount of technical information is not enough if ordinary people cannot understand the key decisions. Clear explanations, accessible data, independent evaluation, freedom of information, anti-corruption safeguards and scrutiny by independent institutions can help the public understand how power is used. There are legitimate limits involving privacy, security and sensitive information, but secrecy should not be the default simply because disclosure is inconvenient.

The standard I want is responsibility proportionate to control. The person who chooses a policy should explain the choice. The professional who presents evidence should disclose its limitations. The contractor spending public funds should answer for the contract. The citizen who participates in a scheme has obligations too, but they cannot be made the convenient scapegoat for decisions imposed from above.

This becomes more complicated when public authority is spread through private service providers. A government may pay a business to run a service and later insist that a failure was the company's fault. The company may insist that it was merely following the contract. People who depend on the service then find themselves trapped between institutions that have learned to avoid responsibility. I want arrangements in which the public can still identify who made the decision, who had the power to prevent harm and how a failure will be corrected.

But power also brings a duty to be honest about uncertainty. Demanding absolute certainty from decision-makers can reward the leader who lies confidently and punish the one willing to admit doubt. That is why political integrity must distinguish a falsehood from an honest mistake.

CHAPTER 03

Political Truthfulness and Honest Error

I get frustrated when politicians present themselves as infallible. But I do not want a system that makes political office impossible for anybody who is willing to change their mind. A prediction that fails is not automatically a lie. A promise can be sincere and still depend on circumstances that later change. Concealing contrary evidence, fabricating information or exploiting an office for private gain are different matters.

The distinction is more important than political loyalty. A party I support could distort evidence; one I oppose could revise a policy for a good reason. If the Century philosophy is meant to be judged through evidence rather than team allegiance, the same standard has to apply when it is inconvenient to my preferred argument.

The record matters more than the performance

I am frustrated by politicians who lie or use public office for personal advantage. But I also recognise that a complicated decision can produce failure without proving anybody deliberately intended the harm. An infrastructure agency may misjudge traffic, a funding reform may alter prices unexpectedly, and an economic policy may move costs onto another department. I don't want voters to abandon accountability; I want criticism tied more closely to what officials knew, what they disclosed, the alternatives they examined and how they responded after mistakes became apparent.

A citizen's insight and a technical expert's objection both deserve a fair hearing. 'No dumb ideas' means no automatic dismissal based on status. It doesn't mean a harmful policy should pass because people voted for it. Rights, evidence, proportionality and implementability remain part of the test. Democratic deliberation should enlarge the range of knowledge available to a decision-maker without dissolving the responsibility of that decision-maker.

People lie, but people also get things wrong honestly. Sometimes the evidence changes. Sometimes the original prediction was weak. I think we need to get better at telling those situations apart without letting anyone use 'it was a mistake' to escape responsibility for deliberate deception.

I see politicians make confident promises and sometimes present contested claims as though no reasonable person could disagree. I want stronger standards, but we have to be careful when deciding who judges whether a political statement is false. A mistake in a forecast isn't automatically a deliberate lie. An unpopular interpretation isn't automatically misinformation. A statement can omit context, use a misleading comparison or change meaning depending on the question being answered.

I would prefer more traceable claims: publication of underlying data, assumptions and dates; independent scrutiny; prompt corrections of factual errors; and clear labelling of projections as projections. Journalists, academics, political opponents and members of the public need freedom to question officials without state authorities becoming referees of every opinion. Where laws already prohibit particular deceptive conduct, the scope of those laws should be stated accurately rather than extended by vague implication.

The strongest objection is that deliberate disinformation can spread faster than careful correction and do substantial damage. I accept that. The answer must still protect lawful criticism and dissent. We should consider transparency duties, independent fact-checking, education and precise legal responses to specifically defined unlawful conduct before granting a government broad power to

punish speech it calls misleading. Any proposed enforcement power should specify evidence thresholds, procedural fairness, decision-maker independence and judicial review.

A politician changing a position after receiving new evidence isn't necessarily untrustworthy. The suspicious behaviour is concealing the change, distorting the evidence or punishing people who ask reasonable questions. In a living democracy, being correctable should be a strength.

Consider a promise that a public service will reduce waiting times after hiring more staff. The claim may be sincere and supported by a reasonable forecast. Yet demand can change, recruitment may be slower than expected, or the service may discover that buildings and equipment limit productivity. An honest public record would preserve the original forecast and explain which assumptions changed. A revised projection isn't automatically a lie; it becomes misleading if officials conceal contrary evidence or continue repeating the original number without qualification.

I would support publishing a promise register for major commitments, with the original terms, responsible agency, funding assumptions, milestones and results. Where the promise was met, evidence should show that. Where it was partly fulfilled or abandoned, the public should be told why. The register should distinguish a changed external circumstance from avoidable administrative failure. A new government shouldn't be free to quietly erase inconvenient records of its predecessor or its own decisions.

The strongest objection is that politics includes broad aspirations that can't all be measured like contracts. That is fair. A value statement such as 'improve opportunity' is different from a numerical construction commitment. Public accountability becomes more effective when leaders distinguish aspiration, policy goal, funded commitment and measurable prediction when making the promise in the first place.

Evidence is not a declaration of political truth

This does not mean that every government decision has one objectively correct answer. Evidence can tell us what is happening, what outcomes are likely and what consequences different choices may produce. It cannot independently settle every moral question or determine which competing social priorities deserve the greatest weight. Those decisions also require public values, democratic judgment and respect for fundamental rights. Furthermore, evidence itself must remain open to scrutiny. Research can be incomplete, assumptions can be mistaken and credible experts may reasonably disagree. The objective is not to establish a government that declares what is true and demands public acceptance.

The objective is to establish a government that must demonstrate why its claims and decisions deserve public confidence. This requires accessible policy explanations, transparent financial information, independent scrutiny and clear distinctions between established facts, reasonable predictions and political opinions. It also requires procedures for distinguishing honest mistakes from negligence, deliberate misrepresentation and corruption. A politician should not automatically face punishment for making a prediction that later proves incorrect. However, knowingly falsifying evidence, concealing material conflicts of interest or engaging in corruption should be subject to meaningful investigation and appropriate legal consequences. Political accountability must itself be fair, independent and protected against misuse.

The same standards must apply regardless of political affiliation. Only then can accountability become a genuine democratic safeguard rather than another weapon of political competition.

I would investigate a public record of significant commitments that preserves the original wording, evidence, assumptions, estimated costs and review dates. If a government later claims the original

conditions no longer hold, the record should show why. That is not a criminal prosecution of every failed promise. It is a way of distinguishing honest correction from convenient revisionism.

The difficult question is who gets to investigate. If the governing party alone decides which statements are false, accountability can become censorship. If an opposing party decides, the process can become retaliation. Independent expertise, public access to evidence, fair investigative procedures and proportionate remedies are needed, but each can be corrupted or misused. A claim should be open to rebuttal; an accusation should not become a conviction merely because it is politically popular.

I would rather know that a government investigated a failed project and admitted the lessons than watch both sides trade accusations they cannot substantiate. Trust should not require perfect leaders. It should require leaders who cannot easily bury the record of what they did. For that to work, the public needs a practical way to follow decisions before, during and after they are made.

CHAPTER 04

Public Reasoning and Informed Participation

The image that keeps returning to me is an ordinary person confronting an ordinary problem: a dangerous footpath, a delayed appointment, a bus route that leaves them stranded. From the outside, the official decision may look simple. From inside the agency, there may be legal, engineering, staffing and budgetary constraints. The public cannot weigh a justification it is never allowed to see.

I do not believe every citizen should need a degree in economics or public administration to ask why something happened. Nor do I believe government should replace technical evidence with whichever explanation sounds most popular. The challenge is to make public reasoning understandable without stripping it of its detail.

Show how a decision was reached

When somebody in government says a change is necessary, I want to see the reasoning. Not a polished speech, but the problem, evidence, options, costs and risks. If it's as sensible as they say, explaining it properly should help.

I have little patience for political arguments that demand loyalty while keeping the evidence hidden. If a government says a project is necessary, I want to know the problem it addresses, what alternatives were assessed, what the expected costs are, what could go wrong and why the preferred option was chosen. If a leader changes position, I want the change explained rather than disguised. Governments should be able to say, 'We were wrong about this assumption; here is what we now know.' That would build more trust than pretending their first announcement was perfect.

For substantial decisions, I would support a standardised public reasoning record. It could include the purpose of the proposal, the responsible minister and agency, the evidence used, material assumptions, legal powers, rights effects, spending estimates, rejected alternatives, consultations, conflicts and review date. A plain-language explanation should accompany the technical material without hiding inconvenient facts from readers who want the full detail.

An example might be a local health service changing appointment arrangements. People could read why the change is proposed, what waiting-time data indicate, which groups may face transport difficulties, how staff workload was considered and how the service intends to measure whether patients receive better care. If an option was rejected because of cost, the decision should say so. If funding was unavailable, it should identify that constraint rather than blame an unrelated group. Where an individual is affected by an adverse administrative decision, their actual statutory review rights must be respected.

Not everything can be released to everyone at once. Personal medical records, witnesses, security-sensitive details and legally protected information create legitimate limitations. But an exception should have a legal basis, a proportionate scope and an independent route to challenge improper withholding where the law permits it. Blanket secrecy isn't a substitute for the inconvenience of being scrutinised. Equally, absolute disclosure can harm people who have a right to privacy.

Imagine a council deciding whether to fund repair of a footpath used by older residents and schoolchildren. A proper public statement would identify the condition reported, relevant inspection findings and the risk assessment. It would explain whether ordinary maintenance, partial replacement, comprehensive reconstruction or an alternative accessible route was considered. The

approximate costs and risks of each feasible option could be described in a short table, with links to technical material where disclosure is appropriate.

The final decision might be to perform temporary safety works and schedule complete renewal later. Residents may still be disappointed, particularly if the existing path remains inconvenient. But a documented explanation would show which constraints are real, what future change is promised and how someone could report worsening conditions. It would also identify a responsible authority instead of leaving the citizen to navigate between council, contractors and state agencies.

A project of this size shouldn't require hundreds of pages of analysis, but it does require more than saying 'funding priorities' as though that phrase explains everything. Transparent decisions don't mean that everyone will agree. They make disagreement more useful by showing where the evidence, values and budget trade-offs actually sit.

Follow a law while it changes

One idea I keep coming back to is a public platform where people can see how proposed laws develop. Imagine opening a website and following a draft: what the original proposal said, who put forward an amendment, what words changed and why the responsible office says the change is necessary. You might be a lawyer, a journalist, a researcher, a business owner or just someone whose everyday life could be affected. You shouldn't need to belong to a political party to compare the versions.

I am not suggesting that citizens directly edit the official law or that every private conversation in an agency should be livestreamed. Parliament still has the job of making laws, and authorised drafting has to remain accurate. I want a more transparent record of decisions made in the exercise of public authority: early public explanation of major proposals where practicable, published versions, stated objectives, impact assessments and a clear history of changes. If an official says an amendment helps families or saves money, people can test that claim against what it actually does.

Victoria already publishes bills and legislation through Parliament and its legislation website. My proposed development is earlier and more consistent visibility of the drafting process, practical consequences and the reasons for changes; it must not be misrepresented as a claim that Victoria has no public bills or consultation arrangements today.

Not everybody can read hundreds of pages. But somebody will, and we should let the people who understand the detail help explain it to others. This returns to what I mean about education: if we teach students how to investigate evidence, government has to make usable public information available. A summary is helpful, but it shouldn't replace the real document for people who want to check it.

Consultation must leave a trace

A consultation isn't meaningful if people spend hours explaining a problem and never hear another word. Even if the government rejects the suggestion, why not tell them why? People might learn something about the limits, or the government might discover its explanation doesn't stack up.

A consultation can appear open while decisions are effectively complete. People submit carefully argued ideas, receive an automatic acknowledgement and never find out whether anything changed. That process may satisfy a legal minimum while teaching the public that participation is theatre. I want decision-makers to explain what questions were genuinely open, what constraints already existed and how submissions were considered.

A useful consultation report could group recurring concerns without erasing minority perspectives, identify which recommendations were accepted or rejected and give reasons. Experts may establish

that one proposal can't safely work; the authority should say what evidence supports that conclusion. Residents may reveal a practical access problem not in the model; the authority should explain whether it changed the plan. A response need not be a personal letter to every contributor to be meaningful, but it must make the path from contribution to decision visible.

People also have unequal resources. A large developer or lobby group can hire advisers and participate repeatedly; a carer or small business owner may struggle to respond once. Fair participation requires transparent lobbying records and practical access for people who can't afford professional representation. This doesn't mean ignoring expertise or equating a technical report with an unsupported claim. It means being honest about who had the opportunity to influence the process.

A fair objection is that consultation can be manipulated by organised campaigns or delay decisions indefinitely. Clear deadlines, disclosed interests, proportionate evidence requirements and genuine decision authority can reduce those risks. Listening isn't the same as surrendering the responsibility to decide.

I keep coming back to the phrase 'there are no dumb ideas'. I mean it as an invitation to contribute, not as a claim that every suggestion is equally informed, affordable or safe. A young person may notice a problem that a department has overlooked. Someone in a trade may identify a practical obstruction that never appeared in a policy briefing. A nurse, carer, engineer, business owner or resident may each understand a different consequence of the same decision. If we mock people before hearing them, we may lose valuable information.

But the invitation to speak isn't a promise that every idea will become law. I want democratic participation followed by public reasoning. Allow somebody to explain the concern and the goal; ask what evidence supports the remedy; bring in specialists and the people who would live with it; compare alternatives; and give understandable reasons when an idea can't proceed. A person can be respected even when their suggestion is rejected. That distinction protects democracy from becoming either an exclusive professional club or a contest won by the loudest voice.

A public platform showing amendments, reasons and competing interpretations would not give the public the ability to edit enacted law. It would help people see the gap between what a proposal promises and what its actual words do. Existing parliamentary websites already provide bills and legislation. The question is what can be improved in the early reasoning, the visibility of changes and the explanation of what was rejected.

This connects directly with civic education. People cannot be expected to participate in decisions when the evidence is deliberately inaccessible; yet publishing a pile of technical documents does not magically equip people to understand them. A usable public record needs clear explanations, links to the underlying material and enough time for considered response. The same information should not become a tool for shaming people who lack specialist training.

I also want to ask how public feedback would change a decision. A consultation should describe themes raised, meaningful differences in evidence and whose views were not reached. It should show changes made in response and explain important suggestions rejected. It cannot promise unanimous satisfaction. It can promise that silence, dismissal and confusion will not be mistaken for consent.

CHAPTER 05

Independent Oversight and Its Own Oversight

When I say corruption should be harder to hide, the easy answer is to propose an independent watchdog. The harder question is how to prevent that watchdog from becoming another place where power accumulates without consequences. An institution cannot become trustworthy merely by putting the word independent in its name.

Australia already has auditors, parliamentary committees, courts, ombudsmen, electoral bodies and anti-corruption agencies with different responsibilities and jurisdictions. I want to understand those institutions before proposing an entirely new layer. Where a remedy already exists but is too difficult to reach, the first reform might be access and funding rather than another office.

Independence is a set of obligations

If we create an independent watchdog, who watches the watchdog? Calling something independent doesn't magically make it trustworthy. It needs a way to be challenged, rules about conflicts of interest and enough freedom to investigate the people who appoint it.

When people suggest solving corruption by creating another powerful authority, I immediately want to ask who holds that authority accountable. An oversight body can misuse information, develop its own political interests, suffer poor leadership or become captive to the institutions it monitors. Making a body 'independent' in a press release won't remove these risks.

Australia already has substantial integrity architecture. At the Commonwealth level, the National Anti- Corruption Commission examines serious or systemic corruption involving the Australian Government public sector; it isn't a general tribunal for every unfair administrative decision or a corruption agency for Victorian councils. Victoria has oversight institutions with distinct legal functions, including IBAC, the Victorian Ombudsman and Integrity Oversight Victoria. I want the manifesto to acknowledge that work before asking which powers, reporting routes or safeguards should be improved.

A proper design would consider appointment procedures, fixed and protected terms, funding stability, investigator powers, disclosure obligations, whistleblower safeguards, fair treatment of investigated people, access to courts and independent review of the oversight body itself. Funding independence is about protection from improper influence, not the simplistic claim that private funding is automatically cleaner than public money. Donors can influence just as governments can.

Suppose an agency receives a complaint about corruption. The complainant deserves a clear explanation of where to report and what to expect, but not every allegation can be proven or must become public. The accused deserves procedural fairness and protection from unsupported conclusions. Investigators need appropriate confidentiality to protect evidence and witnesses. A sensible framework balances these interests and sets out what the public may later learn, including institutional improvements recommended after an investigation.

The strongest objection to new oversight is that it can duplicate existing agencies and drain resources. I agree this is a serious risk. Reform should begin by mapping present jurisdictions and gaps, then ask whether better coordination, access, funding or statutory powers are needed. Establishing a new institution should be the last step of a demonstrated design problem, not a symbol of political virtue.

Suppose an integrity body improperly handles confidential information or makes an unsupported public allegation. It can't claim that its independence prevents scrutiny, because independence from ministers isn't independence from law. The affected person needs a lawful route to complain and seek an appropriate remedy. An auditor or specialist oversight institution may need access to information the general public can't see. The body itself should face reporting and procedural obligations suited to its powers.

This doesn't mean every investigation should be public. Premature disclosure can harm witnesses, reputations and the integrity of evidence. The balance requires a clear statutory purpose, transparent oversight of coercive powers, protections for those under investigation and methods of communicating conclusions without making allegations sound like proven findings. When a case can't be disclosed, the limits and reasons should still be reviewed by someone with appropriate authority.

I would test proposals for new integrity agencies against these questions before suggesting new offices and titles. If an existing institution can be improved through better funding, accessible complaints or clearer referral arrangements, that may be more economical and less confusing for citizens. The purpose is independent accountability, not institution-building for its own sake.

Who can challenge secrecy?

This question really interests me. Suppose you think an agency has improperly hidden something, but you can't see it to prove your suspicion. How can you put forward an intelligent challenge? One option worth investigating is independent review by people lawfully authorised to examine the withheld text. The person challenging the decision could explain their concerns, and the reviewer could consider the complete material without automatically disclosing it to the world.

This isn't starting from nothing. In Victoria, freedom-of-information decisions can already be reviewed through the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner in qualifying circumstances, with further avenues involving the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Existing legal exceptions and procedural limits matter. I want to ask where those avenues can be made more understandable, accessible and effective, and whether appropriate early legislative drafting decisions need additional public review.

I also wonder whether specialist independent legal representation could help someone argue against secrecy where the applicant cannot personally examine protected material. Such a lawyer would need clear authority, confidentiality obligations, independence and public-interest funding rules. They couldn't simply reveal everything to the applicant. There is a genuine trade-off between an effective challenge and protecting somebody else's life or privacy.

I've considered a citizen panel or jury-style element because I don't want accountability to become a private conversation between departments and professionals. But randomly selecting people does not magically make them impartial or qualified. Some questions require judicial powers, technical evidence, security clearance or specialist law. A citizen panel might improve trust or challenge institutional habits in some circumstances; in others a court or tribunal might be far more appropriate. The structure should follow the problem, not the other way around.

An independent body also needs review. Who appoints its members? Who can dismiss them? Can it demand documents? Who audits its funding? What happens if it becomes captured by a government or a powerful business? 'Independent' is not a magic word. I don't want to replace politicians who are difficult to question with another institution that nobody is allowed to question.

Government and independent institutions can cooperate without having identical responsibilities. Elected representatives propose, debate and pass laws through the formal constitutional process.

Public servants deliver authorised services. Independent reviewers examine whether defined powers were used lawfully, honestly and fairly. Courts and tribunals determine disputes within their authority. Citizens, journalists and experts help identify facts or consequences the formal institutions may have missed.

Corruption is not prevented by a title

Making corruption illegal is not the same as making it difficult to commit. An official can act inside the technical words of a law while quietly rewarding friends, donors or organisations in which they hold interests. Public officials can condemn corruption while weakening investigators. Problems can emerge through undisclosed conflicts, opaque procurement, patronage, lobbying, secrecy and a culture that normalises behaviour that should have been challenged.

My proposal is for stronger, usable public records of expenditure; declared political donations, lobbying and relevant financial interests; independently reviewable procurement; and documented objectives, budgets, rejected alternatives and performance measures for major public projects. If a project fails or greatly exceeds its budget, independent investigation should be able to ask why. Did circumstances change? Was the original estimate unreasonable? Were workers or officials negligent? Did someone deliberately conceal or manipulate information?

Not every failure is corruption. Governments should be allowed to make hard decisions and reasonable mistakes. If we criminalise every unsuccessful policy, people may simply stop trying anything that carries risk. But repeated failures, unexplained financial arrangements and deliberate concealment should lead to proper investigation, with evidence and fair proceedings.

Investigators should not possess unchecked power just because they investigate others. Anti-corruption agencies, auditors, courts and electoral bodies require legal limits, accessible complaints, transparent appointments, separation of duties and review of their conduct. When corruption is proven through fair proceedings, proportionate consequences may include removal, recovery of public money and criminal prosecution where justified. Wealth or rank should not buy a special exemption from ordinary law.

Appointment, security of tenure, funding, conflict disclosure, powers to obtain evidence, procedural fairness and review all matter. If a government can dismiss an investigator for making an inconvenient finding, the office may not be meaningfully independent. But if investigators can search, accuse or publish without effective legal limits, independence can itself become an abuse of authority. An allegation must be examined; it must not automatically be believed.

Different kinds of access also need different rules. The public should ordinarily be able to inspect how money is spent and what reasoning supports a policy. Investigators may sometimes need controlled access to sensitive documents that ordinary citizens cannot safely receive. That still requires lawful oversight of the decision to withhold information, rather than secrecy becoming a self-justifying label.

I am interested in representative citizen participation in appropriate review processes, but I do not think randomly selected people can automatically decide complex legal or classified questions without guidance, safeguards or appeal. The answer may involve improving existing institutions, adding independent advice or designing a tightly limited new process. Its name and powers should follow evidence of a gap, not precede it.

CHAPTER 06

Protecting Civil Dissent and Journalism

An accountable government must be able to hear things it hates hearing. I cannot defend the right to challenge my own proposals while giving a future Century government the power to punish people for rejecting them. A political philosophy becomes dangerous when its idea of social unity requires compulsory agreement.

The freedom discussed in Volume III becomes practical here. Peaceful opposition, investigative journalism, unions, community organisations, academic criticism and ordinary citizens asking uncomfortable questions all help expose mistakes. They do not need to be correct every time in order to have the right to speak. The ability to challenge authority matters especially when a critic has little influence or popularity.

A shared purpose without shared obedience

When I say I want people at a similar level of information, I mean that basic public evidence shouldn't be available only to insiders. I don't imagine equal professional expertise or identical interpretations. Citizens should be able to inspect sources, obtain accessible summaries and hear serious opposing explanations. That makes disagreement more informed, not necessarily less frequent.

I also hope this could improve resistance to foreign influence. There is a real public concern about coordinated attempts to deceive or manipulate communities, but transparency alone can't eliminate them. Independent research, media literacy, disclosure of influence, trustworthy election administration and the ability to challenge official narratives are important. The Australian Government's countering-foreign-interference guidance discusses deliberate disinformation as one means of manipulation. The same scrutiny should apply to domestic sources, powerful corporations and government statements. If an authority alone decides what constitutes truth and suppresses dissent, a policy intended to protect democracy could undermine it.

Education may be the most important long-term investment in this framework. Children should learn how government, law, economics, budgets, rights, public institutions and scientific evidence work, as well as how to distinguish a factual claim from an opinion, misleading information from an honest mistake, and a reliable explanation from a convenient slogan. Practical democratic exercises could include comparing public budgets, debating infrastructure proposals and discovering why a proposal that sounds good may produce unintended costs.

I do not want civic education to become political indoctrination. That would destroy the very independence I am trying to develop. Curriculum and educators need appropriate professional independence, multiple perspectives and opportunities for challenge. A student should be allowed to question capitalism, socialism, democracy, elected leaders and this manifesto. They should even be free to conclude that much of my approach is wrong, provided the reasons and evidence can be examined.

Secrecy must be justified, not romanticised

I don't think all government information belongs on an open website. Take the confidential location of a family violence refuge. Revealing it could put someone in danger. Personal health records, witness identities and genuine security operations need careful protection. My argument is about hiding the substance of public authority, not abolishing privacy.

Suppose a proposed law creates new investigative powers. The public should normally be able to understand the powers, thresholds, offences, penalties, oversight and appeal routes. If an attached document reveals an ongoing covert operation, it may be reasonable to redact those operational details. But why would that justify hiding the entire law? A number, eligibility threshold or implementation date may look like a tiny detail yet change people's lives. We shouldn't conceal the substance of a public rule by calling it a technical secret.

Any withholding rule ought to have a clear legal basis, identified risk, smallest workable restriction, accountable authorisation and a way to revisit the restriction later. Something can be sensitive now without needing to remain classified forever. That doesn't mean automatic publication after an arbitrary deadline: the justification must still be tested when circumstances change.

I want government transparency to be the standard, not an optional promise. But I do not mean that every piece of government information should be posted publicly. Military operations, intelligence sources, critical infrastructure weaknesses, sensitive diplomacy and some security measures require confidentiality. Ordinary people also have rights to personal privacy; medical information, financial details and private circumstances must not become public property merely because an institution holds them.

The distinction I want is between public access and independent, secure access. Non-sensitive spending, contracts, policy evidence and reasoning should ordinarily be open to public examination. Genuine security and privacy risks may justify withholding information. But the officials whose conduct is in question should not be the final and only judges of what remains secret.

Authorised inspectors, auditors, courts or other oversight bodies should be able to inspect sensitive records in secure conditions, with appropriate confidentiality safeguards. Classification decisions should be documented, independently reviewable, as narrow as reasonable and reconsidered when secrecy is no longer necessary. A government should not be able to escape accountability by calling an embarrassing decision a national secret. Nor should oversight endanger the very people and operations it exists to protect.

The public does not need to know every classified operational detail to know that those details are subject to enforceable law, trusted oversight and consequences for abuse. We need to examine the actual powers, costs and practical limitations of whichever oversight arrangement Australia would use rather than promise impossible total transparency.

There is an important difference between protecting confidential information and suppressing criticism. A journalist publishing evidence of wrongdoing serves a different function from somebody recklessly exposing a family's private address or information that could put a witness in danger. Genuine security and privacy risks may justify narrow safeguards. They should not become a blanket shield for political embarrassment, waste or improper decisions.

Whistleblowing protections matter because an employee may be the first person to notice a serious problem and the least able to afford retaliation. But confidentiality and procedural fairness still matter. A public accusation may cause irreparable harm when it is wrong. I want protected avenues to report concerns, fair investigation and independent review, not a public system in which the allegation itself decides guilt.

There is also a danger in calling every unpleasant political campaign manipulation. Democracies contain genuine disagreement and stubborn convictions. Foreign interference, coordinated deception and secretly funded influence can be legitimate subjects of investigation, but no ministry should acquire a monopoly on truth. The public needs diverse sources of information and the freedom to test official explanations.

Ultimately, peaceful disagreement is not the enemy of a national purpose. It is one of the protections that might keep that purpose from being turned against the people it was meant to serve.

CHAPTER 07

Constitutional Limits and Due Process

I want democratic governments to have enough authority to govern. But the popular support of a government is not proof that every action it takes is permissible. If basic protections can be discarded whenever a majority is angry, they are not protections for those who most need them.

The previous volume explored the relationship between rights, autonomy and competing claims. Here I want to ask who may decide to limit those rights and what must happen before that decision becomes enforceable. A constitutional safeguard, an ordinary statute, a departmental policy and an officer's discretion are not interchangeable things.

Rules for the people who make rules

Regulation can protect people from powerful companies and institutions. It can also become a maze nobody understands. I'd like rules written so the people affected have a real chance of knowing what is expected of them and how they can challenge a bad decision.

I argue for stronger accountability for government and businesses when their power threatens the public. That doesn't mean handing regulators unlimited access, unrestricted surveillance or the power to enforce vague notions of good behaviour. Institutions created to protect people can also harm them if their powers are too broad, their records are wrong or their decisions can't be challenged.

Every proposed power should identify the concrete harm it addresses, the legal threshold for its use, the level of evidence required, notice where appropriate, privacy safeguards, independent monitoring and remedies for error. The restriction should be proportionate. A government may need genuine investigative authority to address serious corruption or violence; it shouldn't use that justification to collect unrelated information indefinitely or suppress criticism from people it dislikes.

The Victorian Charter is one example of an existing rights framework that requires public authorities to consider and act compatibly with protected rights subject to its legal provisions and justified limitations. Its existence doesn't mean every person has an unrestricted cause of action for every social complaint, and it doesn't remove the need to examine the specific law that grants a regulator power. The manifesto should build upon rights standards rather than claiming new ideas are beyond those protections.

In practice, a citizen should know who made a decision, what evidence they relied on, how to request correction and which independent body can review it, if a review right exists. An employer or business should likewise know what compliance requires and shouldn't be punished for rules that were never reasonably communicated. Proper enforcement and fair process reinforce each other.

A resident who receives an adverse administrative decision may not know whether the appropriate route is an internal review, a tribunal, an ombudsman, a court or a specialist regulator. Different remedies exist for different legal decisions; a general complaint isn't automatically a legal appeal. I would like governments to explain the available routes in ordinary language and give accurate information about deadlines, evidence and assistance where the law permits it.

This is an especially important part of substantive fairness. People with money can often obtain professional advice quickly. Those without resources may miss the chance to challenge a mistake

even when the law technically gives them a remedy. Improving explanations, accessibility and referral accuracy might make rights more useful without changing the outcome of every case. It would also make it easier for agencies to recognise repeated administrative errors.

They might even be partly right about the expense, delay or frustration created by oversight in a particular case. That is what makes the argument dangerous. A genuine administrative problem can become an excuse for removing the institution that would expose misconduct. For this reason, safeguards must be capable of working against the government itself.

I want strong legal protection for competitive elections, peaceful protest, expression and association, independent courts, due process, protection from arbitrary detention, independent electoral administration, lawful investigative journalism, access to review and the rights of minorities against oppressive majorities. Public rights cannot depend solely on a leader's goodwill or political popularity. Oversight institutions also need transparent appointment processes, conflict rules, secure but accountable funding and independent review of their own actions.

Amending fundamental protections should require serious public scrutiny and appropriate democratic and constitutional procedures. But no text can be treated as so sacred that generations living under new conditions are forbidden to improve it. We need rules demanding enough to resist opportunistic dismantling while permitting legitimate peaceful change. Exactly how those rights would be entrenched in Australia remains a constitutional question requiring professional legal work and democratic debate.

Correction should remain peaceful and usable

History demonstrates what can happen when people lose faith that they can change a government lawfully. I want democratic institutions strong enough to resolve abuses before anger turns into violence. The United States has a Second Amendment concerning the right to keep and bear arms, and it is discussed in arguments about defence against tyranny. I am not proposing that an Australian democracy should depend on an armed population as its main defence against authoritarianism.

My preference is meaningful democratic authority, genuinely independent courts and practical remedies. If a government acts unlawfully, its actions should be challengeable. If officials engage in corruption, independent investigators should be able to investigate. If a law harms people or becomes outdated, people should be able to campaign for change without intimidation. If representatives lose the public's confidence, genuine elections should allow them to be replaced.

These mechanisms have to be affordable and usable. It is not enough to say an ordinary person can sue a government if they cannot access legal information, afford advice or enforce the result. Courts need practical authority to enforce judgments, and governments must not be free to ignore inconvenient decisions. Equally, legal challenges need fair procedures and reasonable limits, because endless process can deny timely justice too.

Peaceful correction should be seen as an essential democratic responsibility, not an attack on government legitimacy. The precise design of a constitutional safeguard requires more than a comparison with the American Second Amendment. Australia's institutions, federal arrangements, rights protections and legal history must be examined on their own terms.

The values I want examined include regular competitive elections, meaningful legislative scrutiny, judicial independence, freedom from arbitrary detention, due process, identifiable powers and avenues to contest unlawful decisions. These are not invitations to abolish Australia's existing constitutional order. They are criteria against which any proposed reform, including one inspired by this manifesto, ought to be judged.

A court cannot deliver justice to someone who has no realistic ability to approach it. A review mechanism may exist on paper while its forms, time limits, language or costs make it inaccessible. That does not mean every disappointed applicant is entitled to win an appeal; it means the process should provide intelligible reasons and meaningful opportunities to correct error where law permits.

I can already see how this principle will become difficult in the later justice discussionII. A government may respond to crime by offering police broader powers, harsher sanctions or restrictions on movement. Some measures may protect people facing real danger. But the fear of danger cannot by itself settle the necessity of every proposed power, particularly where mistakes carry irreversible consequences. Powers need legal thresholds, evidence, proportionate limits, records and independent review.

I have not resolved the tension between inherent dignity and the death penalty raised in earlier volumes. Nothing in this chapter should be read as quietly settling it. Quite the opposite: the more severe a state's power over a human life, the stronger the requirement to confront error, abuse, unequal treatment and the very possibility that some powers should never be exercised. The fact that a position appears in an earlier draft cannot exempt it from that scrutiny.

CHAPTER 08

Intergenerational Policy and Public Memory

Governments change. Ministers leave office. Public priorities shift, evidence improves and communities inherit decisions they never had an opportunity to make. A road, energy network or housing project may outlast several election cycles. Yet the explanation for why it was built can disappear long before its consequences do.

In Volume I I argued that a project designed for future generations should not measure success only by its immediate popularity. The same is true of public institutions. They need a memory strong enough to show what was promised, what was known at the time, which warnings were rejected and what was learned afterward. Otherwise every generation is made to rediscover the same mistakes.

Reforms must survive elections without becoming untouchable

Imagine a resident complains that traffic from a temporary road closure is putting pedestrians at risk outside a local school. The agency acknowledges the concern and checks the relevant evidence: traffic counts, crash risks, school arrival times and available alternatives. It considers traffic management and enforcement options, asks affected people about practical problems and publishes a decision with reasons. It explains who is responsible, the cost, the review date and how the resident can raise fresh evidence. After implementation, it measures whether crossing safety and traffic movement actually improved.

The resident may be disappointed if their preferred solution is rejected, but a reasoned explanation respects their contribution. Officials may discover an oversight and change the plan; admitting that should be treated as a success of accountable government rather than a political defeat. If the process can't show meaningful benefits relative to its administrative burden, we should revise that process too.

When disagreement occurs, first identify its type. Is it a factual dispute that could be clarified with better evidence? Is it a causal dispute about what produces an outcome? Is it a disagreement about values, such as how to weigh freedom against security? Is it a practical dispute about cost, timing or implementation? Or is it a mix of all four? Different disagreements need different methods. More statistics will not necessarily resolve a value conflict, while moral certainty cannot replace evidence about whether a programme works.

Uncertainty should be made visible. A useful policy analysis can distinguish what is well established, what is probable, what is plausible but unproven, and what is currently unknown. It should identify assumptions and explain which new information would change the conclusion. This makes it possible to act without pretending to possess certainty that does not exist.

Some decisions cannot wait until all the evidence is available. In those cases, decision-makers should consider the severity and reversibility of potential harms, the cost of delay, the ability to monitor results and whether a smaller or more flexible intervention is possible. When uncertainty is high and the consequences of failure are severe, caution and safeguards may be especially important. When delay itself creates serious harm, waiting for perfect evidence can also be irresponsible.

A useful record of changing beliefs would include the original claim, the reasons for it, the strongest counterarguments, the evidence that would change the view, the decision made at the time and any later revision. That record makes learning visible and reduces the temptation to rewrite earlier

uncertainty as if the answer had always been obvious. Changing one's mind in response to better reasoning is not weakness; refusing to change despite decisive evidence is not strength.

Keep the reason beside the law

Laws are made for reasons. Some stop harm, protect liberty, settle conflicts or make collective life predictable. But the existence of a law does not mean it will remain right for every time and circumstance. Technology changes, costs shift, social expectations develop and evidence may reveal harms nobody understood when the law was first passed.

I would like major reforms to record their purpose, the evidence behind them, their expected benefits, legal and rights effects, the alternatives considered and a date or trigger for review. A review should ask whether the law continues to work, whether the benefits justify the costs, who is disproportionately affected and whether a less harmful alternative now exists.

Fairness cannot be reduced to saving money. A scheme may be inexpensive yet unjust, or expensive yet necessary to protect people from serious harm. Evidence helps us see what happens, but ethical judgement determines which consequences are acceptable. That is why I want the Century approach to combine facts, rights, democracy and accountability rather than turn one value into an absolute shortcut.

This is a concern I want future writers to understand. People can quote a paragraph without its surrounding meaning. A future government could take words like collective responsibility, efficiency, contribution or fairness and use them to justify forced sameness, discrimination or excessive power. It could claim to speak for me while doing something I would have strongly questioned. Even if the original intentions were good, those intentions would not excuse a harmful implementation.

For example, encouraging meaningful contribution should never be carelessly rewritten into a claim that every person who cannot work deserves to suffer. We must distinguish barriers and incapacity from deliberate refusal after fair opportunities. A proposal to limit concentrated wealth should not become a licence for arbitrary property seizure or punishment of political opponents. A system proposed in the public interest must still let the public reject it.

Significant proposals should therefore record their historical setting, ethical reasons, intended limits, foreseeable dangers and unresolved issues. Preserve changes in viewpoint; do not quietly erase the earlier wording and pretend I always agreed with the latest version. Future readers should be able to examine the evidence that prompted a revision and reach their own conclusion. No editor, politician or institution should claim that their interpretation is immune to challenge simply because they call it the authentic manifesto.

The ability to revise is part of responsibility

Society is constantly changing. Technology develops, scientific understanding improves, economic conditions shift and new generations face challenges that previous generations could not have anticipated. Our laws and institutions must therefore remain capable of adapting. A law that was considered appropriate fifty years ago may no longer adequately serve the population today. Equally, a recently introduced policy may produce unintended consequences that only become apparent after implementation. Neither tradition nor novelty should, by itself, determine whether a law deserves to remain in place. Instead, legislation should be open to reasonable examination using evidence, practical experience, ethical consideration and democratic participation.

Where a policy fails to achieve its stated objectives, those failures should be investigated. Where evidence demonstrates that a law causes unnecessary harm, reasonable alternatives should be

considered. Where a system performs effectively, its successes should be studied so that useful lessons can be preserved and applied elsewhere.

A published record should not become an excuse for storing every personal detail forever. Good public memory needs careful distinctions between a record of governmental reasoning, confidential information about individuals and genuinely security-sensitive documents. Data retention carries risks as well as benefits; not every piece of information needs perpetual public exposure.

I would like future decision-makers to be able to see what a project originally intended and whether its assumptions held. They should also see dissenting arguments fairly, including objections that turned out to be misplaced. If the record preserves only the winning side, it becomes a story about victory rather than a record from which people can learn.

There is another danger: a future government may quote a sentence about responsibility, efficiency or national progress while leaving out its human-rights limits. We should preserve dated changes and the context of arguments so that later generations can examine what was meant, what was contested and what must not be treated as settled. The Century Manifesto itself deserves exactly that treatment.

CHAPTER 09

Corporate and Private Influence

Government is not the only source of power. A business can control a workplace, a contractor can determine access to a service, a media company can shape the questions people hear, and a donor may gain access that ordinary citizens cannot obtain. If I ask for public authorities to be transparent but ignore the influence of private institutions, I have only examined half the problem.

I do not regard private enterprise or financial success as proof of wrongdoing. Businesses can create jobs, develop useful technologies, fund investment and provide services. But the fact that somebody owns an organisation does not make its effects on employees, customers, public resources or democratic decisions irrelevant.

Public rules must not become private favours

I support private enterprise, competition, useful innovation and the ability to build wealth. I am not opposed to money as a means of exchange. My concern begins where economic power becomes a way to escape accountability. A corporation may shape the choices available to consumers, influence working conditions, affect supply chains or use lobbying to change public policy in its favour. A profitable outcome for the firm doesn't automatically mean the wider consequences are fair.

Similarly, a government can use procurement, regulation and subsidies in ways that unfairly privilege favoured firms. Transparent conflicts rules, open competition where suitable, honest contract evaluation and scrutiny of undue influence matter to both sectors. Not every large profit is proof of abuse, and no profit threshold alone can reveal whether a market is competitive or a worker is treated fairly. We need to distinguish turnover, profit, risk, legitimate returns and concentrated market power before proposing remedies.

My question about billion-dollar profits is therefore not whether successful businesses should be punished simply for earning money. It is whether extraordinary returns come from innovation and value or from arrangements that permit unfair extraction, exploitation or political influence. Some cases may justify stronger regulation or public return. Others may reflect genuine risk and useful innovation. The evidence should decide which, and remedies should be proportionate.

The strongest objection is that excessive or unpredictable controls can suppress investment and harm workers or consumers. I accept that. A responsible reform would identify specific harmful conduct and evaluate the likely effect of remedies on employment, competition, prices and service quality. Accountability is meant to make markets fairer and more useful, not to replace economic analysis with resentment.

A cooperative shop, a public recycling service or a government-supported manufacturer won't become honest and efficient just because its mission sounds better than profit. It still needs accounts people can inspect, fair procurement, safeguards against favouritism and a way for workers and customers to challenge a bad decision. Otherwise we've simply moved power into a different organisation and hoped nobody abuses it.

I want to see greater public benefit from our country's resources, but the same standard has to apply whether an enterprise belongs to government, its workers, a community cooperative or a private owner. Who controls the decisions? Who pays when it fails? Who can see the books? Who can question it without losing their job or access to a service?

A government may contract a private organisation to provide cleaning, transport, community care or digital services. The service can remain important to the public even when its employees aren't ordinary public servants. This creates a risk of blurred responsibility: the contractor blames the department for the contract, while the department points to the contractor's operational choices. The citizen sees only a failure that nobody claims responsibility for fixing.

Public procurement should make quality and accountability expectations clear. Contracts may need proportionate reporting, complaint handling, privacy protections, worker safety obligations and meaningful consequences for nonperformance. Departments should assess not merely whether the contractor submitted required reports but whether people received the service promised. Smaller suppliers shouldn't face incomprehensible compliance obligations that add little value, yet basic safeguards must not disappear because a job is outsourced.

The strongest objection is that extensive oversight can increase bid costs and exclude smaller businesses. That is a reason to scale obligations to risk and to make procedures understandable, not a reason to remove public responsibility for outcomes purchased with public money. The questions are the same I would ask of my own enterprise: what was promised, who is responsible, how can a person challenge a failure and what must change if the system doesn't deliver?

A financial model does not confer moral innocence

A stronger role for government does not automatically justify unlimited government authority. In fact, the greater the responsibility entrusted to public institutions, the more important their accountability becomes. An economic framework that directs greater resources towards collective development must also establish safeguards against corruption, inefficiency, political favouritism and misuse. Decisions concerning public investment should be supported by accessible evidence, transparent budgeting and independent scrutiny. Citizens should be able to understand where public money comes from, where it is going, what outcomes are intended and whether those outcomes have been achieved.

Where programs fail, governments should be expected to explain those failures and consider appropriate reforms. Where evidence supports continuing a successful initiative, political disagreement alone should not prevent reasonable consideration of that evidence. However, public policy will always involve competing priorities, limited resources and disagreements over values. For that reason, independent courts, legislative oversight, freedom of expression, due process and constitutional safeguards remain essential. The rights of individuals and minority groups must not become expendable simply because a policy is claimed to benefit the majority.

The purpose of collective prosperity is to improve society without abandoning the dignity and liberties of the individuals who comprise it.

Political donations and lobbying need rules based on evidence and existing law, not a fantasy that every conversation with a minister is corrupt. Legitimate advocacy is part of democracy. The problem arises when financial ties, hidden interests, revolving doors or unequal access prevent the public from knowing whose priorities shaped an important decision. Reporting obligations and procurement safeguards must themselves be designed so smaller organisations are not excluded by compliance costs that large firms barely notice.

This concern extends to government-owned enterprises and cooperatives. Public ownership does not guarantee virtue; a social mission does not guarantee good management. Managers still have incentives, accounts can be obscured and workers can be treated unfairly. Where a public service is operated through private contracts, public responsibility must remain traceable. I do not want to

discover after a failure that the contract made every actor responsible for a different fragment and nobody responsible for the whole.

The next volume will investigate economic arrangements, ownership and the public share of prosperity in detail. Before asking who should own or distribute more of society's wealth, I want to establish that whichever institutions hold that power must be open to scrutiny. Otherwise the promise of collective benefit can become another method of concentrating control.

CHAPTER 10

Building Institutions Before Transforming Society

I know why large reform programmes can be exciting. A society with serious problems invites a large response. If housing is unaffordable, wages feel inadequate and public services are under pressure, simply asking people to be patient can sound like an excuse. But I do not think urgency makes a poorly protected system safe to impose.

The Century philosophy is not an announcement that Australia's institutions should be swept aside tomorrow. It is an effort to build a better set of questions, principles and workable proposals over time. Some ideas may be possible within current institutions. Others might require legislation or wider constitutional debate. Still others may fail the test of evidence or rights and should be changed or abandoned.

Begin with correction, not a grand takeover

I'm not suggesting we change the entire country overnight and hope everything works out. If a transparency reform works locally, we can learn from it. If it creates new problems, fix them before making the same mistake nationally. That's more useful than pretending one election will solve everything.

If a government announced tomorrow that every policy must be perfect before taking effect, nothing would ever happen. If it announced instead that it would abolish the existing system and rebuild everything immediately, the result could be chaos and lost protections. I want a staged sequence that strengthens how decisions are explained and corrected, then applies those standards to progressively harder reforms.

Start with public decision records and accessible explanations for major proposals, then clarify consultation and complaint routes. Map gaps between existing regulators, auditors and courts rather than multiplying institutions by default. Require significant policy proposals to identify affected rights, realistic alternatives, full costs and dates for independent review. Trial systems on a manageable scale where the law allows, and publish adverse findings as well as successes. Expansion should be earned by evidence rather than a minister's enthusiasm.

Democratic reform must also survive changes of government. Reporting rules, transparent appointment standards, archives, stable records and independent review can make information available to future officials and citizens. A party may dispute another party's objectives, but it should still face the same obligations to disclose evidence and explain the consequences of decisions. The point isn't to make all politicians agree; it is to make public disagreement more answerable to facts, rights and public outcomes.

My approach to long-term reform rests on four connected foundations: education that teaches people how their country works and how to question it; transparency that lets them examine government decisions, expenditure and consequences; time for communities, institutions and generations to evaluate and adapt; and independent accountability capable of investigating powerful people and correcting wrongdoing.

A programme is judged by its safeguards

Education without transparency leaves citizens attempting to understand decisions while necessary records remain hidden. Transparency without education can overwhelm citizens with information they cannot interpret. Time without accountability lets poor practices become normal.

Accountability without independent legal authority is little more than a promise that the powerful will investigate themselves.

Together, these principles could help develop a population increasingly capable of recognising institutional failures. I do not expect meaningful cultural or economic reform to happen overnight. It may take decades or generations to change political expectations and how people learn about public decisions. That is not a reason to accept injustice. It is a reason to make the process patient enough to understand consequences and determined enough to correct what fails.

These foundations must apply to the Century Manifesto too. If this framework asks other people to publish assumptions, accept independent scrutiny and change course when evidence contradicts them, I cannot exempt my own ideas from those obligations.

One of my greatest concerns is what happens after a system succeeds for the first time. An early generation might genuinely improve living standards and build trustworthy institutions. Later leaders inherit those institutions. Some will improve them. Others might weaken independent oversight, keep information secret, reward political supporters or argue that judicial review and public criticism are obstacles to stability.

The bridge from public integrity to economic reform

The ideas discussed here are interconnected, but their order matters. It would be unreasonable to expect public confidence in extensive economic reforms while the institutions responsible for implementing them remain widely distrusted. Proposals involving public investment, corporate obligations or changes to economic ownership can create legitimate concerns about government overreach, financial mismanagement and individual freedom. These concerns cannot simply be dismissed because a reform claims to serve the public interest. They must be addressed through the standards of evidence, transparency and accountability established earlier. This suggests a gradual process of development.

First, strengthen the democratic foundations through which decisions are made and evaluated. Establish greater transparency, independent oversight, meaningful public participation and clear expectations of political integrity. Then, use those foundations to examine potential social and economic reforms openly. Different proposals can be researched, debated, trialled where appropriate and assessed against measurable outcomes. Successful approaches may be expanded. Unsuccessful approaches should be revised or discontinued. The public should be able to understand not only what decisions have been reached, but also why particular alternatives were accepted or rejected. Such a system would not eliminate political disagreement. Nor should it.

Disagreement can reveal overlooked problems, expose weak assumptions and contribute to better policy. The aim is not to force society into one collective opinion, but to create a fairer process through which differing opinions can be examined. This is especially important when considering policies that alter the relationship between private wealth, public responsibility and government authority. Any transition should recognise existing rights, financial obligations, economic dependencies and the potential consequences for ordinary people. A reform intended to improve collective wellbeing should not ignore the harm that poorly planned implementation might create.

I would begin by identifying existing safeguards and real gaps, testing whether major decisions can be explained in ordinary language, improving access to records and review, and asking people affected by a reform whether it actually helps. Not every reform needs a new agency. Not every improvement needs a national rollout. Trial, evaluation, independent challenge and the possibility of reversal can protect good ideas from premature certainty.

There will be hard choices. Stronger oversight can cost money, slow decisions and frustrate officials trying to deliver services. Weak oversight can allow money to disappear, prevent people from reporting misconduct and make expensive failures harder to correct. The correct answer is not always the midpoint between these costs. We should examine the scale of risk, the price of safeguards, the likelihood of abuse and the harm that an error could cause. Some protections remain essential even when they are inconvenient.

The most serious test of these commitments will come when we are tempted to relax them because we believe our own proposal is good. If a future administration endorses the Century philosophy, it must still be open to organised opposition, critical journalists, independent courts and a public that may decide to reject its programme. An idea does not earn the right to become permanent simply by calling itself the future.

That brings me to wealth. Government can promise to create opportunity, direct investment, regulate markets or redistribute resources, but each choice gives somebody authority over the labour, money and prospects of others. Before I can defend any economic arrangement, I have to ask who benefits, who pays, who makes the decision and who can say no. The next volume follows that question into the economy itself.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME V

The Economy And Collective Prosperity

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

What Is Prosperity For?

The previous volume asked how political power could be held accountable to the people it affects. I do not think that question ends at Parliament. Economic decisions can change a person's life just as directly as legislation. A company can decide whether a region retains a job, whether a product is worth repairing, or whether a household can afford an essential service. A government can decide which roads, hospitals, schools and public systems receive investment. We have to ask what all of that power is meant to accomplish.

I keep returning to a simple question: what is the economy for? We are capable of producing things that earlier generations could scarcely imagine. We can build factories, connect continents, process information instantly and move goods around the world. Yet being capable of producing enormous wealth does not, on its own, tell us whether we have built a good society. Money can increase while people remain isolated, essential services deteriorate, and the environment absorbs damage that never appears in a company's accounts.

That does not make economic growth meaningless. When more useful goods and services can be produced with the same resources, society may have more opportunities. Growth can support employment, innovation, better technology and public revenue. I am questioning what we do with those opportunities, whose lives are improved and which costs we leave uncounted. I want prosperity that can be experienced by ordinary people, not merely observed on a graph.

Success beyond the financial statement

Once we begin establishing a stronger relationship between government and society, we can more confidently examine the economic systems upon which our communities depend. Modern economies rely heavily upon financial incentives. People work to support themselves and their families, improve their circumstances, obtain independence and pursue personal ambitions.

Businesses compete for customers, develop products, provide services and generate employment. These processes can create enormous value. Money is not inherently incompatible with social progress. Financial incentives can encourage innovation, support entrepreneurship and reward individuals for their contributions.

However, a question worth considering is whether our current understanding of economic success places too much emphasis on the accumulation of private wealth and too little on how that wealth contributes to society. We frequently measure businesses through revenue, profitability, market share and financial growth.

While these measurements are important, they do not necessarily demonstrate whether an organisation improves the lives of the people who contribute to, depend upon or are affected by its activities. A financially successful company may provide valuable employment and essential products. It may also generate environmental damage, impose unnecessary costs on communities or concentrate wealth among a comparatively small group of beneficiaries.

Similarly, an organisation that generates modest financial returns may contribute enormously through education, healthcare, social services or community development. The Century philosophy therefore raises a broader question: What if economic success were measured not only by the wealth an organisation creates, but also by the lasting value that wealth provides to society?

This does not require rejecting conventional private enterprise. Rather, it invites consideration of additional economic models that place collective responsibility alongside individual achievement.

I would not replace every financial measure with a vague feeling of wellbeing. That would create a different problem: a government could declare that people were happier while ignoring falling incomes or deteriorating supplies. We need both sides. Productivity, investment, prices, debt, public finances and wages help explain what can be sustained. Access to food, stable housing, healthcare, education, meaningful freedom and the condition of public infrastructure help explain what that activity is for.

Even then, not every benefit can be added neatly into one number. Consider the value of a well-maintained footpath. It might reduce falls, enable an older person to walk to a shop, help someone reach a bus and make a neighbourhood feel cared for. A financial analysis should count what it reasonably can without pretending everything important has a simple market price. And a government that spends money on a well-intentioned project still has an obligation to show that it works.

The cog metaphor in Volume I was about interdependence, not usefulness as a test of human worth. If a wealthy economy cannot protect the dignity of someone who cannot earn, prosperity has lost its purpose.

CHAPTER 02

Money, Prices and Exchange

I do not want to get rid of money. I want to understand what we expect it to do. Without a reliable way to exchange goods and account for costs, daily life becomes harder. The person growing food does not have to negotiate a separate barter arrangement with the mechanic who repairs a truck. Wages allow people to decide what to buy, save for a future need and support others. Prices give useful information about what is scarce, costly or in demand, although they can also reflect market power, taxes, regulation, speculation and unequal access.

Money itself does not grow food or build houses. People, materials, land, energy, machinery, organisation and knowledge do those things. Creating money or increasing a budget cannot automatically create a nurse, a skilled tradesperson or a power line. If a policy promises more of everything without accounting for the people and resources required, I think that is a warning sign.

I also recognise that different jobs, investments and risks can justify different rewards. A person who trains for years, takes professional responsibility, invents something useful or puts savings at risk may have good reasons to expect compensation. Pretending that these differences do not exist would ignore incentives that influence effort and investment. But treating the highest possible financial reward as the definition of a good contribution would be just as simplistic.

Prices reveal some costs and hide others

A cheap product can be genuinely efficient to manufacture. It might also be cheap because somebody else absorbs a cost: a worker with limited bargaining power, a river contaminated by production or a community paying to dispose of waste. The number on the shelf does not explain which of these is happening. I want to know when a low price reflects ingenuity, and when it depends on moving expenses away from the person making the profit.

The opposite mistake would be to assume a higher price proves better treatment. An expensive product may be durable and responsibly made. It may instead carry a prestige brand and a larger margin. We cannot discover the truth by moralising about a price tag. We need information about how the product was created, what standards were followed and where the costs fall.

There is also a difference between turnover, profit and wealth. A business taking a million dollars in sales has not necessarily earned a million dollars. It still pays suppliers, wages, rent, equipment, insurance, energy and taxes. A profitable business may need reserves to survive a downturn or finance its next investment. And an owner whose assets are valued highly may not have that amount available as cash. If I am asking people to consider changes to economic arrangements, these distinctions are not details I can ignore.

Scarcity means every promise has a trade-off

I want society to be more generous in the ways that matter. But if we spend resources on one thing, we have fewer available for something else unless we produce more, raise additional funding or reduce waste. We must ask not only whether a proposal sounds beneficial, but what we would give up to make it possible. Public spending can be an investment and can also be a recurring obligation. Private spending can be productive and can also produce avoidable harm.

Imagine a government promising cheaper electricity by holding consumer prices below its real cost of supply. Households might benefit immediately. But somebody still has to pay the difference, whether through taxation, borrowing, a reduction in investment or losses absorbed elsewhere. The

policy may be justified, particularly to protect vulnerable households, but it is not free simply because the bill looks smaller. Honest accounting should not be treated as opposition to compassion.

The same rule applies to private business. A company may lower prices through better processes or bulk purchasing, and customers may genuinely benefit. If it achieves the same result by underpaying people or neglecting safety, the apparent saving is incomplete. A fair economic system should reward real efficiency without making hidden costs somebody else's problem.

I therefore want to keep money, prices, trade, savings and financial ambition. The larger question is how we prevent these useful tools from becoming more important than the people they were created to serve.

CHAPTER 03

Ideologies, Ownership and Mixed Models

I have described my thinking as socialist-leaning and, at times, as a kind of socialistic capitalism. Those descriptions are attempts to explain a direction, not a demand that people accept a label. I want the freedom to start an enterprise, own property, earn a living and develop new ideas. I also want a society that treats healthcare, education, reliable infrastructure and fair opportunity as foundations rather than afterthoughts. I do not see why exploring one aim should automatically require rejecting the other.

Some people hear the word socialism and picture complete state control. Others hear capitalism and picture unrestricted private power. I think those reactions often prevent the more useful question: who actually controls an institution, whose interests does it serve, what are its incentives and what can people do when it fails? The name attached to a system does not answer those questions.

An ideology is a beginning, not a finished design

I believe one of the greatest mistakes we make when discussing politics is treating political and economic ideologies as finished systems that must either be accepted entirely or rejected because of their historical failures. We often judge entire philosophies by the actions of particular governments, political leaders or historical movements without properly examining the principles, institutions and circumstances responsible for their successes and failures.

It is easy to blame capitalism for inequality, socialism for authoritarianism, or communism for economic hardship. But how often do we stop to examine why those outcomes occurred, whether they were inevitable, and what we could learn from them? Capitalism, socialism and communism represent different approaches to ownership, production, economic organisation and the distribution of resources. Democracy and authoritarianism, meanwhile, concern how political authority is exercised, distributed and held accountable.

These concepts are not interchangeable, even when they overlap in practice. A government identifying as socialist does not automatically make every action it takes representative of socialist principles. Equally, a predominantly capitalist government does not make every decision according to free-market principles or individual economic liberty.

Many capitalist societies provide publicly funded healthcare, social housing, education, welfare and essential infrastructure. These arrangements demonstrate how different economic principles and social priorities can coexist within a functioning society.

Public services do not automatically make an economy socialist, just as the existence of private enterprise does not necessarily make an entire economic system capitalist. Different systems can adopt similar policies for different reasons, even when their underlying philosophies disagree.

To me, they can sometimes resemble two sides of the same coin, simply produced by different mints. Society should not be obligated to choose between two supposedly opposing systems without first examining what each can contribute. I do not believe we should automatically dismiss every principle within an ideology simply because a government operating under its name has failed.

However, I also do not believe that good intentions should excuse harmful outcomes. There is an important difference between what an ideology represents, how it is implemented and what it ultimately produces.

They can discourage people from examining potentially useful policies simply because those policies are associated with an ideology they have been taught to oppose. We should be capable of criticising government overreach without automatically labelling it socialism. We should also be capable of recognising the benefits of public ownership without assuming that every form of private enterprise is harmful.

Likewise, we should be willing to acknowledge historical abuses committed by governments claiming socialist ideals without pretending that every form of collective economic organisation must inevitably produce the same outcome. The purpose of political discussion should not be to defend a label at all costs.

It should be to understand what society needs, identify where existing systems fall short, and collectively develop better alternatives. We are not living in the same world as the people who first developed many of these philosophies. Our technology, economic capabilities, environmental challenges, scientific knowledge and social expectations have changed considerably.

We have developed new ways to communicate, produce goods, distribute resources, educate people and organise entire communities. Our political thinking should be capable of changing alongside them. I do not want to build a society that blindly follows an ideology simply because somebody centuries ago believed it was the answer.

Nor do I want to dismiss their ideas simply because they lived in a different time. I want to examine the problems they were trying to solve, understand the circumstances that shaped their thinking and consider how their principles could be adapted to the world we live in today.

An ideology should not be treated as an instruction manual that can never be rewritten. It should be treated as a foundation upon which future generations can build, question, improve and, when necessary, replace. Every generation inherits systems created by those who came before them. We inherit their achievements, their assumptions, their compromises and their mistakes.

Ownership can mean different things. A privately owned café is not organised like a power transmission network. A community co-operative has different members and duties from a government department. A not-for-profit organisation can employ paid professionals while committing its surpluses to a mission. A public company can compete with private providers; a private company can operate under strict consumer and safety rules. The arrangement must fit the service.

For water, power, transport, healthcare and other essentials, I am open to public or collective options where the evidence shows they would improve reliability, affordability, resilience and accountability. That is not a proposal to nationalise every profitable business. Public ownership can concentrate enormous authority in government, and I have already argued that authority must be limited and answerable. A government monopoly can become just as frustrating to a citizen as an unaccountable private monopoly.

Nor do I want to assume that competition always produces the best result. A consumer can choose between several cafés. They cannot necessarily choose between competing pipes bringing water to one house. Different sectors create different conditions, and the best combination of regulation, public provision, private services or shared ownership may vary.

A grocery store as a practical question

Consider the food in a supermarket. Farmers grow it, drivers transport it, warehouses store it and shop workers place it on shelves. It seems reasonable to ask whether some communities could also

operate a co-operative or publicly supported grocery option in which workers and customers have a say in how benefits are used. But the idea does not become good merely because I like its purpose.

Such a shop would still pay for refrigeration, spoilage, wages, suppliers, insurance, stock systems and management. Its owners would need rules for membership, decision-making and losses. The comparison should include the full cost of any public subsidy and whether the project changes prices, quality, choice, worker conditions or access to fresh food. Private grocers would still need fair conditions in which to compete. If the pilot underperforms, we should be prepared to learn from that and change it.

That is the distinction I want to make throughout the Manifesto. I am interested in alternative structures because I see problems worth solving, not because I think one structure possesses an automatic moral superiority. I would rather test a co-operative that succeeds than defend an ideological symbol that fails. The same applies to private enterprise and government.

CHAPTER 04

Rewarding Innovation, Risk and Work

A society that wants better services needs people willing to create them. Someone notices a problem, develops a product, opens a workshop, buys equipment or trains for a specialised profession. They may spend years building something before earning a reliable income. I do not think the Century philosophy should treat that ambition as selfish. Useful enterprise can be one of the ways people contribute to a community.

I also know that a business is not just an owner with a bank account. A new enterprise may face upfront equipment costs, insurance, licences, fuel, transport, marketing, debt and periods when customers do not arrive. A single bad decision can mean months of work have been wasted. Somebody who takes those risks should not be told that success itself is evidence of wrongdoing.

But an enterprise is not created by an owner alone. Workers provide skill and effort. Customers place trust in the service. Roads, courts, education, utilities and public safety make trade possible. Suppliers and communities carry parts of the relationship too. If a business prospers through all of those contributions, I think it is reasonable to examine how the resulting benefit is shared.

The difference between reward and extraction

I want profitable enterprises that pay fairly, invest in better equipment, train people and build services customers genuinely value. A business improving productivity through better tools may be able to charge less, pay more or grow. Those are real achievements. But a business that increases returns by hiding defects, exploiting workers or preventing competition may be counting a different kind of gain.

Where do we draw the line? It is tempting to say that a particular profit is too large. Yet there is no single number that tells me whether a person developed something valuable or took unfair advantage. Profit is shaped by risk, cost, market conditions, the value of an idea and the availability of alternatives. A fixed ceiling might reward financial manipulation, push investment elsewhere or entrench existing players who know how to avoid the rule.

Equally, saying that all profits are deserved because somebody legally earned them would prevent us from questioning laws that allow harm. If a company controls an essential supply and customers have almost no realistic choice, I want regulators to examine whether its practices weaken competition or create unfair costs. If it grows by inventing a better service and treating people fairly, I want to preserve that incentive. My standard should look at conduct, market conditions and outcomes, not envy or admiration alone.

Small enterprises deserve proportionate obligations

The expectations imposed on a one-person cleaning business should not necessarily look identical to those imposed on a multinational manufacturer. Both must act lawfully and protect people, but a complex reporting regime that a large corporation can fund from a legal department may overwhelm a small operator. If I want to support opportunity, I have to ask whether my proposed rules unintentionally stop people from starting at all.

This does not mean giving small businesses permission to lie, neglect safety or ignore employment obligations. It means designing requirements that address actual risks and can be complied with. A small enterprise should know clearly what is expected, have access to understandable guidance and

be treated fairly when problems arise. Larger organisations with greater resources and greater capacity to shape markets may justifiably face more extensive scrutiny.

The work of a business owner and the work of an employee should not be treated as enemies. Good enterprises need capable workers; workers need safe conditions and realistic paths to increase their opportunities. When those interests conflict, we should investigate bargaining power, actual costs and practical alternatives rather than assume that one side is always right.

This is not the full discussion of employment, welfare or what makes a person valuable. Those questions deserve Volume VI. Here I want to establish the economic principle: encourage productive initiative while requiring the people who profit from it to take their responsibilities seriously.

CHAPTER 05

Not-for-Profits and Social Enterprise

One of the economic arrangements that interests me most is the not-for-profit organisation. I think the name causes confusion. People sometimes hear it and imagine an organisation that cannot sell anything, pay professional wages, build up savings or produce more revenue than it spends. That is not the idea I am exploring. The distinction is what happens to remaining funds and whose purposes they are meant to serve.

It matters because I want to ask whether we can build useful employment and successful services without making private distributions the central purpose of every organisation. That does not mean asking anybody to work for nothing. It does not mean treating an organisation's good intentions as evidence of competent management. It means recognising another way to organise economic activity.

Generating a surplus is not a contradiction

Not-for-profit organisations provide an important starting point for this discussion. Despite their name, not-for-profit organisations are not necessarily incapable of generating financial surpluses. They can employ workers, purchase equipment, provide services, compete for customers and expand their operations.

Employees can receive ordinary or competitive wages. Managers can hold professional responsibilities, develop careers and be compensated for their work. The defining distinction is that financial surpluses are directed towards the organisation’s purposes rather than distributed to private owners.

This demonstrates something worth recognising. A business does not necessarily require the private distribution of profits to provide employment, maintain operations or contribute productively to an economy. Consider an employee working for a community organisation and another employee performing comparable work for a conventional retailer.

Both may receive similar wages. Both may contribute comparable amounts of time, effort and skill. Both participate in the broader economy by purchasing goods, paying applicable taxes and supporting other businesses. Yet the organisations employing them may distribute their remaining financial resources differently.

One may direct its surplus towards private shareholders, while the other reinvests that surplus into services, facilities, employment opportunities or community programs. This is not an argument that workers should accept inadequate wages for the benefit of society.

Nor does it suggest that financial ambition should be discouraged. Rather, it raises an important observation: people can participate meaningfully in productive employment without the distribution of private profits being the central purpose of their organisation.

Some individuals may willingly accept modest financial trade-offs because they believe in their employer’s social mission. Others may expect the same competitive conditions they could obtain elsewhere. Both positions are reasonable. The wider point is that financial reward and social contribution need not be mutually exclusive.

If relatively small organisations can demonstrate this balance, it is worth exploring what could become possible if larger and more profitable enterprises adopted comparable commitments.

There is a question beneath this example that I do not think we should skip. A purpose written into a constitution is not enough. How are its beneficiaries defined? Who verifies the money was used properly? Who decides whether administrators are paid reasonably? Does the organisation produce outcomes, or merely spend most of its resources on the appearance of activity? These questions belong with the accountability rules developed in Volume IV.

A not-for-profit can make poor decisions, develop conflicts of interest, underpay workers or become unresponsive. It can also succeed spectacularly. Its status tells us something about the permissible destination of its resources; it does not automatically establish that every decision is fair. The test should be both governance and results.

I am interested in social enterprises, worker co-operatives, community organisations and conventional businesses that make credible social commitments. They are not identical. Some distribute returns to participating members, some retain all surpluses for a purpose and some remain profit-seeking while measuring additional obligations. We should not pretend they follow the same legal or financial rules merely because they all sound community-minded.

Can it survive an ordinary bad year?

Imagine a repair workshop that sells services, trains young people and keeps useful appliances from becoming waste. It might earn enough in a good year to pay wages, repair tools and create reserves. In a poor year it may need to draw on those reserves. If we force it to spend every dollar immediately because the word profit makes us uncomfortable, we may destroy its ability to survive or serve anyone the following year.

The workshop must also decide how to handle a disagreement between its purposes. Should surplus funds increase wages, reduce service prices, support more trainees or replace old equipment? There may be strong arguments for all four. People affected by the choices should be able to understand how priorities were set and how the result was measured.

My conclusion is not that every company should become a charity. It is that a viable enterprise can be organised around a purpose wider than distributing profit, and those models deserve serious comparison rather than dismissal. The next step is the harder one: how would an entire society fund and invest in common goals without confusing who owns which money?

CHAPTER 06

Surpluses, Funding and Public Investment

It would be easy to look at the earnings of a large company and imagine moving a share of them straight into schools, hospitals or housing. I understand the appeal. But before I make that promise, I have to identify what money actually exists, who owns it, what obligations are attached to it and what changes if we redirect it.

There are several different questions here. How can a private enterprise support a public purpose? How can the public receive a return from assets it owns? How should taxes fund services? How can a community organisation reinvest its own surplus? They may all contribute to collective prosperity, but they are not interchangeable funding streams.

Reinvestment as a possibility, not a free pool of cash

Imagine a highly profitable corporation employing thousands of people. It pays its workers competitive wages, maintains its equipment, invests in technological development and competes within its industry. After meeting these responsibilities, it generates a substantial financial surplus.

Under conventional ownership structures, some of this surplus may be distributed to shareholders, while the remainder may be retained for future investment. Now consider an alternative arrangement in which a significant proportion of that surplus is committed to broader social purposes.

Such contributions might support affordable housing developments, vocational education, medical research, environmental restoration or public infrastructure. The business would continue employing people, providing services and participating in the market.

Its workers would not necessarily experience reductions in their wages. Its customers would continue purchasing its products. Its managers would remain responsible for financial performance. The difference would lie in the intended beneficiaries of the wealth remaining after the business meets its obligations.

The potential becomes particularly significant when considering large corporations with substantial earnings. However, this idea requires an important qualification. Corporate profits are not necessarily unused funds. They may support future investment, compensate shareholders for financial risk and provide reserves against economic downturns. Investors themselves may include ordinary working people through retirement savings.

Redirecting profits without considering these relationships could discourage investment, reduce business competitiveness or create unintended economic consequences. For this reason, a responsible economic framework must distinguish between productive reinvestment, reasonable compensation, financial security and excessive or unnecessary extraction of wealth.

The purpose should not be to weaken successful businesses. It should be to explore how their success can contribute more consistently to broader social development. Different approaches may be appropriate for different industries. Some organisations may operate as not-for-profits. Others may adopt cooperative ownership, employee participation, community investment arrangements or legally defined social commitments.

Conventional private companies could also contribute through targeted investment obligations, transparent social commitments or participation in independently governed public-benefit funds. No single ownership model needs to be imposed upon every organisation.

The fundamental objective is to expand the ways in which economic activity can create collective benefits.

What government can actually receive

Businesses alone cannot be expected to provide every foundation necessary for a functioning society. Education systems, public infrastructure, essential services, environmental protection and long-term national development require coordination beyond the interests of individual enterprises.

Government therefore holds an important responsibility. Its purpose should not simply be to regulate society or collect revenue. It should also help establish the conditions through which individuals, communities and businesses can develop. Public education can provide people with knowledge and opportunities.

Healthcare systems can support wellbeing and participation in everyday life. Transport and infrastructure can connect communities, improve accessibility and reduce economic inefficiencies. Scientific research can produce advancements that benefit future generations.

These investments are not necessarily separate from economic development. They can actively contribute to it. A person who receives a quality education may develop skills that increase their future employment opportunities. A business with access to reliable infrastructure may operate more productively.

A community with accessible healthcare and essential services may be better equipped to participate in economic and social life. When public investment improves people’s opportunities and capabilities, the benefits may circulate throughout the economy.

This creates the possibility of a mutually reinforcing relationship between commercial activity and public development. Businesses generate employment and economic value. Workers receive income and participate in economic exchange. Governments collect public revenue and invest in essential services.

Those services support future workers, enterprises and communities. As productivity and opportunity improve, further economic activity becomes possible. The purpose of such a system is not merely to circulate money, but to continually expand society’s capacity to improve itself.

Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between money directed towards a not-for-profit organisation and money received by government. A not-for-profit does not automatically transfer its surplus into public revenue. Its resources generally remain committed to its organisational purposes, and some organisations may receive tax concessions.

Therefore, if society wishes to use large-scale corporate surpluses to finance public infrastructure or education, explicit funding arrangements would be required. These could include ordinary taxation, public ownership dividends, dedicated social investment funds, cooperative financing arrangements or other democratically approved mechanisms.

Each would need to be evaluated for economic effectiveness, administrative costs, fairness and accountability. The objective is not simply to increase the amount of money passing through government. It is to ensure that public resources are collected responsibly, allocated transparently and invested where they can produce meaningful long-term benefits.

This is where accountability becomes as important as enthusiasm. A government can collect taxes under law, receive returns from publicly owned assets, borrow against future revenue and allocate expenditure through legitimate public processes. A community-owned body may retain funds for members or a social purpose. A not-for-profit's surplus generally stays committed to its stated

objects; it does not automatically enter the Treasury. If I confuse these mechanisms, I could promise the same dollar twice.

Even a publicly owned business cannot always send every surplus dollar to general revenue. It may need to maintain its facilities, replace worn machinery, insure against unexpected losses and finance the future service. If the government extracts too much from it, customers may eventually pay through deteriorating reliability or higher replacement costs. Equally, retaining all earnings without explaining why can shield poor performance. The trade-off must be visible.

I also want to distinguish the public value of an investment from the income that investment provides. A hospital may improve lives without generating commercial profit. A road may connect workers to employers and reduce costs without charging every user its full benefit. These may be worthwhile investments, but we should still examine their total costs and opportunity costs. Calling something an investment is not proof that it pays for itself.

A public promise needs an honest ledger

Suppose a public-benefit fund is proposed for housing, training or regional industry. It should be clear whether the money comes from taxation, voluntary contributions, government asset earnings or another defined source. It should say whether funds can be spent immediately or must preserve capital, how investment risks are controlled, who audits the accounts and who has the power to change the purpose later. People deserve to see those rules before being asked to trust a new institution.

Public services can strengthen business and employment by improving health, skills and infrastructure. Businesses and workers may then contribute revenue that supports further public investment. I find that relationship promising. Yet the return may take years, be difficult to isolate, or fail to materialise. A responsible government should record what it expected, what happened and what it learned.

I am not seeking an economy where nothing belongs to anyone. I am seeking stronger ways to connect what we create with what we need, while preserving honest accounts, sensible investment and meaningful democratic control. We should be able to explain the source of every major obligation and the cost of every promised benefit.

CHAPTER 07

Concentrated Wealth and Economic Power

There is a difference between being wealthy and having the power to shape the choices available to everyone else. One person might have substantial savings because they built a useful business or invested over many years. A large company might earn strong returns because it makes something millions of people want. I do not think those facts automatically establish exploitation.

My concern becomes sharper when a company can decide the conditions of an essential market with little effective challenge. If there is only one practical supplier, if workers cannot easily change employers, or if competitors cannot gain access to necessary infrastructure, economic power may create disadvantages that ordinary individual choice cannot correct. The question is not simply how much money a firm has, but what it can make other people accept.

Success, dominance and misuse are different

A company may grow large because it operates efficiently and offers better products. That can benefit customers. It may also acquire competitors, restrict access to markets or use its position in ways that weaken competition. These are different behaviours and deserve different responses. I want competition authorities to be able to investigate genuine harm, not punish an enterprise for becoming popular.

Market concentration is only part of the problem. Some businesses can influence policy through lobbying, donations, specialist information or their ability to threaten withdrawal of investment. There may be legitimate reasons for governments to listen to businesses, particularly when a policy changes jobs and supply. But listening must not become surrendering the public interest to whoever can afford the loudest representation.

I have already argued in Volume IV that the reasons for public decisions should be traceable, and that corruption, conflicts of interest and hidden influence need independent scrutiny. The same principle applies here. If a government awards a contract, subsidises an industry or changes regulations after hearing from influential organisations, the public should be able to examine the reasoning within appropriate privacy and security limits.

The temptation of a simple profit ceiling

I have questioned extreme profits because I worry that money and influence can become concentrated beyond what is healthy for a community. But I cannot leap from that concern to an arbitrary legal cap. A large absolute profit may be modest relative to a company's investment, and a smaller profit may still result from serious exploitation. A ceiling could create accounting games, distort incentives or discourage projects with high upfront costs. What looks strong in a slogan may fail in practice.

I would rather examine the underlying conduct. Are prices being distorted by the absence of competition? Are public resources being transferred without fair return? Are environmental costs being paid by taxpayers? Is a company avoiding responsibilities that smaller competitors must meet? Are workers able to bargain fairly? Depending on the evidence, competition policy, fair taxation, labour protections, transparency or specific responsibility for harm might be more precise than a blanket limit.

That does not mean the existing distribution of wealth should be treated as morally inevitable. Ownership of capital can provide advantages that accumulate over generations. Someone entering

life without assets or support may face barriers even when they work extremely hard. I want a society that expands genuine opportunity and public foundations rather than merely telling people who are falling behind that somebody else earned their position. But opportunity policies should be measured by whether they work, not by how severely they appear to punish those at the top.

Private wealth also connects to ordinary savings

Another complication is retirement. Investment returns do not only reach a handful of wealthy individuals. Savings held through superannuation can also be invested in businesses, property and other assets, with gains or losses affecting ordinary workers over time. If we change how profits or investment returns work, we should understand the consequences for those savings and for the people who depend on them later in life.

The goal should not be to protect every existing investment at any social cost. It should be to avoid mistaking every investor for an exploiter while still challenging genuine abuses. We must distinguish financial success from political power, market concentration and costs unfairly shifted onto society. Only then can we design responses that address the actual problem.

CHAPTER 08

Responsibility Following Commercial Power

I do not think accountability should be identical for a consumer, a small business, a multinational manufacturer and the government that regulates an industry. Each may influence an outcome, but they do not control the same decisions. Responsibility should reflect what a person or institution can reasonably know, influence and prevent.

This is one of the principles that connects the entire Century Manifesto. We cannot expect people to exercise freedom responsibly without giving them meaningful choices. We cannot ask businesses to follow rules without defining those rules fairly. And we cannot allow a government to use public wellbeing as an excuse to operate without scrutiny. Power should be answered by duties, and those duties should themselves be proportionate and reviewable.

The costs beyond a business ledger

This brings me to my criticism of capitalism. I do not believe money, private enterprise or profit are inherently evil. Businesses can create employment, encourage innovation and provide products and services that genuinely improve people's lives.

But I question what happens when financial success becomes more important than social responsibility. A company can profit from selling a product without bearing the full consequences of how that product affects society. A platform may benefit from increasing engagement even when some forms of engagement are unhealthy.

An entertainment company may profit from controversy while families, schools and communities are left to manage the consequences of inappropriate exposure. This does not mean every profitable product causes harm. Nor does it mean a socialist economy would automatically prevent these problems.

Political power, censorship, propaganda and harmful institutional incentives can exist under different economic systems. The issue is whether the people benefiting from a system are also accountable for the consequences it creates. I believe capitalism's capacity to generate enormous wealth is both one of its greatest strengths and one of the reasons its failures can be difficult to address.

Money can support innovation and social progress. But concentrated wealth can also create influence, obscure responsibility and encourage institutions to prioritise financial returns over public wellbeing. Throughout history, the pursuit of wealth, power and resources has sometimes existed alongside claims of civilisation, freedom and national progress.

I believe this is another reason we must question both the stated intentions of institutions and the consequences of their actions. Good intentions do not guarantee good outcomes. And good outcomes in one area do not automatically justify harm in another.

That is why I support stronger transparency, independent oversight and a clearer duty of care. I do not want to eliminate creativity, competition or financial incentives. I want them to exist within a system that recognises human wellbeing as a responsibility rather than an optional expense.

The same problem can appear in physical products. A company may be paid for extracting a resource while a community is left to repair environmental damage years later. A manufacturer may sell an inexpensive item whose useful life is short and whose disposal is expensive. A platform may generate advertising revenue while schools and families confront some of the consequences of

its design. None of these examples proves that a particular company is guilty. They show why we have to ask where a commercial benefit ends and where its costs begin.

A business operating in a supply chain may not control every factory or subcontractor. That is a genuine complication, not a reason to refuse responsibility. Expectations should depend on access to information, practical influence, severity of risk and available safeguards. Large purchasers may be able to change contracts and audit suppliers in ways that individual shoppers cannot. The answer is not to make everybody responsible for everything; it is to identify who could realistically prevent a problem.

Standards must be workable

I want workers protected, products accurately represented and environmental obligations taken seriously. But those goals can still be pursued badly. If a regulation requires expensive reporting that adds little useful information, a small business may be forced out while a larger competitor barely notices. If government publishes a broad promise but does not fund enforcement, harmful practices may continue while responsible businesses carry extra costs.

Good rules should be understandable, proportionate, enforceable and open to review. They should allow complaints to be investigated fairly. They should recognise differences in business size without excusing serious harm. They should also make public bodies answer for their own conduct, because a government contractor or publicly owned corporation is not entitled to lower standards merely by changing its ownership label.

I think consumers still have responsibilities. People can avoid needless waste, question misleading claims and choose more durable products where reasonably practical. But those expectations should not be turned into an excuse to blame a person with limited money for a system designed by others. The question becomes especially clear when we consider clothing.

CHAPTER 09

Fast Fashion as a System Case Study

Consider a person standing in a shop trying to buy an affordable jumper. Perhaps they would prefer clothing that lasts longer and has been manufactured under conditions they can verify. Perhaps they also need groceries, fuel and rent money. It is easy to talk about ethical purchasing as if every household has the same set of alternatives. In reality, a price difference that seems insignificant to one person can decide whether another person buys what they need.

I want this chapter to examine fast fashion precisely because it forces us to look beyond an easy division between good and bad consumers. The worker making the garment, the person selling it, the business ordering thousands of units and the household buying one shirt can all be making choices within constraints. Those constraints are not identical, and neither is their power.

The system behind the price tag

I believe we have approached the fast fashion debate from the wrong direction. We spend so much time questioning why people purchase cheap clothing, yet comparatively little time questioning the economic systems that make exploitative manufacturing, overproduction and disposable clothing so profitable.

I am not defending worker exploitation, unsafe working conditions, environmental destruction or the unnecessary consumption of clothing. I believe these are serious problems that deserve attention. However, I also believe we need to look deeper than individual purchasing decisions if we genuinely want to understand and address them.

When we look at garment workers in developing countries, we often recognise that many are working under difficult or exploitative conditions because they have limited alternatives. We understand that someone may accept poor wages or unsafe employment because they need to feed their family, pay for accommodation or simply survive.

But how often do we apply that same understanding to the economic circumstances influencing our own decisions? Poverty does not look identical in every country. Wages, currencies, living expenses, public services, economic development and employment opportunities all influence what it means to struggle financially.

A person living in poverty in Australia may experience very different circumstances from someone living in poverty in Bangladesh. Their situations should not be treated as identical, but there is an important principle connecting them: limited resources can mean limited choices.

A garment worker might accept exploitative employment because they cannot afford to lose their income. An Australian consumer might purchase inexpensive clothing because rent, groceries, electricity and other necessities already consume most of their available money.

Both individuals are making decisions within the economic circumstances surrounding them. This does not make their experiences equivalent, nor does it mean every decision is beyond criticism. It means we should consider the circumstances influencing a person's choices before judging their participation in a system.

Most people do not participate in an economic system because they personally agree with everything it represents. They participate because they need to live. We need food, clothing, shelter, employment, transportation and access to essential services.

For people experiencing financial hardship, these necessities often take priority over their ability to choose where products originate, how they are manufactured or whether a company operates ethically. Not everyone can afford to spend $160 on two jumpers.

For some people, inexpensive clothing is not about following every trend, purchasing unnecessary products or treating clothing as disposable. It is about obtaining what they need while preserving enough money to afford everything else. I believe we should distinguish between purchasing affordable necessities and engaging in excessive, unnecessary consumption.

Individuals still have a responsibility to consider their decisions where reasonably possible, but that responsibility must be understood alongside their circumstances and available alternatives. We should not automatically confuse financial limitations with a lack of morality.

Expensive is not the same as ethical

I believe workers should receive fair compensation, safe working conditions and protection against exploitation. However, I do not believe simply making clothing more expensive guarantees these outcomes. A $200 jumper is not necessarily manufactured ethically, just as an affordable jumper is not automatically the product of exploitation.

Higher prices can sometimes reflect better wages, stronger materials, safer workplaces and more responsible manufacturing practices. But they can also reflect branding, marketing, exclusivity or larger profit margins. Price alone does not establish whether a product is ethical.

This is why I believe transparency and accountability are more meaningful than simply encouraging consumers to spend more money. We should be asking where products are manufactured, how workers are treated, how much waste production generates and whether companies genuinely meet the standards they advertise.

Ethical manufacturing should be something businesses can demonstrate, not simply a label they use to justify higher prices. Otherwise, we risk creating a system where ethical consumption becomes a privilege reserved for people who can afford it.

I believe one of the greatest problems with discussions surrounding fast fashion is the tendency to place responsibility on ordinary consumers while overlooking the organisations that control production. A person purchasing an affordable shirt does not have the same influence over global supply chains as a corporation deciding where its factories operate, what wages are paid, how much clothing is manufactured or what happens to unsold stock.

Consumers contribute to demand, and their collective decisions can influence markets. However, businesses make major decisions about production, sourcing, product quality and working conditions, while governments establish and enforce the legal standards within which those businesses operate.

These different levels of influence should carry different levels of responsibility. I do not believe responsibility should disappear simply because someone has less power. I believe accountability should be proportionate to the decisions people can realistically control and the consequences those decisions create.

Instead of concentrating on shaming individuals for purchasing affordable clothes, we should be examining why exploitative and wasteful production remains financially attractive in the first place.

Reuse and repair have practical value

One of the most practical starting points, in my opinion, is something we already have: op shops. Every day, perfectly usable clothing is donated, resold, discarded or left sitting unused. Meanwhile,

people continue purchasing newly manufactured products, sometimes because affordable and accessible alternatives are difficult to find.

I believe we should be doing much more to normalise second-hand clothing and support the systems that make reuse possible. Imagine expanding government-supported op shops, community clothing exchanges, textile recycling facilities and affordable repair services.

These initiatives could operate alongside existing charities, community organisations and private second-hand businesses. Rather than replacing organisations that already provide valuable services, governments could help them expand their reach, improve their facilities and make clothing more accessible.

This could create opportunities for community employment, training, volunteering and local economic participation while reducing unnecessary waste. We should also recognise that second-hand clothing is not always available in suitable sizes, conditions or locations.

Making reuse a genuine alternative means addressing those barriers rather than assuming everyone already has equal access. The objective should be simple: keep useful clothing in circulation for as long as reasonably possible.

Protecting workers during the transition

Although I support expanding reuse and recycling, I recognise that op shops alone cannot solve the problems associated with fast fashion. We also need to question how much clothing we manufacture, how long those products last and why businesses are encouraged to continuously produce new collections.

I believe we should be moving away from systems that depend on unnecessary overproduction and towards manufacturing that prioritises quality, durability, responsible resource use and genuine consumer needs. But there is another consequence we need to consider.

Millions of people around the world depend on the garment industry for employment. If we reduce manufacturing without considering those workers, we could unintentionally remove the incomes of people who are already financially vulnerable. That would not necessarily represent progress.

I believe meaningful reform should consider the people who depend on the existing system, including workers who may need alternative employment, retraining or other economic opportunities as industries change. We cannot claim to protect vulnerable workers while ignoring the consequences that our proposed solutions might have on their livelihoods.

This is why I believe we must look beyond the immediate problem and examine the wider consequences of the changes we propose. A solution should aim to reduce harm rather than simply move it somewhere else.

The responsibility to make better choices possible

Ultimately, I do not believe ordinary people should have to choose between affording essential clothing and supporting the wellbeing of the people who manufacture it. Nor should protecting the environment depend entirely on whether someone has enough disposable income to purchase expensive alternatives.

Businesses should be expected to demonstrate responsible manufacturing practices. Governments should establish and enforce meaningful labour and environmental standards while helping make sustainable alternatives affordable and accessible. Consumers should be encouraged to purchase responsibly, reuse clothing and avoid unnecessary waste wherever their circumstances allow.

These responsibilities should work together rather than being placed entirely on one group. I believe the purpose of economic reform should be to create systems where making the responsible choice becomes increasingly practical for everyone. We should aim to make products more durable, manufacturing more accountable, workers better protected and existing resources more efficiently used.

And we should do this without forgetting that affordability is itself an important social consideration. The fast fashion debate represents something much larger than clothing. It demonstrates how easily society can focus on individual behaviour without examining the circumstances and institutions that influence it.

We see someone buying inexpensive clothes and question their morality. We see someone working under exploitative conditions and recognise their limited alternatives. Yet both situations should encourage us to investigate the wider economic structures surrounding those individuals.

Understanding why people make certain decisions does not mean excusing every decision they make. It means recognising that meaningful accountability requires understanding the options available, the pressures involved and the consequences of different choices.

I believe this principle should extend far beyond fast fashion. Whether discussing poverty, employment, environmental protection, consumer behaviour or economic development, we should be willing to investigate the underlying systems rather than immediately blaming the individuals living within them.

My goal is not to eliminate personal responsibility. It is to ensure that responsibility is distributed fairly, that the causes of problems are properly understood and that proposed solutions do not create unnecessary hardship elsewhere. We should protect workers, reduce waste, challenge unnecessary production and expand affordable opportunities for reuse.

Ethical consumption should not be a privilege reserved for the wealthy. And ultimately, we should not be satisfied with simply telling people to shop differently. We should be asking how to build a society where affordability, human wellbeing and environmental responsibility can exist together.

That, to me, is where meaningful progress begins.

CHAPTER 10

Technology, Automation and Distribution

I am excited by what technology can make possible. A machine may perform a dangerous task, a computer may remove repetitive administration, and artificial intelligence may help someone learn a skill or run an enterprise they could not have managed alone. I do not believe we should reject advancement simply because it changes how people work.

But every improvement also raises a question about who receives the benefit. If a business installs machinery and produces more with fewer hours of labour, customers might receive lower prices, remaining workers might earn more, investors might receive higher returns, or the company might retain the money for the next stage of growth. None of those outcomes follows automatically. The structure of ownership, competition and bargaining matters.

Productivity is not just working harder

I want to distinguish working more intensely from producing useful value more effectively. If a cleaner has better equipment and can complete a safe job with less wasted effort, that is productivity. If a nurse has a system that reduces unnecessary paperwork and creates more time for care, that can also be productivity. An algorithm that increases a firm's output while making its customers miserable or putting its workers at risk may improve one number while damaging the larger purpose.

There is no reason to assume that every job will disappear or that every displaced task will be replaced quickly. New tools can create different services and professions, but the transition may not happen in the same town, at the same wage, or for the same people. Telling someone to retrain does not help much if training is inaccessible or the promised work does not exist. The economic gain and the social cost may arrive in different places.

Ownership of the gains

Suppose a warehouse introduces automated systems that make distribution faster and reduce errors. It may be reasonable for the owners who paid for those systems to receive a return. It may also be reasonable to expect investment in worker training, safety, better services or community opportunities. Exactly how that responsibility should be arranged is not settled merely by the fact that automation occurred.

One approach might be better competition so that gains reach customers through prices. Another might be employee profit-sharing or ownership. Another could involve tax revenue supporting public education or retraining. In some essential services a public operator might be appropriate. Each option brings its own risks, incentives and administrative costs. I do not want to pretend a tax on robots, a universal payout or compulsory public ownership is already an agreed Century policy.

We also need to consider people who cannot change careers easily. A worker approaching retirement, someone with disability-related barriers and a young person entering the labour market may face very different choices. A fair response must not be reduced to a single training voucher. Employment, accessibility, income security and the value of unpaid contribution require a deeper discussion in the next volume.

Human judgement must survive efficiency

Technology can also change who has authority over decisions. When a digital system recommends an insurance outcome, processes an employment application or manages a public benefit, a person should be able to understand the relevant process and challenge consequential errors through appropriate review. Automation does not remove responsibility from the institution deploying it.

I support innovation, but I do not support blind dependence. A business or government that saves money by automating decisions still needs to consider privacy, bias, security and whether people can get help when something fails. The subject becomes even wider in Volume XI, where I want to examine digital society directly.

The economic question remains: if technology allows us to create more with fewer resources, will we use that opportunity to improve human lives, or only to concentrate advantage? The answer depends less on the machine itself than on the society deciding how to deploy it.

CHAPTER 11

Economic Reform Without Economic Shock

By this point, I have raised a series of ideas that could alter the way we organise our economy: public options for some essential services, co-operatives, stronger business obligations, wider social reinvestment and better ways of sharing productivity gains. I can see reasons to explore each of them. I can also see how a badly designed reform could hurt the people it was meant to help.

I do not want a society that refuses every change because somebody can imagine a risk. I also do not want a society that presses ahead simply because the intention is compassionate or the idea sounds fair. The practical test is whether the people affected can get through the transition and whether the eventual arrangement actually improves their lives.

The cost of changing what already works

The same problem applies to economic reform. Suppose a country decided to prioritise collective prosperity, place greater restrictions on extreme profit accumulation, and distribute more financial benefits among workers and communities. The intention might be to reduce inequality, improve living standards and provide stronger public services.

But what happens next? Businesses might face different operating costs. Workers might receive higher wages. Governments might need more revenue. Investors might respond by changing where they invest. Some products could become more expensive, some businesses might become less profitable, and some industries might struggle to maintain supply.

These outcomes are not guaranteed, but they are possibilities that cannot be ignored. An increase in wages does not automatically make everyone better off if essential goods become unaffordable. Likewise, restricting profits does not automatically make goods cheaper if the restrictions reduce investment, production or competition.

Consider fuel or another essential resource. A government might introduce purchasing limits to protect domestic supply during a shortage. For example, a hypothetical limit of 200 litres per week for non-commercial users could be proposed, while businesses and essential services operate under different arrangements.

At first glance, this might appear reasonable. But what happens to rural families who travel long distances? Farmers? People with medical appointments? Businesses that fall between categories? Would people begin reselling their allocations? Would separate categories create opportunities for fraud or favouritism?

Would restrictions actually solve the shortage, or merely redistribute its consequences? Every answer introduces another question. A good policy must consider not only the people it intends to help, but also the people who may be disadvantaged by its design.

This is particularly important when attempting to overhaul an entire economic system. A rapid transformation could interrupt supply chains, discourage investment, create employment uncertainty or produce unintended price pressures. Other countries might respond through changes in trade, investment or political relationships.

And ordinary people may be unwilling or unable to absorb the financial costs of reform, even when they support its long-term objectives. It is easy to tell someone to sacrifice for the greater good when you are not the person struggling to afford groceries, electricity or rent.

A successful reform must not merely promise a better future. It must provide a realistic pathway through the transition. That means modelling costs, testing proposals, protecting vulnerable households, introducing changes gradually where appropriate and remaining willing to reverse decisions that cause unnecessary harm.

Sometimes the most responsible decision is not to implement an ambitious idea immediately. Sometimes it is to acknowledge that more research, planning and public discussion are required.

One reason I hesitate to embrace sweeping economic promises is that society is not a machine we can switch off and rebuild overnight. Farms need supplies; hospitals need medicine; small firms need paying customers; households need wages; transport networks need fuel and maintenance. A policy that interrupts any of those relationships may spread consequences far beyond the industry it targeted.

We should also recognise that international trade and investment do not stop at our borders. If a new rule changes the cost of production, other countries and businesses may respond. Some local industries might become stronger, while others could lose customers or suppliers. Greater national self-reliance can be valuable in particular strategic areas, but it should not be used as a slogan to ignore trade-offs.

Reform should be something people can survive

I want this manifesto to demonstrate the enormous complexity involved in changing an established system. A proposal might improve wages but increase prices. Reducing profits might make essential goods more affordable in one area but discourage investment in another.

Public ownership might improve national control over essential services but could also introduce inefficiencies, political interference or financial risks. A new welfare system might encourage participation while accidentally disadvantaging people whose circumstances have been misunderstood.

Even a proposal designed to protect human rights may create a new power capable of violating them. This is why I do not believe we should pursue revolution simply because we are frustrated with the present. We must ask what happens afterwards. Who grows the food? Who maintains the infrastructure? How do businesses continue operating? What happens to prices, employment, supplies, international trade and essential services while the system changes?

What happens if our preferred solution fails? These questions are not arguments against change. They are part of responsible change.

The ideas discussed here are interconnected, but their order matters. It would be unreasonable to expect public confidence in extensive economic reforms while the institutions responsible for implementing them remain widely distrusted. Proposals involving public investment, corporate obligations or changes to economic ownership can create legitimate concerns about government overreach, financial mismanagement and individual freedom.

These concerns cannot simply be dismissed because a reform claims to serve the public interest. They must be addressed through the standards of evidence, transparency and accountability established earlier. This suggests a gradual process of development.

First, strengthen the democratic foundations through which decisions are made and evaluated. Establish greater transparency, independent oversight, meaningful public participation and clear expectations of political integrity. Then, use those foundations to examine potential social and economic reforms openly.

Different proposals can be researched, debated, trialled where appropriate and assessed against measurable outcomes. Successful approaches may be expanded. Unsuccessful approaches should be revised or discontinued. The public should be able to understand not only what decisions have been reached, but also why particular alternatives were accepted or rejected.

Such a system would not eliminate political disagreement. Nor should it. Disagreement can reveal overlooked problems, expose weak assumptions and contribute to better policy. The aim is not to force society into one collective opinion, but to create a fairer process through which differing opinions can be examined.

This is especially important when considering policies that alter the relationship between private wealth, public responsibility and government authority. Any transition should recognise existing rights, financial obligations, economic dependencies and the potential consequences for ordinary people.

A reform intended to improve collective wellbeing should not ignore the harm that poorly planned implementation might create.

I would begin with clear objectives and the smallest workable tests that can answer the important questions. If a community grocery co-operative is proposed, identify its costs and compare its outcomes with alternatives. If a public repair network is proposed, assess waste diverted, training achieved, customer access, full operating costs and effects on existing providers. If a new corporate obligation is proposed, test whether it reduces actual harm or merely increases paperwork. Make the result public, including uncomfortable findings.

The success criteria should include what happens during failure. Can a programme be corrected without people losing essential services? Is there a safe exit if a pilot stops working? Does a new public institution have independent review? Does a business have a reasonable period to adapt? Are workers and low-income households protected from abrupt losses? Good design includes the possibility that the designer was wrong.

I also want the cost of inaction examined. Keeping a failing system can be expensive. Delay can compound infrastructure problems, lost opportunities and environmental damage. But saying that delay has a cost does not mean the first reform offered must be accepted. We need comparisons between realistic alternatives, including phased approaches and the option to preserve parts of what already works.

I think this is the real meaning of the Century principle: keep what works, fix what does not, and replace what fails. We should be willing to question the economy without gambling the safety of ordinary people on our confidence. Ambition needs practical humility. A shared purpose needs dissent. A better system needs safeguards against its own mistakes.

This volume began by asking what prosperity is for. My answer is that prosperity should give people the means to live with security, develop their abilities, take worthwhile risks and leave something better behind. But an economy can record growth while somebody remains unable to travel to work, find a home, access education or participate in the community. If that happens, we have not finished asking the question. We have only moved from money to the conditions that make its benefits real. That is where the next volume begins.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME VI

Opportunity, Work, Welfare And Human Contribution

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

Start With the Barrier

The economy discussed in the previous volume can produce work, training, public services and enormous resources. But it cannot call itself successful simply because those opportunities exist somewhere on paper. A person standing at a bus stop without a bus cannot reach a job just because the vacancy is advertised. A young person moving between temporary homes cannot study as easily as somebody with a stable room. Someone who communicates differently may be capable of excellent work and still be unable to get past an interview designed around one kind of conversation.

I believe effort matters. I also believe it is dishonest to demand effort without first asking whether that effort can realistically lead anywhere. There is a difference between someone refusing a reachable opportunity and someone being blamed for an obstacle they cannot remove alone. That distinction is where my discussion of work and welfare begins.

I believe government has a responsibility to establish the foundations that allow people to succeed.

Healthcare, education, infrastructure, public transport, housing assistance and accessible community services should not simply be viewed as expenses. They should also be understood as investments in the population’s ability to participate in society. Providing these foundations does not mean handing everyone a successful life. It means recognising that opportunity is meaningless when someone does not have a realistic chance to take advantage of it.

A person cannot easily maintain employment without reliable transportation. A young person cannot realistically pursue education if they are constantly worried about where they will sleep. Someone experiencing disability or significant health challenges may require additional support before employment becomes possible.

Yet we frequently approach welfare and unemployment by questioning the individual before examining the circumstances surrounding them. Why are they not working? Why are they receiving assistance? Why are they not contributing? I believe we should begin by asking a different question.

What is preventing this person from participating, and what can reasonably be done to remove that barrier? Perhaps the issue is transport. Perhaps it is unaffordable housing, limited education, insufficient training, disability, mental health, a shortage of suitable employment or a combination of several problems.

Understanding these circumstances does not eliminate individual responsibility. It allows us to determine where that responsibility begins and what society must do to make meaningful participation achievable.

Barriers rarely arrive one at a time

I want to resist the temptation to imagine a person has only one problem. Losing a car may mean losing access to work; losing work may cause arrears; moving house may interrupt a training course, medical treatment and childcare. Each service might record a separate failure. The person experiences one connected crisis. In Volume I I called for looking beyond the recurring pothole. This is that principle applied to human opportunity.

The correct response cannot simply be to ask every person for more documents. We should identify the relevant obstacles, ask what support the person wants, explain what is actually available and check whether the proposed pathway is safe and practical. We should also be ready for explanations that are not immediately visible: shame, poor literacy, sensory difficulties, fear of another failed placement or a condition that fluctuates. Listening is not the same as automatically accepting every claim. It means making an informed judgement rather than an assumption.

Here's where people can misunderstand me. I'm not saying somebody should lose assistance because they had a bad week, they're disabled or there's no work nearby. I'm asking what happens after we've looked at the barriers, offered real help, made the expectations reasonable and someone keeps refusing. That's a different question, and it's one we should be able to discuss fairly.

I support reasonable expectations that people who can participate in work or training should make a genuine effort. I don't think offering assistance means abandoning personal responsibility. But the first question can't be whether a person has failed to complete a requirement. It should be whether the requirement was appropriate, accessible and connected to a realistic opportunity.

Australian welfare already includes mutual-obligation arrangements, circumstances in which requirements differ and exemptions that may apply. My proposal is therefore not a claim that nobody currently considers barriers. It is to investigate whether assessment, support and compliance decisions are actually aligned with the purpose of helping people participate. The official Services Australia guidance describes participation requirements and possible adjustments, including for some caring or reduced-capacity situations.

A practical reform might begin with a documented barrier assessment before escalating certain compliance responses, where safe and lawful. The assessor would identify the available vacancies, transport, training needs and reasonable capacity of the participant; develop a suitable plan; provide information in an accessible form; and set review dates. The participant would have responsibilities that are clear and achievable, along with a meaningful way to explain changed circumstances or dispute an error.

The criticism is obvious: extra assessments could be expensive, slow and easily turned into another paperwork exercise. Some people may learn to provide the answers that avoid participation, while honest people continue to carry the burden. Those risks deserve controls: trained assessors, independent audits, proportionate evidence requests, review of actual outcomes and a fair response to deliberate misuse. But suspicion can't be the foundation of every decision. Poorly targeted punishment may create more instability than progress.

A barrier assessment can itself fail. It can become an exercise in collecting evidence without arranging transport, finding an employer or changing an unsuitable course. An honest system would measure whether the obstacle was reduced and whether the next step became realistic. The assessment should be proportionate; some difficulties are straightforward, and a person should not be trapped in months of forms to receive a modest practical adjustment.

This is not an argument that government can manufacture a job in every town, pay for every preference or guarantee everyone success. Local conditions and public finances matter. So do the

choices people make. But we cannot reasonably declare a person unwilling to participate before identifying the opportunities actually available to them. The starting question is not who deserves blame. It is what would make meaningful action possible.

CHAPTER 02

Human Potential Beyond Standard Careers

When I say every person should have an opportunity to contribute, I am not asking everybody to become the same kind of worker. That would contradict the individuality I defended in the first three volumes. We have built a society that depends on mechanics, nurses, cleaners, teachers, carers, artists, engineers, farmers, shopkeepers and countless other people who think and work in different ways. We also depend on people whose contributions do not appear on a payslip.

One child may be able to take apart a broken object and understand how it fits together. Another may notice when somebody is upset before anyone else does. One person has a remarkable memory; another can invent a story, calm a difficult situation or organise a complicated task. These are not promises that every strength will become a career. They are reasons not to define a person's whole future by the skills that happen to be measured first.

When I say that I want a society that works for everyone, I do not mean a society where nobody has responsibilities or where resources can be distributed endlessly without considering how they are sustained.

Everything we provide must come from somewhere.

Food needs to be grown, transported and distributed. Buildings need to be constructed and maintained. Healthcare requires trained professionals, equipment, facilities and resources.

Even services provided without charge to the person receiving them still have costs that somebody, somewhere, must help support.

This is why I believe collective responsibility must involve more than expecting society to provide for us. It should also involve asking what we can reasonably contribute to the society providing for us.

However, I do not believe that contribution should be measured purely through money, employment, qualifications or economic productivity.

A person’s contribution to society can be valuable without being profitable.

Someone might struggle to hold conventional employment but be perfectly capable of completing small practical tasks, helping maintain community spaces, participating in recycling programmes or assisting with activities that would otherwise go undone.

Someone else might have very little physical capacity but possess patience, kindness, knowledge or life experience that could benefit another person.

Consider an individual who spends a few hours each week providing companionship to elderly people, participating in community activities or, with suitable training and supervision, helping children develop social connections and understanding.

These contributions may not generate a financial return, but they can create something that is difficult to measure economically: belonging, tolerance, acceptance, companionship and community trust.

I would rather see society invest considerable resources into helping somebody discover what they can do than simply conclude that they have nothing worthwhile to offer.

And if their contribution is small, then it is small.

Education and social expectations should make room for more than one way to learn, think, create and contribute.

One of the central ideas behind the Century Manifesto is that human ability can't be measured through one narrow definition of success. Not everyone is academically gifted. Not everyone is physically talented. Not everyone is naturally artistic, mechanically minded, socially confident or comfortable managing people.

But that doesn't mean people who lack one particular strength have nothing valuable to contribute. I believe society often defines creativity too narrowly. We readily recognise creativity in musicians, artists, designers and performers. Yet creativity also exists in engineering, caregiving, entrepreneurship, problem-solving, public policy, technology and countless other fields.

A mechanic finding an innovative solution to a difficult repair problem is exercising creativity. A support worker developing a better way of communicating with someone is exercising creativity. An entrepreneur identifying an unmet community need is exercising creativity. A person questioning an established political system and proposing a different approach is also exercising creativity.

These abilities take different forms, but they all involve applying knowledge, imagination and judgement to produce something useful or meaningful.

That distinction matters because young people can begin judging their own worth against abilities they haven't developed or were never naturally inclined towards. Someone who struggles academically may believe they lack intelligence. Someone who can't draw may believe they aren't creative. Someone who has difficulty communicating may believe they have nothing important to say.

These assumptions can prevent people from discovering abilities that develop under different circumstances. I want education to do more than assess how well someone performs against standardised expectations.

It should help people discover their strengths, develop weaknesses where possible, acquire practical knowledge and understand the opportunities available to them. This doesn't mean abandoning academic standards or pretending everyone has the same capabilities. Different professions require different competencies, and some requirements exist for important reasons.

Rather, it means providing different pathways through which people can develop and demonstrate those competencies. TAFE, apprenticeships, practical experience, mentoring, traditional education and alternative learning methods should all have meaningful roles. The objective isn't to guarantee that everyone succeeds.

It is to avoid deciding someone's future before they have had a reasonable opportunity to explore their potential.

Fairness doesn't require making everyone the same. It requires recognising meaningful differences without automatically treating those differences as inferiority.

A standard isn't an insult

Some jobs require particular physical abilities, technical knowledge, qualifications or safeguards. Recognising human differences doesn't mean placing someone in a role they can't safely perform. A fair opportunity pathway should explain the competencies required and offer realistic ways to develop or demonstrate them. There's no dignity in promising that everybody can become anything regardless of capacity or available resources. There is also no dignity in denying someone a chance before discovering what they can do.

I want schools, employment services and employers to recognise different strengths: mechanical, interpersonal, artistic, analytical, practical, organisational and caring. Creativity exists in the workshop, office, kitchen, classroom and care facility, not just in traditional creative industries. The important test is whether these routes lead to useful skills, confidence, meaningful participation and further choices.

Creativity belongs outside the arts as well

I want us to reconsider what we mean by creativity. It is often associated with painting, writing and music; it also exists in repairs, caregiving, business, design, software, skilled trades and finding a better way to organise a service. We can admire somebody else's creative skill without possessing the same talent ourselves. Recognising that difference should make us more curious, not less willing to learn.

Imagine a mechanic making an affordable repair that keeps somebody's car operating. Imagine a hairdresser helping a customer feel confident, a volunteer building a community activity or a person noticing a flaw in a policy that everybody else has taken for granted. Their abilities produce different outcomes. We do not need to declare which person has the superior soul to recognise each outcome as worthwhile.

No ranking of human lives

There is a danger here. If I speak only of finding the best role for every person, it can sound as though society owns their abilities and has the right to assign them a task. It does not. Someone may choose a job that pays less, take time to explore, look after family, retire or pursue interests that benefit no one else in an obvious way. That freedom is part of their dignity.

Nor should support be withdrawn simply because somebody does not possess a marketable talent. Human beings are not resources to be sorted into useful and useless categories. The cog metaphor is about interdependence, and a person remains a person even when they cannot turn a cog at all. I want more people to discover their options, not a government that decides every person's worth.

CHAPTER 03

Support Without Devaluation

A society can encourage independence without treating dependence as a moral failure. Children rely on adults. People become ill. People age. An injury can change a person's capacity overnight. Some forms of disability or impairment make paid employment impractical regardless of how supportive the employer is. Others require adjustments that allow a person to work in a way that suits them. None of these realities should determine whether a person deserves safety, respect or the ordinary necessities of life.

I understand the frustration people feel when they think assistance has no clear purpose. But there are at least two very different situations hidden inside the word dependency. One is a system that leaves a capable person without a pathway forward. The other is a person who genuinely needs lifelong support. Abandoning the second person does not solve the first problem.

I do not support a welfare system that encourages indefinite dependency without purpose, accountability or opportunities for development. But I equally reject the idea that people should be abandoned simply because they cannot immediately meet society’s expectations.

Support should encourage independence wherever realistically possible, while recognising that independence and contribution look different for different people. Not everyone will be capable of full-time employment. Some may contribute through part-time work, volunteering, caring for others, community participation or other meaningful activities.

Others may require permanent assistance because their circumstances prevent them from becoming financially independent. Their need for support does not make their lives less valuable.

Understanding the Cost of Collective Support

I am willing to support systems that cost more than they financially return when those systems produce genuine social benefits.

Not everything worthwhile will generate a profit.

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the resources required to sustain those systems.

If a programme continually operates at a financial loss, that loss must be covered through taxation, revenue from another activity, community contributions or some other sustainable arrangement.

This requires cooperation and careful resource management.

There is nothing inherently wrong with society collectively subsidising something that improves people’s lives.

The question is whether the benefits justify the resources being used, whether those resources are available and whether the arrangement can remain sustainable without creating unreasonable harm elsewhere.

We must also recognise that some people will genuinely require ongoing support without being able to offer any measurable contribution in return.

That is part of living in a society where people have different circumstances, needs and abilities. Fundamental human dignity and essential protections cannot depend upon a person’s usefulness to others.

For those who can participate, however, I believe our first responsibility should be to help them discover how.

I believe we should contribute where we reasonably can and support one another where we cannot.

If somebody can contribute forty hours a week, that may be their contribution.

If somebody can contribute two hours a week, that may be theirs.

If somebody can only offer a conversation, companionship or a small act of kindness, that can still matter.

And when somebody cannot contribute at all, we should not forget that the purpose of building a stronger society is also to protect people through the periods of life when they are most dependent upon others.

The aim is not to force everybody into the same definition of productivity. It is to give people the greatest realistic opportunity to participate, contribute and belong, while recognising that collective support must itself remain sustainable.

I want us to stop looking only at what a person costs and start asking what opportunities, abilities and human connections we might be overlooking.

Because the value of a society should not be determined solely by what it produces.

It should also be determined by how effectively it uses those resources to improve the lives of the people within it.

Support should not become ownership of a person's life

Help can turn into control surprisingly fast. A person might have to prove the same thing over and over, travel somewhere they can't reach, or follow a plan that doesn't fit their life just to keep what they need. If support is meant to improve independence, why design it in a way that makes people feel trapped?

There is a difference between offering someone a hand and deciding that you now own their future. I want services to support independence where possible, not create an endless cycle of appointments, forms and conditions that leave a person too exhausted to use the assistance. Help should be capable of being accepted, questioned, adapted and, where appropriate, refused.

Consider a young adult offered a training course. On paper it looks ideal: the course is free, attendance is monitored and the provider reports successful enrolment. But the participant has no suitable transport, the teaching method is inaccessible and the qualification doesn't lead to work available nearby. Repeatedly threatening a financial penalty may improve an attendance spreadsheet for a period without improving the person's future. On the other hand, allowing a person to enrol in dozens of courses without ever assessing progress isn't useful either.

I would want a case worker or employment adviser to explain the available options and their purpose. The participant should be involved in decisions about realistic goals, barriers and suitable alternatives. Where obligations apply, the consequences for non-participation must be lawful, proportionate and subject to review. Basic survival shouldn't become a lever for arbitrary humiliation. The system should distinguish deliberate refusal from misunderstanding, a poor match, changing circumstances and a person who isn't realistically capable of the proposed activity.

This doesn't mean every request for help can be granted or that a person can demand any expensive program without public scrutiny. Government has obligations to the community using the resources and to others waiting for services. Fair allocation is part of compassion. A trial should report cost per

meaningful outcome, retention, participant experience and the risk of people falling into greater hardship after penalties.

The hardest question is where the boundary lies after genuine opportunities have been provided and knowingly rejected. I believe proportionate consequences deserve discussion, but no policy should be proposed without protecting people from destitution, coercive placements and decisions made on inaccurate assessments. The aim is capability and contribution, not punishment for failing to satisfy a statistic.

A support service should explain what it can offer, what it cannot offer, how decisions are reached and how they can be challenged. People should not have to perform gratitude to retain help. Nor should a service assume that the person closest to a standard career path must be the person with the strongest claim to care.

I also want to separate income support, disability services, health treatment, housing assistance and optional programmes. They interact, but they are not the same entitlement and they cannot safely be treated as one switch that is turned off when an obligation is missed. Some supports will properly have eligibility rules; some may be universal; some may have conditions related to their specific purpose. Any system must distinguish an administrative condition from a fundamental protection. That is a question of rights as much as economics.

CHAPTER 04

Incentives, Choice and Refusal

I do not believe compassion requires pretending that deliberate choices are irrelevant. I want a society in which a person who works, studies, develops a skill or takes responsibility can reasonably see a benefit from doing so. That might mean income, qualifications, confidence, more independence or an opportunity to pursue something they value. People need reasons to try, and the people funding shared services deserve to know those services are being administered responsibly.

But incentives are not the same as threats. A person who accepts a job should not automatically lose so much in assistance, transport support or housing security that the job makes their life more precarious. Equally, a programme should not call itself supportive when the only activity it creates is repeated attendance at appointments. We should ask what genuine options it opens.

I want to make my position on personal responsibility clearer because it can otherwise sound softer than I intend. If a government provides realistic pathways, explains the obligations fairly, accounts for disability, caring responsibilities and genuine barriers, and a person is both able and repeatedly unwilling to take any reasonable step, I don't think public assistance must continue in precisely the same form forever. Other people are contributing money, time and labour to make that support possible. Their needs matter too. A system with no meaningful expectations risks becoming unfair to people waiting for services and to those trying to improve their circumstances.

My original, more forceful suggestion is that somebody who genuinely wants nothing and repeatedly refuses every suitable offer should no longer be entitled to ongoing government help. That is an unresolved moral question, not a policy whose mechanics have been proven fair. What counts as genuine refusal, who determines it, and what does 'no help' actually mean? There is an enormous difference between not funding another optional training program and denying food, emergency housing or healthcare. The latter could create further suffering, public expense and an unacceptable loss of dignity. The right response may be to change the type of assistance, require a fair review or impose a proportionate, reversible consequence, rather than abandon a human being.

A useful decision pathway would need to check that the offer was suitable and available; that the person understood it in a way they could access; that transport, health, safety, caring duties and other genuine barriers were assessed; that alternatives existed; and that the decision was made by someone who could be challenged. It would need safeguards against prejudice, automated mistakes and pressure to classify people as unwilling to save a department money. Staff would need resources to offer real assistance, not only the authority to issue penalties. A consequence that destroys the person's housing and then requires a larger emergency intervention has achieved neither independence nor efficiency.

I would also distinguish working life from retirement, permanent disability or a period of recovery. The fact that people age, experience illness or stop working doesn't mean they have refused their responsibilities. Australia already uses superannuation alongside public retirement and income-support arrangements; a different economy could redesign those systems, but it would still have to explain how contributions, entitlements and vulnerable people are protected. The moral objective is participation where reasonably possible, not continuous employment as the price of human dignity.

I don't want government to force every capable adult into one approved version of a successful life. If somebody wants to leave ordinary employment behind, live modestly, grow their own food, support themselves privately or pursue an unconventional life, I believe they should ordinarily be free to make that choice within laws protecting other people. The freedom to refuse an offered

pathway matters. But freedom to refuse isn't automatically an entitlement to have every cost of that decision carried by somebody else.

That is the stronger distinction I am making: you may opt out of a voluntary opportunity; you can't assume that optional public assistance attached to participation continues unchanged regardless of your choices. Other citizens are growing food, working in logistics, caring for people, paying taxes and maintaining public services. It is reasonable to question whether someone with genuine capacity and repeated offers should receive exactly the same discretionary assistance when they reject all suitable opportunities without good reason. I don't want the word 'support' to mean no expectation of effort forever.

Yet even this formulation requires boundaries. Society doesn't have only one type of assistance. Emergency medical treatment, protection against violence, a fair hearing and basic personal dignity aren't the same as a subsidised training placement, an optional enterprise grant, a bonus or an activity-based payment. Before withholding a benefit, the system would need to prove that the offer existed, the person could reasonably access it, alternatives were considered, refusal was informed, and the decision could be challenged. A child or dependent person should never be punished for somebody else's refusal. A person should be able to return to participation rather than permanently inherit a government label of 'undeserving'.

The difficult case must not govern every case

I have sometimes taken a stronger position: after repeated, informed refusal of genuinely reasonable opportunities, I have questioned whether government assistance should continue unchanged. I am not going to pretend that question disappeared because its consequences are uncomfortable. But I cannot simply translate it into a rule that somebody should receive no help at all. Food, emergency shelter, healthcare and protection from serious harm cannot be treated as identical to an optional training placement or an extra incentive payment.

The central problem is proof. Who decides that a person is capable? Who knows whether the opportunity was really suitable? How would they distinguish unwillingness from trauma, pain, communication difficulty, hidden disability, discrimination or an unstable home? Would a missed appointment count as refusal? How long would consequences last? What happens when an assessor is wrong? I do not trust a system that answers these questions by assuming its own accuracy.

The hardest classification: cannot, can with help, or genuinely refuses

Here's the test I would want before we consider reducing somebody's assistance. What was actually offered? Was it a real job or a suggestion that required transport the person did not have? Did somebody explain the training in a way they could understand? Was the work accessible and safe? Did the person have caring responsibilities, changing health needs or a reason they couldn't make the appointment? Could an independent person check the decision?

I don't expect everybody to do forty hours of paid work. Some people can do two hours. Some can keep somebody company. Some cannot participate at all and still need care. What I object to is treating support as if nobody has responsibilities, but I object just as much to an institution labeling someone unwilling because it has not done the work of understanding them.

There is another problem: removing financial support can create costs somewhere else. If someone loses housing or has to rely on emergency services, a policy can look cheaper on one department's spreadsheet while becoming more expensive and less humane overall. That doesn't prove every sanction is wrong. It means any proposed sanction needs its own evidence, defined exceptions,

appeal rights and a full-cost test. I have not settled which benefits could be made conditional or where the minimum safety floor should be drawn.

Rights, responsibility and review

I would want any possible consequence to be lawful, proportionate, documented, reversible and open to genuinely independent review. It should follow a demonstrated opportunity, clear communication and consideration of reasonable alternatives. A person should be able to challenge both the facts and the fairness of the decision. The outcome should be tested for its effects on employment, health, homelessness, families and other public services.

There is also a personal choice to be protected. An adult may decide not to seek ordinary employment and instead live modestly with their own resources, supported voluntarily by others or through an unconventional arrangement. I would not treat that decision as a crime. The further question is what support a community is obliged to provide, and at what level. I have not established a final answer to every part of that question. Protecting essential dignity and recognising appropriate responsibility must remain simultaneous commitments while the details are developed.

CHAPTER 05

Housing as a Precondition for Independence

Housing is sometimes discussed as though it matters only after somebody succeeds at work. I think we have the sequence backwards for many people. A stable home gives a person an address, somewhere to rest, a place to keep belongings safe and a better chance of maintaining ordinary routines. Without stability, getting to interviews, completing training, caring for children and managing health can become substantially harder.

That does not mean housing alone will solve unemployment or guarantee personal wellbeing. Nor does it mean everybody needs to own the home they occupy. It means that safe, secure and reasonably affordable shelter is one of the conditions that makes other opportunities more usable.

I believe housing is particularly important within this discussion. Housing should be treated as a foundation for stability, not merely a reward for economic success. When someone has a secure place to live, they gain a stronger opportunity to maintain employment, pursue education, manage their health, develop relationships and make long-term decisions.

Housing instability can create additional problems that governments and communities must later spend resources addressing. This does not mean every person must be given ownership of a house. It means we should recognise the public importance of affordable, secure and appropriate housing, including social housing and other forms of assistance.

A stable society is easier to build when the people within it have stability themselves.

Different forms of security

Some people want to buy a property; others need the flexibility of renting or the security of suitable social housing. A person leaving an unsafe household may need immediate crisis accommodation and ongoing support. A family living close to work may need tenancy stability more than a relocation grant. An older person or someone with mobility limitations may need an accessible dwelling, nearby services and reliable support. I want policy to recognise these differences rather than assume there is a single universal housing journey.

The public benefit of stability should be evaluated alongside supply, construction capacity, land use, infrastructure, ongoing maintenance, tenant rights and costs. A housing programme that increases demand for scarce dwellings without supporting additional supply may create price pressure. New construction without transport, services or employment can leave people physically housed but socially isolated. Those larger questions belong to Volume VIII, but they cannot be separated completely from opportunity here.

Housing also changes what a person can realistically promise another person. An employer might ask for the same start time every morning; a training provider might require that course materials are stored safely; a parent might need a settled place where children can sleep. A household moving frequently may struggle with all of these even when its members are capable and motivated. Stability is not a prize for good behaviour. For many people it is a precondition for the behaviour society demands.

I think we also have to consider the person who is working and still cannot obtain appropriate housing. Their struggle cannot simply be explained as a welfare issue. Rental scarcity, low vacancy rates, location, household size and access to necessary services can create problems for people

across income and employment categories. This is one reason I reject the idea that support systems can be separated neatly from housing, transport, health and economic planning.

If a government subsidises rent, it must examine whether the assistance reaches the household or is absorbed in higher prices. If it builds social housing, it must account for land, construction, maintenance and the communities around it. If it helps people move to a more affordable region, it must examine whether jobs, schools, healthcare and reliable connections exist there. Each option has a possible benefit and a cost. We should compare what actually improves security rather than declaring one arrangement morally superior in advance.

I would also want support that prevents avoidable homelessness where evidence shows it can work. An intervention before eviction or a coordinated response when someone loses employment might be more effective than allowing a crisis to deepen. But prevention should never be treated as automatically cheaper. Costs, outcomes, eligibility and privacy protections must be evaluated in each setting. I want a system that learns whether it helped someone remain safe, not one that counts referrals while people continue falling through the gaps.

Coordination rather than another maze

If somebody loses housing while searching for work, the income-support system, housing services and training provider may each demand separate evidence. Sometimes different systems need different checks. They should nevertheless recognise that fragmented administration can use the time and energy a person needs to become stable.

I would examine practical coordination: a clear contact point when someone faces overlapping problems, permission-based sharing of relevant information, reasonable documentation and a pathway that does not collapse after one missed appointment. None of these should require a person to surrender their privacy or their right to appeal. I do not want a supposedly efficient welfare system that becomes another institution with unchecked authority over vulnerable people.

CHAPTER 06

Education, TAFE and Pathways

Education should not be a narrow gate that people either pass through at the expected age or miss forever. Some people find their strengths early. Others are ready much later, or only after receiving support that was previously absent. I want a society that is willing to teach again, to explain differently and to help people demonstrate ability without pretending every form of work has identical standards.

I have argued in Volume II that education should teach curiosity, interpretation and critical thought. Here I am asking how those abilities turn into a practical pathway: a course someone can attend, a skill they can demonstrate, a mentor willing to show them a task and a real chance to move on to the next stage.

Sometimes we talk about education as though it ends when someone leaves school. What happens to the person who didn't get the right support at sixteen but is ready to learn at twenty-five? Or the person who can rebuild an engine but struggles to sit an exam? Or someone who needs a different communication method before the lesson even makes sense?

I don't want us to confuse a person not understanding this explanation with a person being unable to understand. Try another explanation. Show them. Let them have a go. Ask what part stopped making sense. That's not lowering the standard of the skill; it's making sure the person has a fair chance to reach it.

And if their question shows they don't know something basic, that is exactly why they needed to ask. We should be able to meet people where they are and still help them reach somewhere further.

Not everybody learns the same way. Some people need to see something. Others need to do it. Some need a bit more time or somebody who can explain it differently. That's why I'm so big on asking questions, even ones other people think are dumb. A question shows you where somebody's at so you can actually teach them.

I think society wastes potential when it decides too early that a young person isn't capable of succeeding. Someone who struggles with classroom instruction may respond to practical demonstrations, one-to-one guidance or a workplace where they can see why a skill matters. Another person may be academically gifted but have little access to professional networks or opportunities to try different work. Neither situation is solved by telling people to simply work harder.

TAFE, apprenticeships, alternative education, traineeships, mentoring and entry-level employment can all play a part. The challenge is connecting them. A course that can't be reached, an apprenticeship without a willing employer or a placement that ends without a recognised skill may look useful administratively but fail as a pathway. I want services to ask not only how many people enrolled, but who completed a meaningful stage, what barriers remained and whether the next opportunity became more realistic.

Imagine a person who has finished an alternative learning program and wants to work in vehicle detailing, landscaping or cleaning. A reasonable pathway might begin with a short practical assessment, safe-work induction, transport planning, equipment familiarisation and a supported placement with an employer. They would learn customer communication, time management, basic budgeting and how to correct mistakes. After an appropriate period they could pursue ordinary employment, additional training or a small business of their own. The details would depend on the

industry and the person's circumstances; this is an illustrative model, not evidence that every participant would succeed.

The strongest objection is cost and uneven quality. Mentoring requires staff time, insurance, supervision and participating employers. A poorly designed placement can become unpaid labour disguised as opportunity. Safeguards must include lawful employment conditions, safety, suitable remuneration where work is being performed, clear learning goals and a route to report mistreatment. If a pilot fails to improve durable employment or meaningful skills, it should be changed rather than defended because its intentions were good.

One opportunity can begin with somebody showing you how

If you haven't had much experience, even a simple job can look enormous. Somebody says you need experience to get hired, but how are you meant to get experience if nobody gives you the first chance? That's where I think employers, training providers and communities can make a difference. It might start with someone showing you how to do a task rather than assuming you should know already.

And the right to say no still matters. A young person can decide a placement isn't right for them. Someone can choose another pathway. Somebody offering help shouldn't be allowed to turn that help into control, and the person receiving it shouldn't be expected to pretend it was useful when it wasn't. That isn't an excuse to reject every opportunity; it's an invitation to work out why this one didn't fit, and whether there's a better way.

I want people who genuinely want to learn to have somewhere to start. Not everyone will end up with the same outcome, and that's fine. We should still be able to give them a crack at something and judge their actual ability rather than deciding their future before they try.

Judge outcomes, not only enrolments

The same principle applies to education and employment. I believe training programs should be judged by their overall outcomes rather than the expectation that every participant must succeed. If twenty people enter a training program and fifteen develop valuable skills that lead to meaningful employment, that program may still represent a worthwhile investment.

The remaining five should not automatically be considered failures. Their circumstances, progress and reasons for not completing the program should help us understand how to improve it. We should measure whether our investments produce better opportunities, stronger communities and greater long-term independence, rather than judging success through simplistic statistics.

A training programme may have good reasons to serve people who face the greatest obstacles. Its completion rate might be lower than that of a programme accepting only the most job-ready candidates. It would be misleading to call the first one a failure on that number alone. We should examine the starting circumstances, skills gained, qualifications completed, confidence built, job suitability, participant experience, cost and what happened after the programme.

I also do not want every young person placed into the cheapest available course so a department can record activity. A pathway should lead somewhere meaningful. When a placement supplies real work, workers require lawful conditions and appropriate pay. When it is genuinely supervised education, its purpose, duration and safeguards must be transparent. The training provider, employer and participant should all know what is expected. Failure should produce information about what to improve rather than automatically becoming a label attached to the learner.

CHAPTER 07

Employment That Is Worth Participating In

If we want people to enter work, the work offered must deserve serious consideration. Employment provides income, social connections, structure, experience and opportunities to build independence. Those benefits are real. So are the costs of commuting, childcare, physical demands, poor rostering, unsafe workplaces and unstable hours. A person can want to work and still find that a particular job is unsustainable.

I want to protect both sides of productive enterprise. A business owner may risk savings, manage difficult customers, pay for equipment and carry responsibility when things go wrong. A worker contributes time, skill and effort, often with less control over the conditions. Neither role should be turned into a villain simply because they have different interests.

A healthy economy should create useful work, support initiative, encourage productive businesses and give people a realistic chance to build security. Entrepreneurship matters because people who notice a need and create something useful can provide services, employment, skills and local value.

Workers matter too. A business doesn't exist in isolation from the people whose labour makes it function. Fair wages, safe conditions, honest employment practices, training and a workable balance of power are part of a functioning economy, not distractions from it. The practical challenge is to support decent conditions while ensuring that businesses can remain viable, adapt and employ people.

Small businesses often face real constraints: cash flow, insurance, equipment, compliance, training, customer acquisition and the risk of a bad month. Policies should consider those realities rather than treating every business as if it had the resources of a major corporation. At the same time, being small shouldn't excuse dishonesty, unsafe work, exploitation or avoidable harm.

Productivity shouldn't be reduced to making people work harder or faster. It should also mean improving tools, skills, systems, infrastructure and processes so that effort produces more useful value with less waste. Productivity gains should be considered alongside job quality, distribution of benefits and effects on communities.

I want people to be proud of starting and growing a business. They may put their savings at risk, work long hours, take responsibility for customers and create opportunities for others. Those efforts deserve recognition. But business success doesn't excuse unsafe work, false promises, exploitation or treating employees as disposable costs. The obligations run both ways: employers need reliable work and viable revenue; workers deserve lawful pay, safety, clear expectations and fair treatment.

Australia already has a national workplace-relations framework, including the National Employment Standards. They establish minimum entitlements for employees within the national system. Proposing ethical enterprise therefore means understanding legal duties first, then asking what standards a business can improve in practice.

A small owner-operator may have limited cash flow and no human-resources department. A large corporation may have teams of specialists and substantially greater influence over suppliers and local employment. They can't always be expected to use identical administrative methods, but neither should be able to ignore fundamental worker protection. Regulation needs to consider compliance costs while preserving the outcomes it exists to achieve.

I also believe work matters. Not because human beings exist solely to generate economic value, but because meaningful work can provide independence, purpose, skills, relationships and

opportunities for personal development. However, if we want people to work, we must make employment accessible and worthwhile.

There is little value in demanding participation while ignoring the barriers that prevent it. A functional society should encourage effort and reward contribution, while protecting those who genuinely require assistance. This requires responsibility from individuals, businesses and government alike.

Individuals should be encouraged to make reasonable efforts within their capabilities. Businesses should provide fair conditions and opportunities. Government should ensure that essential systems function effectively and that assistance is directed towards overcoming genuine barriers.

None of these groups should be exempt from accountability. I believe power requires oversight regardless of who possesses it.

Conditions are part of the labour supply

When an employer cannot attract staff, there may be a real shortage of available skills or people. There may also be a problem with wages, scheduling, safety, housing, transport, retention or the way applicants are assessed. Saying that people do not want to work cannot substitute for investigating those possibilities. In some industries there will be several causes at once.

I also want to recognise workers who have less bargaining power. A new worker, a migrant worker uncertain about their rights or a person dependent on a single local employer may find it harder to challenge poor conditions. Clear information, accessible complaint routes and enforcement matter. Fair employment should not depend on a worker having the money or confidence to fight alone.

I do not believe a small business should be expected to maintain the same administrative machinery as a national corporation. But proportional compliance cannot mean different basic standards for human safety and lawful pay. That distinction connects directly to the power-and-accountability rule in Volume IV: greater capacity may justify more elaborate reporting, while fundamental protections remain in place.

Work should improve life, not consume it

A career can be meaningful without becoming someone's entire identity. Parents and carers need time. People have health needs, friendships, hobbies and responsibilities that a payslip cannot express. Efficient work should leave room for a life outside work whenever practicable. Businesses that retain staff, invest in safety and provide reliable expectations may benefit from that stability, but I would want any particular claim about productivity or savings to be tested rather than assumed.

The goal is not to guarantee everybody their ideal job or require an employer to hire someone unable to perform essential duties safely. It is to create more realistic routes into work, establish fair rules and recognise that making employment worthwhile is part of encouraging participation.

CHAPTER 08

Care, Family and Unpaid Contribution

Some of the most important labour in society takes place without wages. A person helping a parent dress, visiting a relative, preparing meals for someone who cannot cook or offering companionship to an isolated neighbour may make a profound difference. Volunteer organisations and families do work that formal institutions cannot simply reproduce. Yet unpaid contribution can become an excuse for governments and providers to withdraw responsibilities that they have already accepted.

I want care to have a place in the Century philosophy because it demonstrates something wider than the economics of employment. A society's values can be read in the ordinary details of how it treats people who rely on others. That was not an afterthought in my older manuscript, and it should not be one now.

Completing a task is not always the same as fulfilling the responsibility behind it.

This principle is not limited to healthcare. It applies to education, employment, government, community services and businesses.

A school may deliver the required curriculum without ensuring that a student has understood it. A government department may process an application according to procedure while creating unreasonable difficulties for the person seeking assistance. A business may technically fulfil a contract without providing the quality or consideration its customer reasonably expected.

I do not believe that good intentions or procedural compliance should automatically be considered evidence of success. They are part of responsible service delivery, but we must also examine the result.

What did the service actually achieve? Did it meet the person's needs? Were its objectives reasonable? Was the outcome consistent with the standards we claim to uphold?

If we cannot answer these questions, we may be measuring the work performed rather than the benefit it was intended to provide.

My experiences visiting my great-grandmother in aged care have reinforced something I consider fundamental to the Century Manifesto: dignity is not an abstract concept that exists only within declarations of rights or institutional policies.

Dignity is experienced through everyday interactions, surroundings, decisions and relationships.

A person's quality of life can be affected by things that appear relatively insignificant when considered separately. The organisation of their belongings, the temperature of their room, their ability to reach or receive a drink, the way another person speaks to them, and whether their preferences are acknowledged can collectively shape how comfortable, independent and respected they feel.

I am not suggesting that every small inconvenience represents neglect, or that a person's room must be perfectly organised at all times. Human environments are imperfect, and workers regularly face competing responsibilities.

My concern is with the tendency to overlook the cumulative effect of small, recurring problems.

Something that takes only a few minutes to address may not appear particularly important to the organisation. Yet to someone who relies on that organisation for their daily wellbeing, the same issue may have a considerably greater impact.

This raises a broader question about how we judge importance.

Compassion and Accountability Must Work Together

One of the principles already expressed in the Century Manifesto is that compassion without accountability is incomplete, while accountability without compassion can become dangerous.

I believe this is particularly important within institutions responsible for vulnerable people.

Workers are human beings. They become tired, experience stress, make mistakes and face circumstances outside their control. In industries such as aged care, disability support and healthcare, staff may be required to manage complex needs while operating within limited time, staffing and resources.

It would be unreasonable to interpret every mistake as evidence that an individual is careless or incapable.

At the same time, recognising the difficulties faced by workers should not become an excuse for repeatedly overlooking the needs of the people who depend on them.

Both responsibilities exist simultaneously.

An organisation has a responsibility to support its workforce, while also ensuring that the services it provides meet appropriate standards.

When something goes wrong, I believe the initial response should be to understand the situation rather than immediately assign blame.

Was the worker adequately trained? Were instructions clear? Was the responsibility appropriately assigned? Did the worker have sufficient time and resources? Was the relevant information communicated? Was there an established process, and was it followed?

These questions help distinguish between a system that failed to support someone, an individual who made an understandable mistake, and conduct that requires direct accountability.

Understanding the cause does not remove responsibility. It allows responsibility to be assigned more fairly and improvements to be directed toward the actual problem.

There must still be consequences for deliberate misconduct, serious failures or repeated disregard for reasonable responsibilities. However, accountability should be proportionate, evidence-based and focused on preventing further harm.

Shared care is not permission to offload

I believe families and communities play an important role in supporting people who require ongoing care.

They provide companionship, familiarity, emotional support, personal history and relationships that institutional services cannot always replace.

However, I also believe we must distinguish between family involvement as a valuable contribution and family involvement becoming necessary to compensate for recurring service failures.

A relative visiting someone in residential aged care should generally be able to spend that time enjoying their relationship.

They may choose to assist with personal tasks, organise belongings or contribute to everyday routines. Such involvement can be meaningful and appropriate when it respects the resident's wishes.

But it should not automatically be assumed that family members will undertake responsibilities that properly belong to the care provider.

This does not mean institutions must replace families or control every aspect of someone's personal life.

It means there should be a clear and reasonable understanding of what each party is responsible for.

It should not quietly depend on unpaid relatives to compensate for recurring operational problems without acknowledging or addressing those problems.

This principle extends beyond aged care.

Schools should not assume that all parents have the same capacity to provide educational support. Government services should consider whether their procedures impose unreasonable administrative burdens on citizens. Employers should recognise when work is being completed through unpaid labour or unreasonable personal sacrifice.

A functioning society relies on shared responsibility, but shared responsibility must not become a way for institutions to transfer their obligations onto people who have less power or fewer resources.

A relative may choose to help out of love, habit or familiarity. I value that. But if a residential provider has accepted responsibility for safe and appropriate care, it cannot quietly rely on a family member to make up for recurring shortfalls without examining the situation. Likewise, employers should not build schedules that assume somebody else will always provide free care at home.

There are limits. Not every personal preference is a legal service obligation, and staff cannot fulfil incompatible requests at the same time. That is why I want individualised planning and honest discussion, not a promise of perfection. But dignity can be undermined by recurring small failures even when the institution has completed its formal tasks. The difference between ticking a box and meeting a need matters.

The person receiving care retains a voice

Care must be built around safety and the person's choices, communication needs, consent, comfort and clinical circumstances. A worker should know when to follow an established plan, when to ask a supervisor and when to respect a preference that differs from their own. We should not presume that a person loses their personality or their rights when they become dependent on assistance.

I also want to protect workers from impossible expectations. A care system that requires staff to deliver individual attention but gives them no time, equipment, supervision or information is setting both the worker and the resident up to fail. The costs of proper staffing, training and accountability must be part of the discussion. This is precisely where dignity, responsibility and workable institutions meet.

CHAPTER 09

Century Ol' Services as a Practical Example

My business, Century Ol' Services, is one place where I can try to put parts of this philosophy into practice. It is not evidence that I have already solved the problems of work, employment services or the economy. A small enterprise cannot prove a national model. It can, however, expose the distance between good intentions and what ordinary decisions require.

Mobile detailing and practical property services involve costs, scheduling, equipment, customers, safety, weather, transport, quality and sometimes the frustration of a job taking longer than expected. If I want businesses to be accountable, I have to be willing to make my own terms clear, explain what I can and cannot do and put things right when the work falls short of reasonable expectations.

The Century Manifesto is not intended to exist only as political commentary. Century Ol' Services is one practical example of how some of the underlying values could be put into practice. The business begins with services such as vehicle detailing, housekeeping and lawn care. Those services are not the whole purpose; they are the foundation that could make a wider social contribution possible.

The services are the foundation. The opportunities are the purpose.

I enjoy the practical work itself: attention to detail, working with customers, seeing a result at the end of a job, and learning how a business operates. I want the business to be genuinely useful and financially sustainable. It should not depend on pretending that profit is unimportant, because without financial stability the wider purpose cannot last.

The longer-term ambition is to create practical pathways for young people who may benefit from a real opportunity to learn, work, take responsibility and discover their strengths. Some people need more than advice. They may need experience, a mentor, a first job, a chance to make mistakes safely, or a route into further training or entrepreneurship.

The business model must be responsible in practice. Profitability comes first because a business that continually loses money cannot sustainably create jobs. Stability comes next, followed by the capacity to train and support people, then employment and further opportunities. Hiring people before the business can afford to support them would risk harming both the worker and the business.

That means documenting procedures, maintaining insurance and legal compliance, setting fair expectations, paying people properly, protecting customers, monitoring quality, budgeting for training, and being honest about what the business can afford. The social purpose cannot excuse poor management; good management is what makes the purpose credible.

The wider ambition is to build something that serves customers, creates useful work, develops skills and gives people a better chance to contribute. The principle is not charity instead of business. It is a business designed to be useful, sustainable and capable of creating opportunities as it grows.

I do not want the Century Manifesto to exist only as a collection of arguments about what governments should do.

I want them to influence how I approach decisions within my own capacity.

That includes business.

If I believe businesses should be accountable, I should be willing to establish clear service standards and respond fairly to complaints.

If I believe workers deserve dignity, any future employment or training opportunities I create should reflect that belief through safe conditions, clear expectations and fair treatment.

If I believe young people deserve more opportunities, I should consider how the business might eventually support training, mentoring and practical pathways into employment.

If I believe environmental sustainability matters, I should examine the materials, chemicals, equipment and waste associated with the services being provided.

And if I believe that profit should serve a worthwhile purpose, I should evaluate how the business can remain financially sustainable while delivering genuine value to customers and the wider community.

These commitments will involve trade-offs.

A small business cannot fund unlimited community programs.

Training people requires money, time, supervision and appropriate safeguards.

Environmentally preferable products may not always be the most affordable or suitable for a particular job. These are reasons to compare performance, costs, safety and environmental effects honestly rather than to promise that every ideal can be met immediately. My standards should be ambitious, but they must also be practicable and open to revision.

A business that speaks about fairness while refusing to correct mistakes has misunderstood accountability. A business that promises community benefit but cannot survive financially will struggle to deliver that benefit. And a business that claims to support young people without proper training, supervision or safeguards could cause harm despite good intentions. The practical test of my principles is whether I can apply them consistently when doing so is inconvenient, expensive or requires me to admit that an earlier decision was wrong.

Century Ol' Services cannot transform the nation on its own. It can, however, be a place to put small commitments into practice, learn from the results and improve over time. The same applies to individuals, community organisations, workplaces and governments. Collective responsibility begins with decisions made at the level each of us can genuinely influence.

Opportunity has to be real before it can be scaled

My longer-term ambition is to give young people and others who struggle to find an entry point a practical way to learn and progress. A clear task, demonstration, supervised practice and feedback may suit somebody who does not flourish in a conventional classroom. But an ambition is not yet a measured result. I cannot claim a number of people have been trained, employed or moved into better careers without actual records demonstrating it.

If I reach the point of offering placements or employing staff, the obligations will be concrete: lawful wages or properly structured educational arrangements, insurance, suitable supervision, safe equipment, clear communication, respectful treatment of customers, consent for handling personal property and a genuine process to raise concerns. Someone should be able to learn a useful skill without being used as cheap labour, and a customer should not have to absorb the cost of unqualified work.

There is also an economic boundary. A business that has not learned to cover its costs cannot promise sustainable employment. Saving for replacements, maintaining equipment and paying for legal compliance are not distractions from community purpose. They are part of what makes that purpose possible.

An ordinary place to test accountability

I want to compare what I say against what happens. Are quotations understood? Are jobs completed to the agreed standard? Are safety problems reported? Does a complaint lead to a fair explanation or a correction? If I were to hire someone, would they know what support was available and who to approach about a problem? Could I show that training achieved something useful rather than merely generating a nice photo for social media?

I also want to protect the freedom of people involved. A young person should be able to discover that this kind of work is not for them. A business cannot promise every learner a job, and a worker should not feel pressure to share personal difficulties to qualify for an opportunity. My role is to create a fair possibility within the resources I actually have, then learn from the result.

The larger Century System should be held to a harder standard than my business. It would affect many more people. If I expect my own small enterprise to record failures and correct them, I should expect far stronger openness and review where public authority and public money are involved.

CHAPTER 10

Leadership, Listening and Continuous Improvement

One of the lessons that connects business, care, education and government is that being responsible for a service does not mean personally carrying out every task. Leaders are responsible for the conditions in which others perform the work. They need clear expectations, adequate resources, ways to receive information, reasonable oversight and the humility to correct decisions that are not working.

I do not think every mistake must be treated as misconduct. A worker can be trained, careful and still make an error. A manager can set reasonable procedures and still face an unforeseeable event. But when leaders repeatedly ignore a hazard, fail to resource an essential task or punish people for raising legitimate concerns, that is a different kind of failure.

Leadership Is a Responsibility to Build Functioning Systems

I believe leadership is frequently misunderstood as the authority to instruct others rather than the responsibility to help an organisation function effectively.

A manager cannot personally complete every task or observe every interaction. This is precisely why management systems, training, communication and clearly defined responsibilities are necessary.

The purpose of leadership should not be to make one person indispensable to the organisation. It should be to establish conditions in which other people can reliably fulfil their responsibilities.

This means recognising that workers have different abilities, learning styles, experiences and support requirements.

Some people work effectively with broad instructions and considerable independence. Others perform better when tasks are clearly explained, demonstrated and organised into practical steps.

Neither difference automatically determines someone's value as a worker.

A responsible leader should consider how these differences affect performance and whether reasonable support can improve outcomes.

I see leadership as a form of stewardship. Someone entrusted with responsibility for an organisation should help guide its direction, protect the interests of those it serves, support its workers and recognise where improvement is needed.

However, a leader should not be held personally responsible for every unforeseeable mistake simply because they occupy a senior position. Their responsibility should reflect what they reasonably knew, controlled or could have prevented.

The important distinction is between holding someone accountable for circumstances outside their control and holding them accountable for failing to exercise the authority they actually possess.

Good leadership must be supported by clear expectations, delegated responsibility, adequate resources, useful feedback and meaningful review.

The objective is to create an organisation capable of functioning consistently, not one that only performs well when a particular manager is watching.

Individual needs and consistent standards

One of the recurring ideas within the Century Manifesto is that fairness does not necessarily mean treating every person identically.

People have different circumstances, abilities, preferences and needs.

This becomes particularly important when considering healthcare, disability support, aged care and education.

A standard procedure may provide a useful foundation, but that does not mean every individual will experience or benefit from it in exactly the same way.

For example, one resident may be capable of managing their own hydration, while another may require encouragement, reminders or physical assistance in accordance with their care plan.

One person may prefer a warm room during personal care, while another may have different comfort or clinical needs. One person may value a highly structured routine, while another may feel more comfortable when given flexibility and control over their day.

Individualised care requires recognising these differences rather than assuming a single approach will adequately serve everyone.

I believe personalised care plans, practical checklists and clear communication can help translate this understanding into daily practice.

However, checklists must remain tools rather than replacements for professional judgement.

There is a risk that introducing additional procedures can create unnecessary paperwork, reduce flexibility or encourage workers to focus on recording tasks rather than understanding them.

This means that any system intended to improve care should itself be evaluated.

If it does not achieve these outcomes, it may require modification or replacement.

The purpose of individualisation is not to eliminate standards. It is to establish reliable standards while allowing appropriate flexibility for the people those standards exist to protect.

Prevention and the Responsibility to Think Ahead

I believe one of the most effective ways to improve services is to recognise problems before they become more serious.

Prevention is not always dramatic. It may involve checking that an environment is safe, communicating a change in someone's circumstances, preparing equipment before a task or recognising that a person may require additional assistance.

In aged care, preparing a comfortable environment before personal care may reduce avoidable distress. Ensuring appropriate hydration support may prevent a need from going unmet. Clear pedestrian arrangements around vehicle access points may reduce the risk of an accident.

However, prevention must also be approached critically.

Not every possible risk can be eliminated, and not every preventive measure is practical or justified. Some proposed safeguards may create new difficulties, restrict personal freedom or consume resources better directed elsewhere.

A responsible approach should consider the likelihood and severity of harm, the effectiveness of available measures, the resources required and any unintended consequences.

Prevention should not become an excuse for excessive control or the removal of reasonable personal choice.

The objective is to identify avoidable harm and reduce it in ways that are proportionate, practical and consistent with individual rights.

Training means understanding the purpose

I believe training should involve more than teaching someone how to perform a task.

A worker should understand why the task matters, what outcome it is intended to achieve and how to recognise when the usual approach may not be suitable.

This requires practical knowledge, judgement, communication and the ability to recognise when guidance is needed.

In care settings, the distinction can be significant.

A worker may understand how to complete a personal care routine but still need guidance about communicating with a resident, maintaining privacy, recognising discomfort or accommodating an individual preference.

Similarly, a business employee may know how to clean a vehicle without understanding how to recognise vulnerable materials, communicate a limitation or identify when a requested service could cause damage.

I believe organisations should consider ongoing learning as part of ordinary operations rather than something that ends when initial training is completed.

Periodic refresher training, supervised practice, mentoring and opportunities for feedback could help maintain consistency.

However, a fixed training frequency should not automatically be imposed across every organisation or occupation.

For example, six-monthly refresher sessions may be useful in some environments, but their frequency, content and effectiveness should be assessed against actual risks, professional requirements, workforce needs and available evidence.

Training must also be accompanied by practical support. Requiring workers to demonstrate competence while denying them sufficient time, equipment or guidance creates a contradiction between expectations and reality.

The purpose of development should be to increase a person's ability to succeed, exercise sound judgement and accept greater responsibility where appropriate.

Complaints should change something

I believe a functioning institution should have a way to recognise when its systems are not delivering their intended results.

Complaints, worker feedback, observations, incidents and service outcomes can all provide information about where improvement may be necessary.

However, collecting information is not the same as using it.

An organisation may have a complaints procedure, but if recurring concerns do not lead to meaningful consideration or action, the procedure risks becoming an administrative exercise.

A useful improvement process should identify the concern, investigate its causes, assess reasonable options, implement appropriate changes and review whether those changes have worked.

It should also allow people to challenge conclusions, raise concerns without inappropriate retaliation and receive clear communication about the matters that affect them.

Not every complaint will be justified, and not every proposed solution will be practical. Some concerns will involve conflicting perspectives, incomplete information or expectations that cannot reasonably be met.

This is why fair investigation matters.

Feedback should neither be dismissed simply because it is uncomfortable nor accepted without examination simply because someone has expressed dissatisfaction.

The purpose is to understand what is happening as accurately as possible.

An institution should be willing to recognise that an existing procedure may be inadequate, even when the people responsible for creating it acted with good intentions.

Likewise, it should be willing to retain procedures that are working, despite criticism that is not supported by the evidence.

This reflects one of the central commitments of the Century Manifesto:

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

These are not reasons to abandon reform. They are reasons to develop it carefully.

I believe policies become stronger when we acknowledge the questions that remain unanswered rather than presenting a preferred solution as though its effectiveness has already been established.

The Larger Century Principle

At its foundation, this discussion is not simply about aged care.

It is about the relationship between people and the systems we create to serve them.

Institutions are necessary because individuals cannot reasonably provide every service, manage every risk or meet every need independently. We create organisations, professions and systems to share responsibilities and make complex work possible.

But as those institutions grow, there is a risk that maintaining the system becomes more important than fulfilling the purpose for which it was established.

Procedures become habits. Responsibilities become disconnected. Problems become normalised because they are familiar. Success becomes measured by what is recorded rather than what people experience.

Not because every established system is wrong, or because those working within it have failed, but because even well-designed institutions require examination, correction and adaptation.

I do not expect perfection from human beings, and I do not believe perfect systems are achievable.

What I expect is a willingness to recognise preventable harm, understand why problems occur, take reasonable responsibility and improve where possible.

A society that values compassion must make room for human mistakes and different needs. A society that values accountability must also be prepared to act when those mistakes reveal recurring failures.

Neither principle should exist without the other.

I want an institution that can investigate both personal conduct and system design. If the same complaint recurs across shifts, workers or locations, it may point beyond one individual. If a complaint is mistaken, the institution should be able to explain that fairly without humiliating the person who raised it. Useful feedback requires protection from retaliation, appropriate privacy and a record of what action followed.

There will always be trade-offs: time used on documentation is time not spent delivering care; unnecessary forms can make staff less effective; and the easiest number to count may not describe what matters. The answer is not to abandon standards. It is to examine whether each procedure helps people meet the real need, protects rights and gives workers the resources to do their job.

This volume began with barriers to opportunity. It has ended with institutions that can either remove those barriers or create new ones. I want people encouraged to develop their strengths, rewarded for genuine effort, protected when they cannot work and listened to when a system fails them. Those commitments require public resources, individual responsibility, lawful standards and a willingness to change course.

But there is another question we have not yet answered. What happens when a person's choices deliberately harm somebody else? A society that protects dignity must also protect victims, distinguish mistake from wrongdoing and decide how authority should respond to danger. That is where the next volume turns—to justice, rehabilitation and public safety.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME VII

Justice, Rehabilitation And Public Safety

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

Crime Is Not One Cause or One Population

A person assaulted on a train does not need a lecture about how society works before somebody helps them. They need safety. A family whose car has been stolen does not need to be told that crime is a complicated social phenomenon as though that makes the loss less real. Yet after responding to those immediate harms, we are still responsible for asking why crimes happen and what might prevent the next victim. I refuse to choose between those duties.

The mistake is to imagine that every crime must have the same cause, or that every geographical pattern reveals the character of the people living there. A place where more crimes are recorded is not automatically a place whose residents commit more crimes. A person who understands that poverty and peer pressure can influence behaviour has not excused violence. Understanding and accountability are questions that belong together.

What a crime map cannot tell us

I believe one of the biggest mistakes we make when discussing crime and immigration is assuming that two patterns appearing in the same place automatically means one caused the other. When looking at Melbourne's crime maps, we can identify areas where recorded offences are more concentrated. But does that automatically mean the people living in those areas are responsible? And if those areas also have larger immigrant populations, does that prove immigration is the cause? I don't believe it does. We need to examine the circumstances that shape where people live, where crime occurs and why individuals become involved in criminal behaviour.

Think about how people choose where to live. The same amount of money might afford someone a larger home further from the city or a smaller apartment closer to employment, education and public transport. But that decision isn't always a genuine choice. For someone arriving in Australia, or someone already struggling financially, housing options may be limited by income, employment opportunities, transport, rental availability and access to support networks. People naturally gravitate towards places where they can afford to live and access the services they need. If certain neighbourhoods have higher proportions of renters, overseas-born residents and recorded crime, we should investigate why those patterns exist rather than assume one explains another.

Population density, commercial activity, transport hubs, economic disadvantage and the movement of people through an area can all influence recorded crime. And we need to remember that the location of an offence does not necessarily tell us where the offender lives, let alone their background. Where crime happens and who commits it are two different questions.

Recorded offences, recorded victims, alleged offenders proceeded against by police, survey-based victimisation and convictions are distinct measures. Their definitions, time periods and denominators need to be identified before they are combined. I would not want to build policy on a dramatic map that fails to separate a busy shopping street from a residential neighbourhood, or a

reported event from a proven offence. Differences in policing and reporting can also affect the patterns we see.

The latest available Australian Bureau of Statistics releases include recorded victims for calendar year 2025 and recorded alleged offenders for 2024–25. They do not turn the presence of migrants or renters in an area into proof of criminal responsibility. Those are different datasets answering different questions. [1]

Different crimes have different causes, and different individuals make decisions for different reasons. Statistics can show us patterns. They can identify areas where problems are concentrated and help us determine where further investigation is needed. But statistics do not automatically explain the underlying causes. We need to examine housing, employment, population density, economic opportunity, education, family environments, policing practices, social influences and individual responsibility. We also need to be willing to challenge our own assumptions when the evidence points somewhere unexpected. If we discover a genuine problem, we should be willing to acknowledge it regardless of whether the findings are politically convenient.

That includes examining immigration-related questions fairly, without automatically blaming immigrants or refusing to investigate legitimate concerns. The goal should not be to find a demographic group to blame. The goal should be to understand the conditions that contribute to crime and determine how to reduce it. Because if we genuinely want safer communities, we need more than statistics, assumptions and political arguments. We need to understand the people, environments and systems behind the numbers. Correlation is not causation. And understanding the cause is the first step towards fixing the problem.

This argument follows the cultural question developed in Volume II. If we reject collective blame when discussing religion and immigration, we cannot quietly bring collective blame back when discussing justice. People must answer for their actions; they should not be sentenced by surname, neighbourhood or the traditions they inherited.

CHAPTER 02

Immediate Protection and Long-Term Prevention

My pothole principle starts with an ordinary observation. When somebody is in immediate danger, we deal with that danger. We do not leave a hole in the road because a future engineering study might explain why the road keeps breaking. But we also do not keep patching the same surface forever without investigating drainage, design, materials or maintenance. Public safety needs both kinds of work.

More visible police or security may be a reasonable immediate response where a transport interchange is unsafe. Reliable reporting, emergency response and enforcement can protect people who cannot postpone their journeys. That does not mean that the number of officers standing on a platform proves the long-term causes of danger have been fixed. Public safety policy should be measured through what happens to the people using the service, not merely through activity statistics.

See, I agree with your latter point, but disagree with the first. We absolutely need more funding for public resources, education, mental health services and community support to help prevent crime before it happens. But that doesn't mean we should reduce policing and public safety in areas where people are already experiencing crime. We shouldn't automatically vilify police for doing their job and keeping people safe. Instead, we should be improving their training, accountability and operating standards so unlawful behaviour is addressed on both sides. Police misconduct and discrimination should never be ignored, but neither should the safety of the general public.

I think making public transport safer is a good FIRST step, provided these measures are properly monitored and held accountable. We need people to feel comfortable catching trains and using public transport again. Public transport, carpooling and other shared transport options should be encouraged, protected and incentivised, not just to support disadvantaged communities, but to benefit society as a whole. More people using shared transportation means fewer individual cars on the road, less congestion, potentially lower emissions and reduced environmental impacts. Making these systems safer, more affordable and reliable encourages more people to use them, which can support further investment and expansion, particularly into regional areas and communities currently lacking adequate transport options.

It's not about choosing policing over public services. It's about investing in both immediate protection and long-term prevention while building a more accessible, sustainable and environmentally responsible transport network. One addresses the problems we're facing today, while the other helps prevent them tomorrow. Both are necessary if we genuinely want to improve society.

I want police held to high standards precisely because their responsibility is important. Training, clear legal powers, independent complaints and accurate records are protections for members of the public and for officers doing their jobs lawfully. An approach that simply vilifies police will not help a victim waiting for assistance. An approach that treats every police decision as beyond criticism will not build lasting trust either.

Long-term prevention must be more precise than a vague promise of opportunities. If an area has repeated youth violence, what ages and offences are involved? Are specific schools, transport connections, supervised recreation or youth services absent? Are there hours when risky conduct concentrates? Are there identifiable disputes? Is there a way for affected residents to explain what

they actually experience? If investment is proposed, it should have a theory of change and independent measures of safety.

There is also a distribution question. It would be unjust to tell a disadvantaged community it must tolerate danger until a prevention program produces results. But it would be equally irresponsible to spend indefinitely on reactive enforcement while allowing the same preventable failures to continue. The immediate protective response and the long-term preventive response must be funded, reviewed and improved together.

CHAPTER 03

What Justice Owes Victims

It's easy for a conversation about rehabilitation to forget the person who was hurt. I don't want that. Victims deserve safety, recognition and actual support. But if we don't think about what stops the next offence, we're leaving the next victim out of the conversation too.

Discussions about rehabilitation sometimes make victims sound like a background detail in the offender's personal development. I reject that. Justice must recognise harm, offer appropriate protection and support, and consider whether a decision exposes someone else to danger. People affected by violence may need safety planning, accessible services, financial help, reliable communication and a process that treats them with respect rather than asking them to repeatedly relive events without purpose.

Victims don't all want the same sentence or outcome. Some seek the strongest lawful punishment; others prioritise restitution, answers, protection or confidence that nobody else will be harmed. We shouldn't claim to speak for every victim, nor should a person's reluctance to participate in a justice process be treated as a lack of concern. Their needs should help shape services while decisions about guilt and sentence remain subject to independent law and evidence.

A public safety system also owes the community honesty. If a program claims to reduce reoffending, what behaviour does it measure? Does it mean fewer arrests, fewer proven offences, fewer returns to custody or fewer serious violent harms? Are people followed for long enough? Does a reduction for one group come with worse outcomes somewhere else? These aren't technical questions for experts alone: they determine whether the public can trust claims that a policy has succeeded.

I would support transparent information about victim services and safety outcomes, without exposing private details or reducing human suffering to one performance indicator. Costs matter because money spent without benefit can't help other people, but a victim's wellbeing isn't a line item that can be responsibly ignored simply because it is difficult to measure.

Support that survives the courtroom

A person harmed by serious offending may be required to deal with police, a court, health professionals, insurers, workplaces or housing providers. Every institution can have its own form, timetable and definition of what it can offer. The person may have to explain the experience repeatedly while trying to recover some stability in ordinary life. I believe a system concerned with justice should examine whether this process itself adds avoidable hardship.

One possible reform to evaluate is better coordination of lawful support and clearer explanation of what help is available. That doesn't mean creating one giant file accessible to every agency. Privacy, consent and safeguarding matter. It means identifying where existing services can refer people responsibly, whether an individual has to restart the same process repeatedly and whether information is understandable when someone is under pressure.

A department might report the number of victim-support referrals, but I would also want evidence about access, satisfaction, waiting times and whether the person received support appropriate to their needs. The victim shouldn't have to accept contact from an offender, participate in mediation or approve a policy simply because the institution wants a neat success story. A system can listen to different victims without converting their pain into a political endorsement.

Victim support in Victoria already includes the Victims of Crime Financial Assistance Scheme for eligible victims of violent crime, which can contribute to counselling, medical costs and other recovery needs. This is an existing public measure, not a new Century invention. I want to ask who falls through its gaps, whether people know it exists and whether its processes impose unnecessary new burdens. [2]

A victim should not be required to forgive an offender, meet them in a restorative program or perform public resilience for a service provider. Restorative practices may be meaningful for some; for others they would be unwanted or unsafe. A credible system permits informed choice and protects privacy. A criminal case belongs to the rule of law even when the people harmed understandably seek particular outcomes.

I also think families, witnesses and people who have to live near the scene of repeated offending deserve attention. Crime can change a whole community's willingness to travel, socialise or allow children independence. Support should recognise practical effects such as missed work, housing instability and fear of repeated contact. Listening to victims does not mean reducing them to an argument for whichever punishment a political party already prefers.

CHAPTER 04

Proportionate Responses to Different Wrongs

Not every wrong deserves the same response. Someone making a stupid mistake isn't the same as somebody deliberately committing serious violence. If we stop making distinctions, how can we say the punishment is fair?

Society needs rules, but rules become difficult to defend when the response ignores the difference between mistakes, nuisance, repeated intimidation, dangerous behaviour and severe violence. A young person making an offensive remark isn't the same as someone threatening another person's safety. A first minor property offence isn't the same as repeated serious offending. The response should examine seriousness, circumstances, evidence, history, risks and the legal rights of everybody involved.

I am not suggesting that a harmful act becomes harmless because the offender had a difficult childhood or says they did not intend it. Victims experience consequences regardless of what an offender meant. I am saying that understanding the circumstances can help determine which response is fair and which response is most likely to prevent repetition. An explanation isn't automatically an excuse. Accountability remains necessary, but it should be proportionate and connected to the actual wrongdoing.

For less serious offending, the options worth examining can include restitution, supervised community-based responses, education, restorative processes where appropriate and supported pathways away from further crime. Such measures must not pressure victims to participate or expose them to fresh harm. Some circumstances require stronger restrictions, and there are cases in which imprisonment is needed to protect the public. A good system should recognise those distinctions rather than promoting either punishment or leniency as the answer to everything.

The strongest objection is that individualised responses can look inconsistent or unfair. Two people may receive different outcomes for apparently similar acts, and victims can rightly question why one offender appears to receive an opportunity another did not. That is why factors affecting decisions need to be stated, recorded and reviewable. Consistency means applying fair principles to relevant differences, not pretending every person and offence is identical.

Dangerous conduct, honest mistakes and repeated harm

If somebody makes a mistake and the consequence leaves them with no realistic way back into work or community, have we protected society or just created another problem? That doesn't apply in the same way to every offence. We have to judge the risk and seriousness before choosing what comes next.

When somebody leaves custody, they may face barriers to housing, employment, training, identification, healthcare and trust. Some restrictions are justified by particular risks; others may continue long after their safety purpose has been served. We should ask whether every barrier makes the public safer or whether some make stable lawful participation harder. A system can hold people accountable while still considering how they will live after punishment.

Imagine someone leaving a short sentence with few qualifications, limited savings and no secure address. If they can't attend training, obtain transport or access safe accommodation, it is misleading to say the state has given them every opportunity merely because a leaflet lists services. That doesn't remove their obligation to obey the law. It raises the question of whether the conditions for complying are realistic and whether intervention could reduce further harm.

An appropriate plan might connect a person with lawful identification, health supports, literacy or training, housing referrals, employment assistance and supervision fitted to risk. The agencies involved would need defined responsibilities and communication that preserves privacy. Programs shouldn't become compulsory performances designed only to improve the department's statistics. Quality, suitability and independent evaluation matter.

A fair objection is that these services could be viewed as rewards denied to people who have never offended. That is a serious fairness question, not a reason for automatic rejection. Investments can be justified by the public interest in preventing further victims, and support for offenders must not displace basic support for people harmed by crime or other people facing hardship. We must compare choices fairly across the whole system.

Consider a person who commits a low-level, non-violent offence and hasn't previously come into serious conflict with the law. A diversionary pathway might combine meaningful accountability with addressing causes such as unmet support needs or poor decision-making. If effective, it could prevent unnecessary criminalisation and future harm. But if a scheme simply sends someone through a short course without checking whether the behaviour changes, the word 'rehabilitation' becomes little more than branding.

I would ask how candidates are selected, what obligations they accept, whether participation is actually voluntary where required, how victims' interests are protected and what happens when a participant fails to comply. No program should give preferential treatment merely because someone has a better lawyer, a persuasive story or an easier background for administrators to manage. Equally, a rigid rule that ignores disability or legitimate barriers may create unequal outcomes while claiming consistency.

The strongest objection is that alternative sanctions can appear too soft and risk repeated wrongdoing. That should be tested against appropriate comparators and public-safety results, not dismissed or accepted on instinct alone. If a model fails to reduce harm or makes accountability meaningless, it should be redesigned or discontinued. If it protects people more effectively than a short custodial penalty, toughness as a slogan shouldn't prevent consideration.

I am not inventing proportional sentencing. Victorian law already includes just punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation, denunciation and community protection as authorised sentencing purposes, alongside principles including proportionality and parsimony. [3] What matters for this Manifesto is whether those principles are expressed clearly enough to be understood and consistently enough to be trusted. A legal framework can have sound aims while particular procedures produce unreasonable results.

Some people are dangerous enough that the community needs protecting from them. I don't pretend a class or training course suddenly makes that risk disappear. Prison can be necessary. The question is what happens while somebody is there, and whether we're doing anything that reduces future harm.

Compassion doesn't mean releasing someone simply because they tell a convincing story about changing. Some conduct poses grave dangers. A society has a duty to protect others, enforce lawful sentences and recognise the severity of serious wrongdoing. I believe secure imprisonment can be necessary where proportionate and justified. Rehabilitation should never become a promise of release regardless of current risk, legal requirements or victim safety.

Yet serious confinement creates heavy duties for the state. A person doesn't lose inherent dignity because they have been convicted. Custodial authorities control food, healthcare, movement, access to family, privacy and everyday safety in ways most employers and service providers do not. That

control makes abuse more dangerous, and it increases the obligation to provide lawful living conditions, access to review and protection against arbitrary treatment.

The human-rights test can't disappear at a prison gate. The Victorian Charter recognises rights including protection against cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and humane treatment of persons deprived of liberty. [J1] International standards such as the United Nations Nelson Mandela Rules address humane treatment and access to rehabilitation, education and suitable work. [J2] These protections aren't guarantees of comfort or immunity from lawful restrictions; they are the minimum standards that distinguish accountable custody from unchecked force.

The practical question is how a corrections system balances safety, accountability and opportunities for change without allowing any of them to become a slogan. That requires trained staff, suitable facilities, evidence-based risk assessment and genuine review mechanisms. It also requires admitting where a program fails rather than shifting all responsibility onto the person in custody.

There are offenders whose level of danger makes extended or very long-term custody necessary. Saying that does not require believing that all people who offend are beyond change. Nor does belief in rehabilitation require release where credible evidence shows continuing unacceptable risk. Risk assessments need scrutiny: officials must explain what they can predict, what they cannot and how review works.

CHAPTER 05

Young Offenders and the Environment

I am interested in why a young person may become involved in dangerous conduct when many others exposed to similar influences do not. Peer approval, excitement and status can matter. But those words do not explain an entire person. They are possible influences to investigate, not diagnoses made from a television program or a suburb.

I do not believe violent entertainment alone explains youth crime. There are broader influences that deserve attention. Poverty, unstable housing, family environments, trauma, education, peer pressure, access to opportunities and individual circumstances can all contribute to a person's development. Some young people may be attracted to crime through excitement, status, belonging or the approval of their peers. Others may be responding to desperation, instability or harmful influences. And some simply make harmful choices for which they must be held accountable. But I want to understand how these influences interact. Could certain media environments reinforce aggressive attitudes in some vulnerable young people?

Could online communities reward dangerous behaviour with attention and popularity? Could repeated exposure to criminal behaviour affect how some young people perceive risk, consequences and social acceptance? These are questions worth investigating rather than assuming we already know the answers. Millions of young people consume violent entertainment without committing crimes. That matters. It suggests we should examine the differences between young people who offend and those who do not, rather than blaming an entire generation. We should also distinguish between genuine changes in crime rates, particular types of offending and public perceptions of crime. And when someone does commit a serious offence, protecting the community and holding that person accountable must remain priorities.

Understanding the circumstances that contributed to offending should help us prevent future victims, not excuse existing harm.

I also believe we need to look more deeply into why some young people become involved in criminal behaviour. Not every young offender is motivated by a desire to seriously harm another person. Some may be chasing adrenaline, recognition, excitement, status or approval from their peers. Others may be influenced by their upbringing, economic circumstances, social environment or exposure to criminal behaviour. This raises another question I think deserves investigation. What influence does our increasingly stimulating environment have on young people? We live in a world of constant entertainment, social media, instant gratification and exposure to behaviour that can sometimes be dangerous, reckless or antisocial.

I wonder whether repeated exposure to certain behaviours, combined with peer pressure and an individual's personal circumstances, can influence how some young people perceive risk and consequences. That does not mean video games, social media or entertainment automatically create criminals. Millions of people consume the same content without ever committing a crime. And that is precisely why the question interests me. If millions of young people experience similar media and entertainment, why do only some go on to offend? What separates those who recognise the consequences of their actions from those who disregard them? Could family environments, education, positive role models, emotional development, peer groups and experiences with authority influence that difference?

And what role does the perception of consequences play? These are questions I believe are worth investigating rather than dismissing or assuming we already understand.

Understanding someone's circumstances does not mean excusing their actions. If someone commits a crime, they should still be held accountable. Victims deserve protection, communities deserve safety and people should be able to use public spaces without fear. But accountability and prevention are not opposing ideas. We can investigate why people offend while still enforcing laws and protecting the community. We can invest in police and public safety while also investing in housing, education, youth programs, employment opportunities and community support. In fact, I believe doing both is essential. If we only respond after crimes occur, we may continuously deal with the consequences without addressing the conditions contributing to them.

But if we only focus on prevention and neglect immediate public safety, we risk abandoning the people currently experiencing harm.

An offender may have sought adrenaline or status and still have frightened or seriously injured somebody. That harm remains theirs to answer for. The reason to ask about motivation is to intervene earlier and more effectively. We should not use speculative theories about games, movies or social media as substitutes for longitudinal research that separates correlation, selection effects and the experiences of people who never offend.

Youth justice also involves different developmental capacities, family environments and prospects for change. I cannot simply copy every adult punishment into a youth system and assume fairness. Nor should the fact that a person is young mean victims are left exposed to repeated violence. Child protection, youth development, school exclusion, transport access, family support and lawful supervision can all intersect in ways that require careful decisions rather than slogans.

If a young person is repeatedly offending, I want to know what support or consequences were actually delivered. Was a placement available, was it safe and did anyone follow up? Were the conditions intelligible to the young person? Did the program reduce harm or merely record attendance? Failure may lie in the person's choices, an inaccessible service or both. We do not know without examining the detail.

CHAPTER 06

Rehabilitation and Meaningful Prison Activity

People still need skills, structure and some reason to improve. What if prison work helped pay for training, supported restitution and taught people something useful? I'd want to know who runs it, whether prisoners are safe and how we stop it turning into a business that profits from keeping them inside.

I have argued that where people have realistic capacity and opportunity, making an effort should matter. That principle doesn't stop applying because somebody is in prison. Education, literacy, trades, counselling and suitable work may help a person develop skills, contribute to shared responsibilities and prepare for life after release. They may also improve how people spend their days in custody. But an opportunity isn't genuine simply because a manager records it as available.

A person may have learning difficulties, a disability, trauma, health needs or a security classification that prevents access to a particular placement. Prison resources may be limited; not every course is offered everywhere. An institution must establish whether an activity was actually available, safe, accessible and suited to the individual before describing refusal as deliberate unwillingness. I would want individual opportunity plans, opportunities for participation, recorded reasons for nonparticipation and fair routes to challenge an inaccurate assessment.

Work must never become an excuse for exploitation. The Mandela Rules discuss useful work, vocational preparation, protections against servitude and remuneration, and caution against subordinating the interests of prisoners and their training to institutional profit. [J2] A system that treats prisoners as cheap labour while providing little skill development would fail the same responsibility test I apply to businesses. Fair incentives and carefully justified privileges can be discussed, but essential rights, medical care and humane custody aren't bargaining chips.

A workshop that teaches more than obedience

Contribution doesn't need to mean a high-paying job. It can mean acquiring literacy, completing appropriate education, supporting a lawful program, developing employable skills, taking responsibility for conduct or participating in rehabilitation suited to the person. Some people can't participate conventionally. Their inability shouldn't become an excuse to deny minimum protections. Likewise, a person with capacity who intentionally refuses every suitable opportunity creates a legitimate policy question about how resources and privileges are allocated. The answer must still be lawful, proportionate and independently reviewable.

Custody creates special challenges. Staff must manage safety between people with different needs and risks, including serious violence. Prisoners can have health and disability support needs, histories of trauma or communication barriers, but those circumstances don't remove the need for security rules or lawful discipline. A system that pretends these pressures are simple may endanger both prisoners and staff.

I would want institutional reviews to examine safety incidents, access to appropriate health services, complaints about mistreatment, staff working conditions and the quality of program delivery. More reports alone don't establish more abuse, because better reporting systems may initially reveal problems that were previously hidden. Likewise, a reduction in formal complaints could reflect either improvement or fear of retaliation. Measurements need interpretation, independent safeguards and the willingness to listen to people with direct experience.

A prisoner must have meaningful access to independent scrutiny of serious rights concerns. Staff should also have safe channels to report unsafe conditions and poor management. A workplace that discourages incident reporting isn't made safer by impressive statistics. I don't want to romanticise prisons as rehabilitation centres or write them off as hopeless. They are coercive public institutions, and that means their use of power needs exceptional accountability.

When somebody leaves custody, they may face barriers to housing, employment, training, identification, healthcare and trust. Some restrictions are justified by particular risks; others may continue long after their safety purpose has been served. We should ask whether every barrier makes the public safer or whether some make stable lawful participation harder. A system can hold people accountable while still considering how they will live after punishment.

Imagine someone leaving a short sentence with few qualifications, limited savings and no secure address. If they can't attend training, obtain transport or access safe accommodation, it is misleading to say the state has given them every opportunity merely because a leaflet lists services. That doesn't remove their obligation to obey the law. It raises the question of whether the conditions for complying are realistic and whether intervention could reduce further harm.

An appropriate plan might connect a person with lawful identification, health supports, literacy or training, housing referrals, employment assistance and supervision fitted to risk. The agencies involved would need defined responsibilities and communication that preserves privacy. Programs shouldn't become compulsory performances designed only to improve the department's statistics. Quality, suitability and independent evaluation matter.

Prison industries, education and transition services are not imaginary inventions. Existing corrective systems already operate such programs. That matters, because a new proposal should identify what actually differs from current practice rather than rely on the novelty of its presentation. The 2026 Productivity Commission data report that 80.4 per cent of prisoners deemed eligible for employment were employed in 2024–25; that figure says nothing by itself about wage adequacy, personal choice or subsequent rehabilitation. [4]

My thought experiment is to explore whether some suitably classified prisoners could live in a secure but more open compound, undertake meaningful workshops, agricultural tasks or supervised maintenance, and gain qualifications. I imagine something more constructive than leaving a person idle, but I do not claim the setting is safe or financially efficient merely because I can picture it. Some prisoners require a different level of supervision; some cannot work safely; some need specialised treatment.

Another part of my idea is a secure compound with high fences and appropriate guards, where suitable prisoners have more movement within a defined internal area. Instead of relying on a small cell for every waking hour, they might maintain shared facilities, tend gardens, help grow some food, use modular classrooms, learn trades and gradually build a functional community. I pictured a place with communal bathrooms, available water, basic growing supplies and a chance to improve its own environment. In the most successful version, people could experience a relatively normal daily routine without asking the public to pay for unnecessary luxuries.

That picture is a proposal to test, not a promise of a cheap prison. High fencing, trained staff, emergency response, safe buildings, sanitation, health services, utilities, education, transport and oversight can remain expensive even when prisoners grow vegetables. Food gardens are seasonal and unreliable as a sole source of nutrition. People in custody can't simply be told to survive on whatever the group produces. The government retains responsibility for adequate meals, drinkable water, beds, climate-appropriate accommodation, health services, disability access, hygiene and

protection from violence. Nor should a person be required to work for basic food or safety. The opportunity to improve communal life is different from a threat of deprivation.

The word 'communal' also must not disguise risks between prisoners. More freedom of movement can mean greater opportunity for mutual support, but it can also mean intimidation, exclusion, assaults and informal power hierarchies. Safety requires more than fences around the perimeter. If an open or farm-style arrangement can't manage a particular risk, then it isn't appropriate for that person. People convicted of grave violence can't automatically be sent to a more open setting just because doing so might look cheaper. Placement must be individually justified by safety, sentence, security needs, health and review rights. There must be realistic options for people unable to garden, maintain facilities or live safely in a large communal group.

I would also be careful about the distinction between a lower-cost placement and a lower-standard placement. The deprivation of liberty and lawful loss of certain privileges are already serious consequences. Different custody levels may justifiably offer different levels of autonomy and activities, but baseline dignity and protection aren't privileges to be earned. Someone who refuses available, suitable work might have fewer additional incentives or less eligibility for an optional program after a fair decision. They don't lose the right to adequate food, water, healthcare, sanitation, safety or access to complaints.

I would want any trial to distinguish a real training placement from a commercial job, communal upkeep from labour for an outside buyer, and genuine choice from coercion. Accessible education should count as meaningful progress, not a lesser form of contribution than producing a marketable item. These are people who may eventually re-enter workplaces and communities, not merely units of prison output.

CHAPTER 07

The Full Cost of Custody

Every time we talk about saving money on prisons, I want somebody to show the whole calculation. Not just the building and meals, but staff, healthcare, security, education, reoffending and costs placed on other people. A saving that creates more victims later isn't a saving worth pretending about.

I have raised concern about the amount society spends maintaining prisons, particularly where people appear to reject opportunities to change. I believe finite public money should be used effectively. Victims, children, housing programs, hospitals and educational pathways all compete for resources, so the cost of a corrections policy deserves serious investigation. But it would be dishonest to say that every dollar spent on an imprisoned person is waste merely because they aren't currently working.

A prison pays for buildings, security, healthcare, staffing, training and safety regardless of any one person's participation. A program that lowers the average daily cost but increases serious reoffending may cost the community far more. A policy that transfers expenses from prisons to hospitals, courts, families or homelessness services can't honestly claim all of those costs disappeared. Nor can spending more automatically establish that an intervention is humane or effective.

I would want an independent model comparing realistic alternatives: current custody, improved education and skills, better reintegration, suitable community sanctions and secure long-term imprisonment where necessary. It would include the impact on victims, staff, future offending, courts and police, and it would report assumptions transparently. We need to distinguish a measured observation about prison costs from a hypothesis that one proposed reform will reduce them.

The strongest economic criticism of my concern is that expensive interventions can still be justified when they protect rights or prevent grave harm. I agree. Human dignity isn't a promise that every right will be provided without cost. It is a requirement to consider whether the cost is justified by the protections involved. Efficiency must describe doing necessary things well, not removing necessary things from the accounts and calling the result a saving.

Revenue does not erase the cost of keeping somebody safe

Imagine a government considering an education program inside a prison. The direct cost includes teachers, materials, secure space, administration and time taken away from other activities. Possible benefits might include recognised qualifications, more constructive daily routines, improved employability after release and fewer future offences. Some benefits may accrue years later and be difficult to attribute to the course alone. Staff safety or wellbeing might improve, remain unchanged or worsen during implementation depending on the design.

An honest study would identify the baseline and compare people who had similar needs and opportunities, rather than claiming success because those most motivated to participate later did better. It would examine dropouts, barriers to enrolment and who was excluded. It should follow participants long enough to detect meaningful outcomes, while protecting personal information. A headline figure about savings can't replace that work.

The state can reasonably consider public cost, but shouldn't ignore the distribution of that cost. A scheme might reduce one department's spending by shifting risk to families or social services. A

prison with low per-person spending may have fewer useful programs or worse health outcomes. A justice system that appears inexpensive only because it leaves victims unsupported or gives staff unsafe conditions hasn't proved efficiency. It has moved the bill somewhere else.

Imagine a prison warehouse. It has sold or supplied lawful goods and, after we have honestly counted its actual operating expenses, we are told it has an additional $10,000 surplus. My first instinct is to ask why all of that money should disappear into a general budget or accumulate for the benefit of a small group. Could some support wider public services, while the remainder improves the environment and opportunities of the people who produced it? Could money pay for classrooms, training equipment, safer facilities, mental-health supports, better amenities or incentives for the workers involved? Before we call it a $10,000 benefit, though, the accounts need to be clear. Did the calculation include prisoner remuneration, the full share of supervision and security, equipment, electricity, insurance, transport, maintenance, training, health and safety, administration, depreciation and the opportunity cost of buildings? Were customers paying market prices, or was another department quietly subsidising the warehouse? Did commercial customers gain an unfair advantage from labour conditions that an ordinary business couldn't lawfully use? The number has meaning only after those questions are answered.

If a genuine surplus remains, I would want a published allocation rule rather than a manager spending it as they please. A possible rule could provide for fair worker payments and savings, where appropriate victim restitution and lawful obligations, reinvestment in training and conditions, and a transparent contribution to public purposes. The percentages aren't settled by me; they require costing and participation from workers, correctional staff, victims' representatives, economists and independent reviewers. A transfer between two public accounts isn't new wealth for the country just because somebody calls it a tax. The accounting should say what resources were actually created and who received them.

The 2026 Report on Government Services gives several different cost concepts. It reports national recurrent corrective-services expenditure of about $7.0 billion for 2024–25 across custody and community corrections, and a national recurrent-cost measure including capital costs of $440.60 per prisoner per day. The latter is not a claim about the direct marginal saving from releasing one prisoner or the net income of a proposed prison farm. It also should not be transferred uncritically across jurisdictions. [4]

Any comparison should identify the perspective of the calculation. A government may save one expense while a family pays a new one; a corrections department may report revenue while its healthcare and infrastructure costs sit elsewhere. Lower spending is not automatically a better result if violence, untreated illness or subsequent offending increases. A higher upfront expense can be justified if it reliably prevents serious future harm. But that needs evidence and a reasonable comparison period.

Even where an intervention produces a genuine surplus, the public deserves to know the terms of trade. Was the product sold at fair market prices? Did local firms or workers lose opportunities? Did correctional staff absorb hidden extra work? Were prisoners paid fairly under the applicable framework? The answer should be an independently audited whole-system account rather than a promotional figure chosen by whichever institution wants funding.

CHAPTER 08

Capital Punishment: A Position Under Challenge

Here is the most difficult disagreement in my own philosophy, and I do not want it edited out of the record. I believe human beings have inherent worth. I have also expressed support for the possibility of capital punishment in some of the most extreme cases, particularly where a person has committed a heinous offence and subsequently refuses genuine opportunities to contribute or reform. Those convictions sit in serious tension. I have not reconciled them.

The position I actually expressed

I want this to be clear, because the way this argument has been rewritten at times has made it sound like something else. I am not suggesting that someone convicted of a terrible crime should automatically be executed, or that everyone in prison should face the same conditions. My position is that people convicted of the most heinous acts should face a choice of working towards their keep in prison or death. They made a decision that caused devastating harm, sometimes taking another person's life. I believe that decision should carry consequences serious enough to reflect what they have done.

I know people will disagree with me, and I want them to explain why. But I don't want an editor to turn my position into a general question about a prisoner choosing to die because life in prison is unpleasant. That isn't the argument I am making. I am questioning why someone who has knowingly done the worst harm to another person should then be able to refuse every reasonable opportunity to contribute while the community carries the whole cost of keeping them in custody.

I have said it before: they committed the crime; they do the time. If you do not want those consequences, the starting point is not to murder, sexually assault or deliberately inflict extreme harm on somebody. People outside prison are expected to work, pay taxes, care for others and take responsibility for their choices. Why should prison automatically mean there is no expectation that a person who can genuinely contribute should do so?

But here's the part of my idea I don't want people skipping over: the first response should be to give someone a genuine chance to do better. Not just a poster on a wall or one unsuitable job offer. I mean real education, employment, support, suitable activities and the chance to find something they can do, even if their contribution is tiny. I want the system to keep trying reasonable alternatives instead of judging someone immediately by their worst day or their first refusal. People have different abilities, and sometimes the institution is the one that hasn't provided a fair opportunity.

My more severe proposal comes after that distinction, and only for the most heinous offences. Where someone has deliberately caused extreme harm, is genuinely capable of contributing and knowingly refuses every reasonable way to make an effort after sustained support, I believe the consequence should be the choice I've described: work towards their keep or face death. That is how I connect free will, their original offence, further decisions in custody and the obligation not to place every avoidable burden on other people. I am not calling a person worthless because the accounts show a loss. I am asking what accountability means when somebody refuses even the smallest meaningful contribution after real opportunities to change.

There is also a limit to this comparison. A child sent to detention is not equivalent to a person convicted of murder, and a school principal does not have the lawful or moral authority to take a life. The example explains why I think consequences should escalate and opportunities should come first. It does not prove that my proposed final consequence would reduce crime, be lawful or avoid

terrible mistakes. Those are separate questions readers should challenge me on, and I want that argument tested openly rather than quietly changed into something I never said.

I'm not talking about an ordinary offence or every prisoner who has a bad day and refuses an activity. I am talking about the most extreme crimes, and I do not mean that an offender avoids the question simply because release might eventually be possible. Where somebody is genuinely able to participate and continues deliberately to reject meaningful, reasonable work or training, I believe they should have to choose between that participation and death. I see the requirement to contribute as a consequence of their actions, not the state taking their choices away for no reason.

I realise people will tell me that a choice under that threat isn't voluntary. My own reasoning is that the person still had choices before committing the offence and would have another choice inside prison: make the effort to work and improve, or refuse it and face the most severe consequence. I do not see this as society declaring that their life has no value because keeping them alive costs money. I see it as holding them responsible for the deliberate harm that brought them there and for how they choose to respond to genuine opportunities afterwards. The cost to the community is part of my argument, but it is not the sole measure of a person's value.

That is also why I compare our priorities. Teachers and underpaid staff sometimes buy necessary supplies using their own wages so their workplace can function. Families struggle with food and housing. People who have done nothing wrong can be denied opportunities through lack of money or support. I question why they should continually shoulder the avoidable costs of somebody who deliberately caused grave harm and refuses to do anything constructive afterwards. I am not saying every dollar saved on a prison would automatically pay for a classroom; budgets aren't that simple. I'm saying our priorities deserve examination.

My belief is that real, predictable consequences can give people a reason not to commit crime. That is the intended deterrent effect, not a proven crime-rate result. The strength of deterrence depends on many things—detection, social conditions, the specific offence and the way consequences are understood. I want evidence to test whether my idea would actually make the public safer rather than assuming that a harsher consequence automatically reduces offending.

The older reading edition records the more direct work-or-death proposal, including the notion that a person convicted of the most heinous offences who repeatedly refuses meaningful work or training should have to choose between participation and death. My later clarification is that capital punishment remains a position I am prepared to discuss, not a final legally workable design. I do not regard an execution threat as proven voluntary consent. The source position is preserved because changing it invisibly would destroy the honesty of a living Manifesto.

What the law and the rights argument say

Australia has abolished capital punishment and is a party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As a party it is obliged not to execute people within its jurisdiction and to maintain abolition. The proposed work-or-death condition is not lawful Australian policy. [5]

The objection is not simply that an execution could cost too much. A conviction can be mistaken; new evidence can emerge after sentence; institutional bias and inadequate defence can affect people unequally; disability, trauma or mental illness can be misclassified as refusal. An execution cannot be corrected. There is also the coercion issue: participation under threat of death is not an ordinary employment choice. The fact that an offender once acted wrongly does not make every later exercise of state power legitimate.

I must distinguish four decisions. Which actions, if any, could ever justify the state intentionally taking a life? Could that decision be made without a material risk of fatal error? What legitimate conditions and responsibilities may be imposed in custody while maintaining human dignity? And how should the public fund safe, lawful confinement and support for victims? None of those questions can stand in for another. A cheaper outcome is not necessarily a morally permissible one.

I have a different proposal for prisoners convicted of offences below that most serious category. They could choose to work and improve their conditions, or live with basic, lawful prison conditions rather than expecting the public to fund extra comforts. I imagine a secure environment where suitable people can grow food, maintain facilities, use a supervised farm and learn trades. They might help plant, harvest, prepare or sell produce under proper rules and use legitimate earnings to improve their lives while completing their sentence.

If a person doesn't want to take up the opportunities, I don't believe the institution should owe them every optional extra. The prison would still be a prison, and the punishment would still include restriction of freedom. But I want the opportunity to make progress available from the beginning. There should be a genuine path back to ordinary society for people who can be safely released. In my view, people should be encouraged to work because they can see what they're building towards —not simply left idle until their release date arrives.

I use the words basic necessities deliberately. My proposal is about not funding unnecessary comforts; it is not an argument for denying essential food, clean water, shelter, sanitation or urgent healthcare. A farm can add to the food supply, teach agricultural skills and create value, but a failed harvest cannot mean someone starves. The practical boundary between basic conditions and privileges needs a lawful, transparent definition; it must not be left to whichever officer dislikes an individual.

I know the words 'no one is forcing them to die' will be challenged. I am using them to explain my moral reasoning about earlier conduct and the opportunity to work, not to claim that an execution threat is legally voluntary or free of coercion. Somebody can make terrible decisions and still have been misidentified, wrongly convicted or incorrectly assessed as able to work. Mental illness, trauma, injury or inaccessible programs can make apparent refusal much more complicated than it looks.

Who decides that an offence qualifies? Who proves a person was fairly convicted? Who establishes that work was actually available and appropriate? What independent process distinguishes a considered refusal from a disability-related barrier, unsafe workplace or prison failing its own responsibilities? What happens when new evidence later shows the conviction was wrong? What prevents authorities with financial targets from deciding that somebody is 'unwilling' because their continued custody is inconvenient?

I do not want those objections brushed aside. They are part of the conversation I am asking for. But I also do not want my argument quietly softened into a different proposal simply because it makes people uncomfortable. I'm describing what I believe, why I believe it and where I still need answers. If a better approach genuinely makes people safer, gives victims justice, helps prisoners make amends and protects the public purse, then show me how it works. That is how this manifesto is supposed to develop.

A better non-lethal alternative might include secure long-term detention for those who remain dangerous, appropriately supervised activity, independent risk reviews, meaningful incentives and permanent protections for basic care. That alternative has costs, and those costs deserve scrutiny, but a funding shortfall cannot itself establish a power to kill. This is an unresolved foundational conflict between my instincts about accountability and the rights framework I want to defend.

CHAPTER 09

Police Powers, Hoon Laws and Public Transport

If we expect prisoners to answer for their actions, authorities must answer for theirs as well. Police can make mistakes, and powers meant to keep people safe can be abused. If somebody is wrongly treated, where do they go and how do they get a fair hearing?

Justice doesn't begin at a prison. It begins with the way police, investigators, courts and regulatory authorities use power. I support enforcing laws that protect people from dangerous driving, assault, threats and other serious harm. I also believe enforcement can damage trust when it is poorly explained, disproportionate or difficult to challenge. Both concerns have to be taken seriously.

Vehicle seizure and hoon-law enforcement illustrate the tension. Dangerous driving can threaten people who had no part in a driver's choices. Strong interventions may prevent injury and create consequences that are difficult to ignore. But confiscating a valuable vehicle, imposing penalties or creating long-lasting legal effects is a serious exercise of power. The offence elements, evidentiary safeguards, review rights and consequences for an innocent third-party owner deserve careful attention. Criticising an unjustified seizure isn't the same as defending dangerous driving.

A practical improvement would make rules intelligible, help people obtain decision records, preserve relevant evidence, offer accessible complaint and review procedures and publish useful information about enforcement patterns. A person who challenges police action shouldn't be presumed guilty of bad faith, just as a police officer shouldn't automatically be accused of corruption because somebody disputes an allegation. Facts, authority and fair process matter.

A fair objection is that lengthy review can delay enforcement and add workload. That can be addressed by choosing proportionate safeguards and prioritising timely decisions, not by giving officials unchallengeable authority. Public trust becomes more warranted when enforcement is effective and capable of correction.

When a mistake is expensive before a court hears the case

A driver who believes a vehicle-related enforcement decision was mistaken should have a comprehensible route to discover the allegation, access relevant records when lawful, obtain advice and pursue any available review. That process doesn't automatically make the driver's complaint correct. It makes the exercise of power more accountable. Likewise, a victim of dangerous driving should be able to understand why a serious allegation was or wasn't acted upon without being promised an outcome the evidence can't support.

Police and regulators need clear powers to intervene quickly where danger is immediate. Review rights should be designed around that reality rather than preventing every urgent protective action. But urgency is a reason for timely review, not indefinite immunity from scrutiny. Records of errors, withdrawn actions and successful challenges can reveal confusing rules or training problems. Public education about the elements of an offence may prevent wrongdoing and reduce misunderstandings before enforcement is needed.

I would measure trust partly by whether people can raise concerns safely and receive reasoned responses. An increase in complaints after a new reporting channel opens isn't necessarily evidence of worsening conduct; it may indicate that reporting became easier. The meaning of every metric must be examined rather than selected for its public-relations value.

The example I have used is an accidental loss of traction on a wet road. It is possible to mistake an unintentionally spinning wheel for deliberate behaviour; it is also possible that a driver who claims an accident was actually reckless. Neither story can be assumed in advance. Victorian hoon laws permit immediate vehicle impoundment on specified reasonable grounds before a criminal finding of guilt, subject to the legal scheme. [6] This makes evidence preservation, accessible review and the position of an innocent owner important practical questions.

A driver who has done nothing wrong should not face an indefinite wait for review if a vehicle is essential to work or caring responsibilities. But an officer should not have to ignore a clear and immediate hazard while a lengthy administrative process unfolds. I would examine rapid independent review of disputed facts, proportionate interim measures and what remedies exist if the original decision is overturned. Where penalties are already reviewable, the reform should improve their accessibility and speed, not claim that no review exists.

The same balance applies to public transport. People should be able to travel to school, work, medical appointments and social activities without threats. That requires reliable enforcement and trained staff where danger is real. It also requires design, lighting, transport reliability, youth support and safe reporting channels. One platform can need both immediate intervention and the long-term attention of the authorities who determine its operating conditions.

CHAPTER 10

Prison Labour and Institutional Incentives

There is an apparent contradiction I want to discuss rather than hide. If people harvest crops and the prison takes a share to offset costs, they are once again working for the system. But perhaps that isn't a contradiction at all if the real aim is to develop responsibility and reduce waste without exploitation. The question becomes how the work is arranged and whether people receive fair recognition and safeguards. Is

the gardening educational, recreational, a paid job, a communal maintenance duty or unpaid production for a commercial customer? Those categories must not be blurred to hide who profits.

A prison-run warehouse shouldn't use a captive workforce to displace ordinary local businesses or drive wages down. Commercial prison labour raises special concerns about consent, remuneration, workplace safety and private profit. The International Labour Organization cautions that when a private company uses prison labour, consent must be genuine and conditions should approximate a free employment relationship. A prisoner shouldn't risk essential living conditions or an unfair sentence decision merely for declining commercial work. This is a different legal situation from ordinary lawful prison upkeep duties, and it calls for specific legal advice rather than one vague assertion about compulsory labour.

I can imagine community councils within a prison that help organise garden schedules, communal areas and small local improvements, while professional staff remain accountable for safety and legal decisions. That could teach budgeting, conflict resolution, cooperation and maintenance. But these councils must never become unofficial courts, be allowed to deprive neighbours of essentials, or operate through intimidation. Administration must be transparent, protective and open to challenge. If it becomes harder for a vulnerable prisoner to obtain help because the 'community' decides they aren't useful, the proposal has failed one of its most important tests.

Incentives can undermine the purpose of justice

I want to push the argument further rather than hide behind reassuring language. Somebody who deliberately commits a serious crime has already violated the rights of another person. Their punishment may justifiably remove freedoms that the victim and the wider public retain. I question why taxpayers should carry every expense of that sentence if the person has the capacity to make a real contribution towards the institution housing them. When an institution can offer supervised work, training and useful production, it seems reasonable to ask whether that contribution should be expected, how it should be recognised and who should benefit.

My proposed arrangement is not simply to pay someone almost nothing and declare the prison profitable. I want prison work to produce a real benefit: an appropriate contribution to public costs, money remaining for the person who earned it, and investment back into education, equipment, recreation and quality of life within the prison. I have questioned whether custody should involve different wage arrangements from ordinary free employment. That question is controversial, and I would want the exact tax or deduction rules made explicit rather than invented by prison managers. The person should see a benefit from participating. The crime carries the consequence of confinement; the opportunities to learn and earn should give them a reason to build something better.

But this argument can't stop at the person's conviction. If the state decides that somebody deserves 'unethical wages', it has created a new power: officials can benefit financially from the labour of

people who can't freely change jobs, leave the building or bargain on equal terms. A government might then have an incentive to fill workshops, withhold training, pressure prisoners or favour long detention because those people produce cheap goods. A justice system must not become a business that needs prisoners to remain profitable. Punishment should be imposed by lawful sentence, not multiplied through hidden employment penalties that administrators can adjust for revenue.

There is also a difference between unpaid or low-paid communal upkeep, supervised public-service work after a lawful conviction, and a commercial contract selling products to a private customer. The International Labour Organization permits certain court-imposed work under public control, but imposes stricter requirements where labour benefits private enterprises. Its guidance on private-sector prison work stresses genuine agreement, protection against penalties for declining and employment conditions approaching ordinary work. In Victoria, the ILO has specifically recorded rules preventing directions to work in private prisons or in commercial industries supplying private companies. We can't simply declare all cheap prison work lawful or treat a business contract as though it were cleaning a shared kitchen.

Suppose a prison workshop produces goods more cheaply than a local company because its workers are paid a fraction of the ordinary commercial rate. A customer may benefit and the prison may report extra revenue, yet an outside worker could lose income and a business could close. The apparent public saving might become lower tax receipts, greater welfare expenditure and damage to a local economy. If a government pays the prison instead of a regular supplier, part of the 'profit' might just be money moved between public accounts. The full question is whether this activity creates new public value after all consequences are counted, not whether one manager's ledger looks better.

Instead of choosing between unrestricted prison wages and outright exploitation, I would investigate several arrangements side by side. Necessary lawful communal upkeep could be organised with clear duties, safety standards and accommodation for capacity; educational activity could generate qualifications and demonstrable skills; public-service production could operate under a separately defined lawful remuneration model; and commercial work could require genuine participation and stronger wage safeguards. Any deductions for lawful victim restitution, prisoner savings, maintenance or public purposes would need explicit legal authority, clear statements and independent review. These are categories for investigation, not permission to ignore current law or a promised single wage rate.

For my hypothetical $10,000 surplus to mean anything, it must be calculated after staff supervision, prison- worker remuneration, transport, machinery, workplace injury costs, security, facilities, administration, depreciation, procurement and realistic market effects. The public should see whether the project reduced net costs or merely recorded income while other departments paid the bill. Reinvestment could be debated among educational facilities, necessary workplace improvements, prisoner savings, victim-related programs and general public services. The priorities should be decided transparently, rather than by a prison manager rewarded for hitting a revenue target.

This is also where my objection to rising prices meets reality. Better wages, safer conditions and independent scrutiny can increase the apparent cost of providing a service. Somebody pays: the taxpayer, the buyer, the organisation through a smaller surplus, or a mixture. We can't always eliminate the cost by changing ownership or calling a payment a tax. Yet the opposite approach—lowering labour standards—can create injury, coercion, unfair competition and greater future public expense. The correct comparison includes all of those effects. It may show that a responsible

prison enterprise is more expensive today but provides better skills and fewer future harms; it may also show that some proposed enterprise simply isn't worth operating.

My original instinct remains worth debating: serious wrongdoing should carry responsibility, and a person capable of constructive work should have meaningful opportunities to make amends. But I can't prove the case by simply saying the prisoner has forfeited the right to object. We must define exactly which restrictions follow from a lawful sentence, which additional expectations are justified, which basic standards remain intact, and how a prisoner can challenge an erroneous assessment. The government takes control of the person through incarceration; that is precisely why it owes a greater duty to prevent abuse of that control.

I would not want a prison to depend on a contractual guarantee of cheap labour or occupancy. If a government department, private operator or outside customer benefits financially from longer detention, that interest must never be permitted to influence charges, release decisions, disciplinary findings or program eligibility. Audits and public contracts may help, but they are not sufficient unless prisoners can safely complain and independent bodies can investigate.

International Labour Organization guidance distinguishes work required under supervision of a public authority from work performed for private undertakings. Where prisoners work for private enterprises, genuine voluntary consent and conditions approximating those of free workers are crucial. [7] This does not answer every wage question in an Australian correctional facility, but it rules out pretending that a captive workforce operates like a normal commercial labour market.

Prison labour makes my machinery metaphor particularly uncomfortable. The workshop may produce useful goods, and the institution may fairly ask convicted people to meet lawful responsibilities. But the prisoners aren't machine parts. They are people in an environment where the state controls movement, opportunities, living arrangements and much of the information needed to appeal a decision. That creates risks unlike those in an ordinary workplace.

If a prison becomes financially reliant on workshop revenue, who protects prisoners when production targets and rehabilitation goals conflict? Who checks whether a refusal was deliberate or caused by disability, fear, illness, injury or the lack of a genuinely available programme? Who checks whether a lower wage is a lawful feature of correctional work rather than an illegal subsidy for a private business? Who measures whether outside jobs were displaced? The state can only claim genuine public savings after accounting for guards, training, supervision, machinery, healthcare, buildings, lost tax revenue and future reoffending.

I still want the public's cost question taken seriously. I want people to consider meaningful activities, communal maintenance, growing food, classrooms, trade training and reinvestment in safer facilities. My hypothetical $10,000 warehouse surplus offers a starting calculation, not proof. But I also have to recognise that the more power I give a prison to classify people as 'unwilling', the stronger the need for independent review, safe conditions, access to advice and a line the institution may not cross in pursuit of income. Under section 22 of Victoria's Charter, people deprived of liberty retain a right to humane treatment and inherent dignity. International forced-labour standards distinguish publicly supervised work pursuant to conviction from labour placed at private enterprises' disposal. [J2] [J5]

A prison that costs less because people live without adequate food, medical attention, hygiene or safety hasn't achieved efficiency; it has moved part of the expense onto captive human beings. A prison that trains a person to avoid future offending while responsibly managing costs could provide a different form of public value. The difference must be demonstrated in practice.

I want restitution where appropriate, not a system that puts prisoners in permanent debt by inventing unpayable obligations. I want people to gain vocational skills, not employers to profit from fear. And I want genuine savings, not a scheme that shifts a cost to correctional staff, workers outside the prison or the next victim. The incentive test belongs in every prison contract and program design, especially those claiming public benefit.

CHAPTER 11

Military Force and Organisational Accountability

A justice system becomes dangerous when an organisation treats loyalty to itself as more important than the law. That danger exists beyond civilian courts. Police, prisons and armed forces rely on legitimate authority and must make difficult decisions under pressure. The need for discipline cannot become an exemption from accountability.

My broader essay uses Australia's involvement in Afghanistan as an example of why it is necessary to distinguish lawful combat, individual wrongdoing and the culture or command arrangements around an institution. A soldier may be required to make an immediate decision in genuinely dangerous circumstances. An allegation that somebody deliberately harmed a non-combatant or a person under control is a different question. Those scenarios cannot be collapsed into the same debate about the morality of war.

Consider Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan. Military operations present extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Soldiers may be required to make life-or-death decisions under pressure, with incomplete information and little time to respond. Rules of engagement exist to regulate when and how force may be used. They provide operational authorisations and restrictions, but must remain consistent with the applicable laws of armed conflict. One example discussed in accounts of the Afghanistan conflict is ROE 429 Alpha, also known as ROE 429A. This was an offensive rule of engagement associated with the International Security Assistance Force, under which force could be authorised against certain identified individuals or groups resisting the international mission.

Unlike situations involving immediate self-defence, offensive targeting could sometimes be authorised against a lawful military target who was not presenting an immediate threat at the exact moment force was used. However, that did not mean anybody present in a conflict zone could lawfully be killed simply because they appeared suspicious or were considered an inconvenience to military operations. Distinguishing lawful military targets from protected civilians remained essential, as did compliance with the applicable laws of armed conflict and national restrictions. Questions have been raised in public reporting about how international rules of engagement interacted with Australian authorisations, particularly during operations involving the identification and targeting of insurgents.

The precise relationship between these rules, their application in particular operations and the legality of individual actions must be examined carefully rather than assumed. This becomes particularly important when considering the findings of the Afghanistan Inquiry, commonly known as the Brereton Inquiry. The inquiry identified credible information concerning alleged unlawful killings involving Australian special forces personnel. It also examined significant failures in organisational culture, operational reporting, leadership and oversight. Importantly, the inquiry did not conclude that the alleged unlawful killings resulted from soldiers misunderstanding their rules of engagement. Its findings indicated that the personnel interviewed understood the relevant rules and laws.

That distinction matters. We should not confuse a deliberate unlawful act with an honest misunderstanding simply because both occur within a complex institution. A soldier who knowingly commits an unlawful killing must still be held personally accountable. But individual responsibility should not prevent us from examining whether broader organisational failures allowed misconduct to develop, continue or go undetected. We must ask not only why an individual soldier fired their

weapon, but also what happened throughout the institution responsible for authorising, supervising and reviewing military operations. Who established the operational rules? Who authorised the mission? What intelligence was available, and how was it assessed? Were the legal limits clearly communicated? Did commanders properly supervise their personnel?

Were reports accurate? Were allegations investigated? Did the institutional culture encourage accountability, or did it discourage people from speaking up? And when warning signs emerged, what was done to prevent further harm? These questions do not automatically excuse somebody who knowingly breaks the law. They recognise that personal wrongdoing and institutional failure can exist simultaneously. Punishing an individual does not automatically correct the conditions that allowed misconduct to occur or remain undetected. Similarly, reforming an institution does not remove the need to hold individuals accountable for deliberate wrongdoing. Both responsibilities must exist together. This is why I believe institutional accountability must accompany individual accountability, particularly when the consequences involve the loss of human life.

The greater the power an institution possesses, the greater its responsibility to exercise that power lawfully, carefully and transparently. We should be willing to question even the institutions established to protect us, not because we oppose their purpose, but because we recognise how important that purpose is. And we should not condemn every soldier, police officer or public servant because of the misconduct of others.

The public version of the 2020 Afghanistan Inquiry described credible information relating to 23 incidents and alleged unlawful killings of 39 people. These are inquiry findings about allegations, not a licence for me to announce guilt in individual criminal cases. The public response also involved organisational review and attention to culture, reporting and accountability. [8]

The specific operational detail sometimes described in commentary as “ROE 429A” should not be presented in this edition as an independently established fact about a particular incident without the relevant primary document. The argument does not require unverified operational minutiae: no rules of engagement can lawfully make the intentional killing of protected civilians or detained persons acceptable. I would want the precise operational rules, dated instructions and evidence reviewed before publishing a case-specific claim.

The Century approach should hold two propositions simultaneously. We must not label an entire profession criminal because some members are suspected of wrongdoing. We must also avoid allowing institutional pride, secrecy or difficult operating conditions to conceal evidence of abuse. Independent investigation and a fair process protect soldiers who obey the law as well as people who may have been harmed.

CHAPTER 12

Measure Justice by Prevented Harm

At the end of this, I don't want a prison that only looks better on a spreadsheet. I want fewer people harmed, genuine rehabilitation where it's possible, meaningful consequences where they're needed, and clear evidence of whether our approach is actually working.

I want a system that recognises victims, uses detention when necessary, gives realistic opportunities for responsible change and doesn't pretend that good intentions equal results. It would set clear purposes for each intervention. Is the goal immediate protection, proportionate accountability, restitution, reduced violent offending, preparation for release or support for victims? Different purposes need different evidence. Counting completed classes or days served doesn't prove the intended result occurred.

A credible reform sequence would begin with accessible rehabilitation opportunities, reliable assessments, fair recordkeeping, better reintegration pathways and robust complaint mechanisms. It would test how those changes affect safety, staff and prisoner wellbeing, repeat offending and the use of public funds. Where safe and legal, carefully defined pilots could compare outcomes with existing practice. They would require privacy protection, independent evaluation and published reasons for changing course.

The test of a justice system isn't whether it feels tough or sounds compassionate. It is whether it protects the community, upholds lawful rights, treats victims seriously and learns from failure. A person who has done terrible things can remain accountable without the state surrendering the standards that distinguish justice from revenge. A victim can be protected without being asked to approve every punishment proposed in their name.

The test is what does not happen again

I would evaluate justice through several different lenses, not a single headline number. I want to know whether victims feel safer and receive help without unreasonable delays; whether serious violent incidents fall; whether sentences are proportionate and reviewable; whether errors are uncovered and corrected; whether people who return to the community have stable opportunities; and whether staff and prisoners are protected from abuse.

Reoffending statistics need definitions. An arrest is not a conviction, a return to community supervision is not necessarily a new serious crime, and an unreported offence will not appear in police records. The Productivity Commission cautions that two-year return-to-corrective-services measures are proxies, and that increased recorded offending can sometimes reflect more effective detection. [4] I would rather admit an imperfect measure than build an entire institution around pretending one indicator tells the complete story.

We should track who receives access to training, who completes it, what happens after release and whether people with disability or poorer literacy are excluded from the very programs used to judge them. We should count complaints upheld against officials and report what changed as a result. We should make sure economic performance does not become an incentive to keep people imprisoned or hide preventable harm.

The Century System cannot claim success because a prison is harsher, a police power is broader or a funding spreadsheet looks cleaner. It must ask what works for people actually affected. It should protect the public now, offer lawful routes away from future wrongdoing, hold authorities accountable and refuse to use someone’s unpopularity as a substitute for evidence.

I began this volume with the person who needs protection immediately. I end it by asking what kind of society leaves fewer people exposed to that danger in the first place. Courts and prisons are essential parts of the answer, but they do not design our housing, regional economies, public transport or everyday community spaces. The next volume moves beyond the justice system to the environments we choose to build—and the risks we allow to accumulate when we fail to build them well.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME VIII

Housing, Communities And Regional Development

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

Housing as More Than a Commodity

Before talking about property markets, I want to begin with what a home actually does. Somebody needs somewhere to sleep, keep their belongings, recover from illness, study, maintain relationships and organise their life. Without a dependable place to live, nearly every expectation we place on that person becomes harder. A job application may require an address. A shift starts before a bus runs. A child needs somewhere safe to complete schoolwork. Housing is not an isolated consumer purchase; it is part of the foundation that makes many other forms of independence possible.

I believe one of the biggest mistakes we make when discussing Australia's housing crisis is treating it as though it is only a problem of housing supply. Housing is certainly part of the problem. We need more homes, better planning, more affordable options and infrastructure that can support a growing population. But I think we also need to question why so much of Australia's population, employment, education, healthcare and investment is concentrated around a relatively small number of major cities.

I believe housing is particularly important within this discussion. Housing should be treated as a foundation for stability, not merely a reward for economic success. When someone has a secure place to live, they gain a stronger opportunity to maintain employment, pursue education, manage their health, develop relationships and make long-term decisions. Housing instability can create additional problems that governments and communities must later spend resources addressing. This does not mean every person must be given ownership of a house. It means we should recognise the public importance of affordable, secure and appropriate housing, including social housing and other forms of assistance.

A stable society is easier to build when the people within it have stability themselves.

I do not believe security means that everybody must own a detached house, and I do not think a person has failed because they rent. Ownership can offer control and stability, but it can also involve debt, rates, repairs and the risk of losing income. Renting can suit mobility and changing circumstances, but only if the terms allow a reasonable level of security. Social and community housing have different responsibilities again. The principle is that people need appropriate homes and a realistic ability to keep them, not that one tenure should be imposed as an ideal for everyone.

The home, the household and the wider community

In the earlier volume on work and welfare, I argued that people cannot be expected to overcome barriers that public institutions ignore. Housing is one of the clearest examples. It affects whether a carer can remain close to family, whether a person with disability can live accessibly, whether a worker can accept a shift and whether an older resident can remain part of the community they

know. A housing policy that counts completed buildings but never asks about those outcomes may achieve its numerical target while missing the purpose.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported around 452,000 social housing dwellings at June 2025, along with many households receiving rent assistance. Those programs already exist. The question is how well they meet needs and how the system responds when suitable housing is unavailable. This Manifesto should not claim that assistance is a new invention, or pretend a home becomes affordable merely because one support payment exists. The meaningful test is whether people can pay for housing and still meet ordinary living costs. [1]

I would distinguish the price of a dwelling from the cost of living in it. A cheap home with a long daily commute can be expensive once fuel, fares, lost time and vehicle maintenance are considered. An inexpensive property requiring constant repairs or heating may impose a similar burden. A small dwelling close to work could be a better choice for one person; for another, the freedom to have a workshop, garden or space for children matters more. Those differences should be respected rather than forced into one universal model.

Housing is also an asset, and I do not want to pretend property ownership or investment is immoral. Savings, construction work, responsible landlords, builders and investors all play real roles. But a policy becomes distorted when the appreciation of existing assets is treated as the only measure of housing success. Rising values can benefit owners while making entry harder for people who are still outside the market. The wider consequences deserve as much attention as the return earned by any single participant.

My argument begins from a simple position: the economy should support people building lives, and a home is one of the basic places where those lives happen. I would judge housing by security, suitability, cost, choice, access to services and the experience of the people living there. Those indicators may disagree with one another. That is precisely why we should be willing to examine more than the number of properties sold.

I also want to know whether policies improve the ability to stay housed when life changes. A household can appear financially secure until a job loss, injury, family separation or sudden rent increase pushes it into crisis. Emergency accommodation, social housing and other assistance all have different roles, but the transitions between them can matter as much as the services themselves. We should measure the time it takes to find a suitable home, how often people have to move against their wishes, and whether interventions preserve connection to work, school and family. A housing system should not celebrate affordability in an average figure while people with the least choice remain trapped.

CHAPTER 02

Why Opportunity Concentrates

Why are so many Australians trying to live near the same employment centres, hospitals, universities and transport corridors? I think we too often treat the answer as an unchanging personal preference, as though all these people independently decided to choose a capital city. People have preferences, certainly. But preferences are shaped by the places where opportunity exists and the infrastructure that previous generations built.

This concentration didn't appear overnight. Over decades, governments, businesses and industries have invested heavily in metropolitan areas. As employment and services expanded, people naturally followed those opportunities. More businesses attracted more workers. More workers created greater demand for housing, transport and services. Greater demand encouraged further investment, which made those locations even more attractive. Over time, this created a cycle in which opportunity became increasingly concentrated, and people became increasingly dependent on living near that concentration. Now we look at Australia's housing demand and ask where people want to live.

But I think we should also be asking why people want to live there, and whether the choices available to them have been shaped by the systems we have developed. If the best employment opportunities are concentrated in Melbourne, people have strong reasons to move towards Melbourne. If specialised healthcare, major educational institutions and important industries are concentrated in Melbourne, people become increasingly dependent on accessing the city. Then we question why so many people want to live in Melbourne. Of course they do. We have helped build the incentives around it.

I recognise that major cities naturally attract businesses, skilled workers and industries through economies of scale. Concentration isn't automatically a failure of government planning, and there are genuine economic benefits to having large, connected cities. But recognising those benefits doesn't mean we should ignore the disadvantages of excessive concentration or stop developing alternatives.

Why concentration can be rational

The concentration of opportunity is not only a policy failure. Businesses often benefit from being close to suppliers, employees and customers. A major hospital needs trained workers, specialist equipment and a population large enough to support complex services. Universities and research industries attract people who benefit from working together. Frequent public transport can serve a dense community more efficiently than scattered households across very long distances. Those advantages are real, and a serious regional argument has to acknowledge them.

If I suggested spreading every specialised hospital and university evenly across Australia, I would be creating the very inefficiency I claim to oppose. Some services need to remain concentrated. My question is which parts of work and life genuinely need that concentration and which could function in more places if transport, digital services, vocational pathways and appropriate investment improved. This distinction matters because the purpose is choice, not a political campaign against cities.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that capital cities added about 324,700 residents in 2024–25, while areas outside the capitals added about 94,700. Melbourne grew by about 105,000 people over that year. These are measures of population change, not proof that every new resident

wanted the same lifestyle or that any particular migration group caused a housing shortage. They do demonstrate the scale of planning required in the places where growth is concentrated. [2]

There is a self-reinforcing pattern. An employer chooses a location because the workers are already there. Workers move there because the jobs exist. Public investment follows demand, then makes the location even more attractive. Property prices and rents respond to competition for access. When the cycle continues for decades, the absence of an alternative can start to look like a voluntary preference. Some people genuinely love city life; others are choosing between the location of their job and the location they could otherwise afford.

I want government to be careful about claims that a particular suburb or town is underdeveloped because people simply do not want to live there. Maybe that is true. Maybe the town is exposed to real flood risk or lacks an economic reason to expand. But it is equally possible that a limited transport service, closing training opportunities, poor internet or a shortage of healthcare is part of what suppresses demand. We should investigate those causes before treating the resulting demand as fixed forever.

In a way, this is the same argument made about education and employment earlier in the series. Asking someone to move where jobs exist ignores the cost of making that move. Telling a region to attract people ignores whether it has the institutional foundations to do so. A fair system should understand the constraints facing both sides. That does not guarantee an equal spread of prosperity, but it gives us a more useful starting point than assuming the current map is the only possible future.

Another possibility is that some jobs have become concentrated because the whole industry benefits from the proximity of workers and facilities, while other jobs cluster because the service network never expanded elsewhere. The two cases require different responses. A regional manufacturing proposal may need reliable freight, skilled trades and multiple suppliers; a public-sector office may depend more on digital systems and staff preferences. I want these differences established before investment decisions are made. Without them, decentralisation risks becoming a contest to relocate a building, rather than a serious attempt to improve the opportunities available to the people who live there.

CHAPTER 03

Supply Now, Options Later

The easiest way to misunderstand my regional argument would be to hear it as an excuse not to build homes where the demand exists today. That is not what I am proposing. A person facing an unaffordable rent increase now cannot wait twenty years for a new regional economy. Somebody sleeping in their car cannot be told that long-term decentralisation will eventually provide an answer. The immediate supply problem and the structure that keeps recreating it must be addressed on different time horizons.

The Productivity Commission has argued that Australia needs to build more housing in locations where people want to live. I agree with that principle. People need housing now, and we cannot simply expect everyone to relocate to regional Australia while waiting for opportunities that may take decades to develop. However, I don't believe today's patterns of housing demand should automatically determine the entirety of Australia's long-term development strategy. Where people want to live is influenced by where they can realistically build a life. And those circumstances can change. I am not against apartments, higher-density developments or expanding housing supply within existing cities.

If someone wants to live in a Melbourne CBD apartment because they enjoy the lifestyle, accessibility and convenience, they should have that opportunity. Equally, someone who wants a house with a backyard, access to nature and a quieter regional lifestyle should not have to sacrifice their employment prospects, education or access to essential services to achieve it. The objective should not be forcing people out of cities. It should be giving Australians more genuine choices about where and how they live.

Two time horizons, not competing slogans

I also believe we need to be realistic about timing. Regional development is a long-term strategy, not an immediate substitute for increasing housing supply in existing high-demand areas. We cannot tell people struggling with housing affordability today that the solution is simply to wait for another town to develop. We need to address the immediate shortage while simultaneously working to reduce the conditions that will recreate the same shortage in the future. That means building more appropriate housing in existing cities and regional communities, while investing in the infrastructure and economic opportunities required to provide more viable choices over time.

I see this as an example of treating both the immediate problem and its underlying causes. If a road develops a dangerous pothole, we should repair it before someone gets hurt. But we should also investigate why the road keeps deteriorating, rather than repeatedly paying to repair the same damage. I believe housing should be approached with similar reasoning. Build the homes people need today. But also investigate why housing demand has become so concentrated, what disadvantages that concentration creates and what can realistically be changed.

Australia already has a National Housing Accord target of 1.2 million well-located new homes across five years beginning in July 2024. The National Housing Supply and Affordability Council reported in 2026 that construction conditions and the outlook still left significant pressure on that goal. My proposal should be assessed against measures and institutions that already exist, not sold as though nobody else has considered supply. The public needs honest delivery reporting, including the difference between approvals, starts, completions and genuinely affordable homes. [3]

Building more homes in existing cities can mean different forms of development in different places. It could mean apartments close to transport and employment, townhouses in suitable established areas, smaller accessible homes for people wanting to downsize, and detached homes where land and services can support them. There are trade-offs in each choice. Greater density can support public transport and local shops but can also put pressure on green space or older infrastructure if poorly planned. Low-density expansion can offer private outdoor space while consuming more land and adding longer service networks.

I am not proposing that all opposition to development is selfish. Existing residents may raise genuine concerns about fire access, traffic, drainage, overshadowing, heritage or inadequate school capacity. Those objections deserve evidence and a response. But neighbourhood character can also become a vague reason to block every new household. A reasonable process should separate measurable harm from a general preference that nothing nearby should ever change. People already living in an area have interests, and people who need somewhere to live have interests too.

The strongest practical objection to developing regional alternatives is opportunity cost. Every dollar and skilled worker committed to a speculative new centre may be unavailable for repairs or housing people urgently need in an established town. That criticism should be built into the design, not dismissed. I would test regional development through stages and clear triggers: genuine employers or services willing to participate, housing demand that can be sustained, environmental approvals and a funding plan for upkeep, not merely a glossy picture of the proposed settlement.

The lesson of my pothole principle applies here. Fix the dangerous road today, then investigate why it keeps failing. Build homes where people need them today, then examine why they have been left with so few genuine alternatives. Treating only the immediate pressure guarantees we revisit it. Treating only the long-term vision abandons people who are already struggling. Good planning needs to hold both responsibilities at once.

CHAPTER 04

Regional Communities with Their Own Economies

A regional town cannot become a successful community simply by placing more houses on its outskirts. People need the capacity to build a life there. That includes work, local businesses, education, healthcare, childcare, leisure, transport and a measure of connection with places beyond the town. If the jobs are elsewhere and every specialist service requires a long drive, a cheap mortgage may be the only advantage we have created.

I believe we need to invest in developing existing regional centres and, where appropriate, establishing new economic hubs supported by long-term planning. That means looking beyond simply constructing houses. It means developing employment opportunities, reliable public transport, healthcare, schools, training facilities, digital infrastructure, retail, entertainment and the services that make communities functional. It also means creating incentives for businesses and industries to establish themselves outside major metropolitan areas. A regional town should not exist solely as somewhere people sleep before travelling into Melbourne for work. It should have an economy of its own.

Young people should have reasons to remain in their communities rather than feeling they must leave to pursue an education or career. Families should have access to the services they need to raise children. Businesses should have access to suitable infrastructure, workers and markets. And residents should be able to participate in their local economies without being entirely dependent on travelling to a capital city. This doesn't mean every small town needs its own university, major hospital or enormous commercial district. Different communities have different needs, populations and economic capabilities. Regional development should reflect those circumstances rather than attempting to replicate a capital city everywhere.

A local economy rather than a distant dormitory

The goal I have in mind is a network of regional centres with complementary strengths. One place may be suited to food processing, agriculture and related training. Another may have manufacturing, health services, logistics, tourism or a specialist education sector. These should not be selected by political enthusiasm alone. Local workers, employers, councils, First Nations communities and residents need a genuine role in identifying what works and what risks the development would create.

There is a difference between encouraging a business to relocate and establishing a lasting economic reason for it to stay. A tax incentive might persuade a company to open a temporary office. If the workers cannot find homes, the supply chain is unreliable or the customers are too far away, the business may disappear when the incentive ends. I would rather see a coordinated proposal showing its employment market, logistics, housing requirements and long-term viability before government advertises it as a triumph.

Young people deserve particular attention. Regional communities can lose talent when their students have to move away for training or work. That does not mean universities should be duplicated in every town or that young people should be discouraged from exploring cities and other countries. It means more local vocational partnerships, apprenticeships, reliable online access, placements and routes to return with new skills. A regional future ought to be a real option rather than a penalty for where someone was born.

Regional centres also have existing economies that should not be sacrificed to make room for a fashionable new industry. Farming, repair trades, small manufacturing, local retail and community care can be important even when they do not produce the publicity associated with a major corporate project. I want to consider whether new investment strengthens these relationships or makes local businesses unable to compete for labour, space and essential supplies.

However, I also recognise that building regional infrastructure is not automatically a good investment simply because it is outside a major city. Some proposals will be more practical than others. Governments must consider demand, economic viability, environmental effects, public benefit and opportunity costs. We should not spend billions developing infrastructure that communities cannot realistically support, or create business incentives that provide little lasting value once the funding disappears. The goal should be to identify places with genuine potential and build coordinated, evidence-based development strategies around them.

A practical proposal would begin with a place-specific capability study: what is already here, what services are fragile, what infrastructure is reliable, which employers have genuine unmet needs, and what local people wish to preserve? Then government and business could establish limited, reviewable investments. Some projects would fail the test. That is acceptable. The failure would be promising every town identical growth simply because the slogan of decentralisation sounds fair.

Imagine two towns receiving the same investment announcement. In one, the new employer offers secure jobs, nearby training and local procurement, and enough new homes are built to avoid pushing rents sharply upwards. In the other, a large project requires fly-in workers, competes for a limited pool of rental homes and leaves when a subsidy expires. Both might be reported as regional investment, but they are not the same outcome. I would want project agreements to publish their assumptions, test supply-chain and workforce pressures, and allow an independent review years after the announcement. Regional economic success has to survive the election cycle and the opening ceremony.

CHAPTER 05

Individuality in Mass-Produced Housing

I do not think a street of nearly identical houses is automatically a social disaster. Standard plans can reduce architectural costs, simplify building and make homes available to people who could not afford a completely customised design. My concern is what happens when the entire design conversation becomes so narrow that people are offered very little control over the homes and neighbourhoods they will live in for decades.

The cost of uniform developments

Mass-produced housing developments can serve a purpose. They make it easier to build large numbers of homes, keep costs predictable, and provide housing to growing communities. However, when entire developments rely on the same handful of designs, we risk sacrificing architectural individuality, neighbourhood character, and the sense of identity that makes a place feel like a community.

Part of the problem comes down to economics. In past decades, particularly from the 1950s through to the 1990s, different building practices, materials, and regulatory requirements helped shape the cost of housing. Some materials and methods that were once inexpensive are now restricted or avoided because of safety, health, and environmental concerns. Modern construction must meet higher standards, which is important, but it also adds costs.

At the same time, large developments benefit from economies of scale. Reusing the same house plans, construction methods, and materials allows developers to build more efficiently. Custom designs, by comparison, can require additional architectural work, engineering, and planning approvals. These extra costs can make individuality financially unattractive, even when a more varied development would offer greater long-term value to the community. The problem isn't mass-produced housing itself. It's when efficiency becomes the priority at the expense of individuality.

A neighbourhood should be more than a collection of houses built as cheaply and quickly as possible. It should be somewhere people can develop a sense of belonging, raise families, build relationships, and establish roots across generations. Different architectural styles, varied streetscapes, and thoughtful community planning can help create places with their own identity rather than developments that feel interchangeable.

There is no reason modern safety standards and affordable housing must come at the expense of creativity. Developers and planning authorities could encourage greater variety through pre-approved alternative designs, flexible design guidelines, and more efficient approval processes. This would allow developments to retain the financial advantages of large-scale construction without making every street look nearly identical. Ultimately, the goal should not be to return to outdated building practices or make housing unnecessarily expensive. It should be to build communities that are affordable, safe, practical, and visually distinctive. Housing is a long-term investment in how people live, not merely a product to be replicated as efficiently as possible.

We should be building communities, not simply filling land with houses.

The essay on uniform housing is not a demand to recreate every old building material or abolish modern codes. The appearance of a historical neighbourhood can be appealing, but some past materials and building practices exposed people to significant health and safety risks. Energy efficiency, durability, fire protection and accessibility are not optional inconveniences. The challenge

is to achieve those public goods while asking whether construction and planning systems can permit different layouts and appearances without unreasonable extra cost.

Choice that does not require a wealthy buyer

I wonder whether a broader library of tested designs could offer meaningful options at different budgets. Shared structural systems might be combined with approved variations in room arrangement, façade, accessible entry, shading or adaptability. Builders could still order materials efficiently while households could select from more than a couple of standard appearances. But a design catalogue is not free: it may increase coordination and stock requirements, and not every variation will suit every block. I want genuine cost comparisons before calling it a solution.

The test should not be based on whether I personally like the look of a development. People have different tastes. Some appreciate uniform architecture, some prefer a traditional streetscape, and some would choose the simplest affordable home without decoration. Their choices are no less valid than mine. The concern is whether families with modest incomes are excluded from even basic functional choices while expensive custom homes remain the main route to individuality.

Accessible design is one example of why choice must reach beyond appearance. A person who uses a wheelchair, an older resident with limited mobility or a family expecting changing needs may benefit from a different bathroom, entry or bedroom arrangement. Some changes can be anticipated through flexible layouts; others require specialist assessment. That is a much stronger reason to test adaptable plans than a blanket rule that every street must look unique.

There is a real trade-off with the urgency of building. If an aesthetic requirement made every home more expensive or delayed completion, the policy could harm people who are least able to wait. I would pilot voluntary design options and compare purchase price, running costs, uptake, resident satisfaction and delivery time against the standard product. A promising result could be expanded. A costly, unpopular option should be altered or dropped. Creativity matters, but it is not an excuse for protecting my taste at another person’s expense.

The wider Century principle is that efficiency should serve people, rather than people being asked to fit whatever process is easiest to reproduce. We may discover that some standardisation makes individual choice more affordable. We may discover other forms of uniformity are unnecessary. I want a system willing to learn the difference.

CHAPTER 06

Community Design and Belonging

Distinctive houses do not automatically make a good neighbourhood. A beautifully designed building can still be isolated from schools, shops, public transport, green space and ordinary human contact. Equally, a modest street of simple dwellings can be a welcoming place if residents can walk safely, meet neighbours, access the things they need and feel a sense of belonging. Architecture matters, but community cannot be manufactured by façades alone.

But stronger connections between regional communities, larger regional centres and capital cities could make an enormous difference. Imagine living in a regional centre with affordable housing, reliable healthcare, modern schools, local employment and access to open spaces. Now imagine frequent and dependable public transport connecting that community to surrounding towns and Melbourne, allowing residents to access specialised services, major events, education and employment without an exhausting journey. Suddenly, regional living becomes less about accepting isolation and more about choosing a different lifestyle. Transport infrastructure can help make distance less of a disadvantage.

And these connections should not exist only between regional towns and Melbourne. Regional centres should also be better connected to each other, allowing their economies and communities to support one another.

What people experience between the buildings

I want new developments to be assessed from the perspective of somebody actually living there. Can children reach a playground without crossing a dangerous road? Can an older person go to a pharmacy without relying on a family member to drive? Is there somewhere to sit in shade, a route that feels safe at night, public toilets where needed, and accessible ways of entering public buildings? Those are everyday questions. They affect whether someone can use a community, not only whether a council can say a park has been delivered.

A lively local centre might include a mixture of homes, small businesses, community services and places to gather. It does not require copying a particular European or Australian town design. Nor should it require every suburban family to surrender the privacy and space they value. I want people to have meaningful alternatives: some neighbourhoods with higher density and frequent services, others with different forms of housing, but all planned with realistic access to essential needs.

Safety also belongs in design. Volume VII examined crime prevention and immediate protection; this volume asks what it means to create public spaces that are welcoming without becoming places of excessive surveillance or exclusion. Lighting, sightlines, safe transport, maintenance and places for young people to gather can be considered alongside residents' privacy. A park used by teenagers is not automatically a security problem. At the same time, the public should not be asked to tolerate serious intimidation to preserve an ideal of openness.

A community changes as its residents age. Young families need schools and childcare; older residents may need accessible housing, care services and social connection; people with disability may need reliable paths, transport and appropriate facilities. A neighbourhood designed only for one stage of life can force people to leave when their needs change. Smaller dwellings and adaptable homes in established areas might give residents more choices without making them abandon relationships they have built over years.

Local identity should include people rather than become a weapon against them. A neighbourhood can protect significant buildings, historical streets or Indigenous cultural places while still accepting new households and different architectural forms. I want careful heritage standards, not the assumption that all existing buildings deserve protection regardless of use or condition. The relevant question is what a place means to the people connected to it and how that meaning can continue while necessary change occurs.

If we measure community design through the number of houses approved and the size of the nearest park, we will miss much of this. Resident experience, walking accessibility, service quality, housing suitability, maintenance complaints and the ease of everyday tasks should be measured over time. Those results might suggest a development that looks impressive on opening day needs substantial changes five years later. A system that can admit that is closer to doing its job.

CHAPTER 07

Housing, Agriculture and Environmental Limits

I want more viable places for Australians to live, but I do not want decentralisation to become another excuse for unlimited clearing and land conversion. A town can be economically promising and still be a poor place to expand if it lies in an important floodplain, depends on scarce water, destroys valuable agricultural land or puts people in unacceptable bushfire danger. The land is not an empty spreadsheet waiting for houses.

We also need to consider environmental and agricultural consequences. I don't believe decentralisation should become an excuse for endlessly clearing farmland, destroying natural habitats or expanding urban boundaries without proper planning. Existing infrastructure and developed areas should be used intelligently, with careful consideration of environmental impacts, water availability, natural hazards and long-term maintenance costs. Development must be economically and environmentally sustainable, not merely attractive on paper.

A genuine place-based environmental test

Not all farmland has the same productive importance, and not all open land has the same ecological value. Some sites contain threatened habitats, culturally significant places or groundwater systems that would be expensive or impossible to replace. Others are already disturbed or may be suitable for infill. A reasonable decision needs maps, local expertise, field investigations and the voices of people who know the country. It cannot begin with the conclusion that a particular area must expand and then search for a convenient justification.

First Nations communities must be more than a late box on an approvals checklist. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have connections to Country, cultural obligations and legal rights that vary by location and by the applicable land arrangements. Development should involve relevant Traditional Owners early and respect cultural heritage and any rights or consent processes required by law. That is not merely a matter of presentation; decisions can permanently affect places people have cared for over generations.

Housing development also requires water, drainage, sewage, power and waste services. A region with relatively cheap land may have expensive or fragile networks. Even if construction is permitted, drought vulnerability, extreme heat, bushfire evacuation and flood exposure may make long-term occupation risky. We should not compare the purchase price of a new allotment with an existing urban property while pretending these ongoing costs and hazards do not exist.

This does not mean environmental protection must always prevent development. People need housing, farmers need viable businesses and governments must balance competing public needs. A protected ecosystem may rule out one site while better design, smaller footprints or redevelopment make another feasible. The honest position is to assess alternatives, mitigation and cumulative impacts openly. The easiest site to purchase is not necessarily the cheapest or safest place for a community to exist.

Where environmental costs cannot be avoided, they must not be hidden in future budgets. A road that repeatedly washes out, an estate needing constant flood recovery or a settlement reliant on expensive water transfers may look viable when only the first construction bill is counted. This is the same maintenance principle that will carry into Volume IX. We should account for the systems people will depend on and for the land that future generations will inherit.

I am not arguing that Australia should freeze its settlements in place. I am arguing for expansion where there is credible demand, realistic capacity and a justifiable environmental footprint. Sometimes that means more efficient use of land already developed. Sometimes it means carefully planned growth on the edge of a centre. It should never mean that an arbitrary housing number gives us permission to ignore water, culture or avoidable danger.

CHAPTER 08

Infrastructure Capacity and Hidden Costs

A new housing development is often celebrated when the keys are handed over. But that is not the end of its cost. More residents need teachers, nurses, waste collection, safe roads, electricity, water, community facilities and maintenance long after the original builder has left. The hidden mistake is to count the price of construction while leaving the costs of a functioning settlement for somebody else to discover.

What frustrates me most is that Australia has had decades to recognise many of these challenges. We knew our population would continue changing. We knew major cities would face growing pressure on housing and infrastructure. We knew transport networks, healthcare services and employment opportunities would need to expand. And we knew regional communities could play a greater role in Australia's future. Yet we have repeatedly allowed long-term problems to become more difficult before responding with the investment and planning they require. This is a principle I see across many of Australia's challenges.

When we delay dealing with an underlying problem, we often end up paying more to manage its consequences. Infrastructure takes time to develop. Industries take time to establish. Hospitals require facilities, equipment and skilled workers. Transport networks require planning, funding, construction and ongoing maintenance. Sustainable communities cannot be created overnight. The longer we delay developing alternatives, the more difficult and expensive the transition can become.

What a growth plan should have to demonstrate

This is also why housing, transport, employment and public services cannot be planned as entirely separate issues. Building thousands of houses without adequate infrastructure creates new pressures. Building transport infrastructure without understanding where people need to travel can waste resources. Encouraging businesses to relocate without suitable workers, housing and services can undermine their chances of succeeding. These systems depend on one another. We should therefore be planning them together.

The people and services needed for a community cannot necessarily arrive on the day new homes are occupied. A school may have temporary classrooms, a regional hospital may struggle to recruit specialists, and a bus route may not have enough patronage to operate frequently at first. That transitional gap is one of the hardest problems. It would be unrealistic to demand every planned service be fully operational before the first dwelling opens, but equally unreasonable to make families wait indefinitely while a promised service remains a drawing.

I would want clear stages: what housing can be occupied now, which essential services must be ready first, what interim arrangements will protect residents, and what population or demand triggers additional investment? The community needs to know who will pay for those upgrades and what happens if growth is slower or faster than expected. A credible plan should contain contingencies rather than placing all hope in a single forecast.

A school is not merely a building; it needs teachers and operating funds. A hospital requires clinical staff, equipment and continuing care pathways. Transport requires vehicles, drivers, maintenance and service frequency. A road must be repaired through its life. These ongoing obligations are particularly relevant when a government approves low-density growth across large areas because the initial land price appears cheap. The kilometres of pipes and pavement do not become free just because the lots sell.

There is a division of responsibility between governments, councils, utilities and private developers. I do not want to assume that all infrastructure can be charged to developers without affecting housing prices, or that governments should pay every cost without regard to the benefits flowing to private landowners. Charges, grants and contributions require careful design. The public should understand which costs are recovered, which are subsidised, and who will maintain the result.

If a project adds many homes but pushes a nearby clinic, public transport service or road beyond capacity, that pressure is a real cost even if no one includes it in the housing project budget. On the other hand, a new population can make a previously unviable service viable and help businesses expand. Those effects should be measured in both directions. Growth is not automatically a burden or a benefit; it changes the requirements of the place.

The 2026 National Housing Supply and Affordability Council and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports show that housing supply and affordability need separate attention, including whether households can access appropriate homes. I would add a further test: whether homes remain connected to dependable public systems as population changes. An estate should not be declared successful solely because its planned lots were sold. [1][3]

I would also examine how to sequence services without allowing a staged plan to become an excuse for permanent delay. A new neighbourhood may begin with a temporary school arrangement or a limited bus service, but residents should know what will trigger the next stage, which authority is responsible and where funding will come from. If a forecast is revised, that decision should be published with the reasons. Some facilities may be more efficient when shared across nearby communities; others are essential within a short journey. The correct sequence depends on actual needs, including those of people who do not drive or cannot easily travel.

CHAPTER 09

Avoiding Regional Displacement

It would be an extraordinary contradiction to invest public money in a regional centre, celebrate an increase in population and then discover that the nurses, apprentices, retail workers, renters and older people who already lived there can no longer afford to remain. A development policy should not measure success only by the number of people arriving. It should ask what happens to the people who were there first.

We already have examples of growing regional centres. Infrastructure Australia has identified substantial population growth in places such as Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. But population growth alone should not be mistaken for successful regional development. A town is not necessarily thriving simply because more people are moving there. If housing prices rise beyond what existing residents can afford, hospitals become overwhelmed, roads become congested and essential infrastructure struggles to keep up, then we risk relocating the same problems rather than solving them. I believe regional development should be measured by the quality of life, economic opportunities and long-term sustainability of the communities being developed.

That includes protecting the interests of people who already live there. Regional communities should not be treated as empty spaces waiting to absorb metropolitan population growth. They are existing communities with their own histories, identities, industries and needs. Development should strengthen those communities rather than displace the people who helped build them.

Investment can help and harm at the same time

New businesses may create jobs, but they may also compete for a limited supply of housing or skilled workers. Tourism can bring customers and investment, but short-term accommodation can compete with long-term rentals. A major construction project can raise local spending while using resources that existing residents need. The effects will depend on the town and timing. I do not want to treat regional development as automatically good merely because the policy is intended to help.

The most obvious risk is rising rents and land prices. Someone who owns property may welcome the increase, while a low-income renter or young person attempting to move out of home may face greater insecurity. That does not mean every rise in value is evidence of abuse. It means policy needs to track who is better off and who is worse off, and whether additional supply or targeted assistance is keeping up with the new demand. Celebrating a growth headline without examining displacement would be a failure of accountability.

Existing residents should have meaningful opportunities to influence plans while those plans are still open. Consultation held after a developer has effectively decided the outcome is not enough. Nor should a consultation process allow a small, well-resourced group to speak for every renter, young person or worker in a town. Public institutions need accessible participation, published evidence and a fair way to resolve competing interests. This connects directly to the accountability standards developed in Volume IV.

The rights of First Nations communities and the cultural history of a place require particular care. Regional centres are not empty areas waiting for a new identity to be imposed by planners from a capital city. Traditional Owners, long-established communities and newer residents may have different views of development. None should be reduced to a decorative story on a promotional brochure. The aim should be a fair process that recognises real interests and legal obligations.

I would want a regional investment proposal to report changes in rental affordability, access to social housing, employment quality, school and health capacity, transport, small business survival and residents' sense of belonging. These measures could reveal that growth is occurring alongside deteriorating conditions for certain groups. If it does, the plan must change. Development that only works for arrivals who can afford the newest houses is not a complete success.

The uncomfortable truth is that no development can promise nobody will experience change or inconvenience. Trying to prevent every change can protect scarcity and exclude newcomers. But treating disruption as harmless progress can be cruel to existing communities. The Century approach should be to disclose trade-offs, hear the people affected, protect basic rights, monitor consequences and adjust rather than demand either permanent stagnation or limitless growth.

CHAPTER 10

A National Network of Livable Places

If we want Australians to have a genuine choice about where they live, we should not treat each city, regional centre and small town as a separate island. They perform different functions and depend on one another. A person may work in one town, study in another, visit family in a third and need specialist treatment in a major centre. Our planning should recognise those relationships instead of assuming that every journey must lead towards one capital city.

The objective should not be to make Melbourne less desirable. It should be to make more of Australia desirable and accessible. I want to see a country where people can choose to live in major cities, regional centres or smaller communities without automatically giving up access to meaningful opportunities. A country where regional development is not treated as an afterthought. Where businesses can succeed outside capital cities. Where public transport connects communities rather than leaving people dependent on cars for every aspect of their lives. Where regional growth improves the lives of existing residents instead of pricing them out.

And where environmental protection, economic development and community wellbeing are considered together rather than treated as competing afterthoughts. We cannot go back twenty years and make the investments we should have considered then. We cannot instantly undo decades of development patterns. But we can decide what we want Australia's next twenty or fifty years to look like. That requires planning beyond individual election cycles, measuring the actual outcomes of public investment and being willing to change direction when something isn't working. Ultimately, I don't believe Australia's housing problem is simply about where people want to live.

It is also about where people have been given realistic opportunities to live. If we continue concentrating employment, services and investment in the same places, we should not be surprised when housing demand continues concentrating around them. We need to build more housing, but we also need to build more places worth living. The answer is not to force people away from opportunity. It is to make opportunity available in more places. And if we genuinely want Australians to consider building their lives outside our major cities, we need to give them meaningful reasons to do so.

Because the goal shouldn't simply be fitting more people into the Australia we have already built. It should be building an Australia that gives more people the freedom to choose the life they want.

Different places, connected opportunities

I do not want a national plan that forces regional Australia to become a collection of copies of Melbourne. A town with agricultural expertise, another with manufacturing capability and another with specialist healthcare may complement each other. Reliable connections could allow residents to share opportunities without each place bearing the cost of duplicating every facility. What those links should look like depends on real demand: a frequent bus may be more useful than a grand new station; a reliable regional health network may matter more than a new convention centre.

There is an important distinction between a regional centre that has the workforce and services to grow and a location that is simply empty on a map. Public funds are finite. A new settlement needs a reason to exist beyond the apparent availability of cheap land. I would want governments to compare investment in established regional centres, expansion of current towns, redevelopment of existing urban sites and genuinely new settlements on the same transparent principles. One option will not be right everywhere.

National planning must remain compatible with people's freedom to move. If someone chooses the energy of a major city, they should not be shamed for it. If another person wants a backyard and a quieter community, they should not be told that accepting poor access to employment is the price of that preference. Public policy cannot guarantee every choice will be possible at every cost, but it can stop unnecessarily narrowing those choices through short-term and disconnected decisions.

The regional population figures published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics should not be used as a scoreboard in which more growth always means a place has won. We need to understand differences between population change, housing affordability, service capacity and quality of life. A town that grows more slowly while maintaining strong access and good local employment may be healthier than one that doubles rapidly without services. The data should inform questions about place, not become a substitute for judgement. [2]

I believe a credible national settlement strategy should explain where new jobs could realistically be supported, which existing networks can be improved, where environmental limits make growth inappropriate, and how people already living in these communities will benefit. It should set public milestones with independent review, and it should allow priorities to change when evidence does. That is not a demand that government control every private decision. It is a demand that public decisions about infrastructure and settlement form a coherent account of their consequences.

We have reached a point where housing can no longer be considered separately from the systems supplying it. Energy must be dependable. Water has to be available and safe. Roads and rail need maintenance. Public transport must be useful, not merely present on a planning diagram. Communications, drainage and waste services have to work after the ribbon is cut. The next volume examines those physical networks, because more places worth living in will remain a promise unless the foundations of daily life are actually built.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME IX

Infrastructure, Transport, Energy And Environmental Stewardship

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

Maintenance Before Repeated Crisis

A pothole can look like a minor problem until it damages someone’s vehicle, causes a crash or returns so regularly that residents stop believing repairs mean anything. I see it as a useful test of how governments make decisions. We can make a road safer today while still investigating why the surface keeps failing. Those are not competing responsibilities. One meets the immediate need; the other examines whether the same money and labour will be demanded again next month or next year.

A pothole doesn't care which political party promised to fix it. It just keeps damaging cars until somebody does something useful. But if it keeps coming back, why aren't we talking about the reason? That same question should guide how we spend money on long-term repairs.

I keep returning to the pothole because it is ordinary enough to expose an important mistake. A dangerous hole in a road needs attention. Repairing it may prevent an accident, protect tyres and keep a route usable. But if the same place breaks apart repeatedly, simply counting each patch as another completed job can confuse activity with progress. Has the road base failed? Is drainage allowing water beneath the surface? Are heavy loads greater than the structure was designed to withstand? Or is the surface otherwise sound and the occasional patch precisely the economical answer? Those possibilities require different responses.

I don't want governments to rebuild a road every time somebody complains about a pothole. That would waste money and close perfectly usable infrastructure for little benefit. I want maintenance decisions to be based on evidence about the cause, not only on the immediate visibility of the damage. The questions aren't simply whether the repair was cheap or whether an official can say a problem was addressed. They are how long the repair is expected to last, what risks remain, what future work is likely and whether another option would produce better long-term value.

Imagine three responses to an illustrative stretch of road. Option A repairs the immediate defect, with a low initial invoice and a shorter expected life. Option B renews the pavement and addresses confirmed drainage failure, demanding more up-front expenditure and a longer closure. Option C investigates redesigning the route or changing how traffic loads are distributed. None should win by definition. A sound economic and engineering appraisal would compare actual condition data, future maintenance, disruption, safety, environmental impacts and uncertainty. A cheap repair might be exactly right if the defect is isolated; wholesale replacement might be justified if failures repeat. A redesign may be unnecessary or may address a larger network problem that resurfacing cannot.

Now put that same damaged section on a major road carrying heavy traffic. How are workers meant to close it safely without affecting everybody who relies on it? A small street closure might inconvenience hundreds of people; a major arterial closure could affect thousands of journeys, with

congestion spreading into neighbourhood streets and delays to buses, deliveries and emergency access. Those figures are hypothetical - the real impact would depend on actual traffic counts, the timing and available alternatives. This makes it easier to see why an authority might keep choosing short repairs. They can reopen the road sooner. But if we're back there every few months, we should add up the repeated closures, not only the patching invoices. A properly staged long-term repair may cause more disruption once but less over its life. Or perhaps it won't. That is exactly what the traffic study and engineering assessment need to find out.

The strongest objection is that governments operate within budgets and can't commission lengthy investigations for every local defect. I agree. Investigation should be proportionate. A small repair can use standard maintenance practice; a persistent or high-risk failure deserves a deeper review. The purpose is to avoid spending large amounts repeatedly without ever asking why. Where the data show a pattern, an agency should be able to tell residents what is happening and what would trigger a different response.

For the driver, a good system means hazards reported clearly, urgent risks controlled and repeat failures investigated without requiring endless complaints. For a road worker, it means adequate safety procedures, proper materials and a realistic work order, not pressure to declare a job complete when conditions make a durable repair impossible. For a council or state agency, it means recording the condition and intervention in a way that permits later evaluation. That is how the same principle applies to people at every stage of the decision.

Inspection, maintenance and the evidence of failure

A maintenance program should classify roads and structures by risk and expected service life rather than waiting until public complaints become politically embarrassing. A small defect on a quiet route may justify a routine repair. A developing defect near a school crossing or a bridge may need urgent protection and technical testing. Repeated failure at the same location is a reason to check drainage, heavy-vehicle loads, construction quality and subsurface conditions. It is not proof of one particular cause before engineers have inspected it.

The same logic applies beyond roads. Water pipes leak, buses age, computer systems reach the end of support, power equipment wears out and hospitals depend on plant that requires servicing. If every failure is treated as a surprise, we create a permanent crisis industry. I do not mean that all assets should be replaced early. Replacement can waste money and materials when a safe repair would extend useful life. I mean that the decision should reflect evidence about safety, reliability, remaining life and future costs, not just whether the next announcement sounds impressive.

The lesson is accountability without blaming a worker for a failure they did not design. I want frontline staff able to record recurring problems without pressure to close a work order merely because the repair has been photographed. I also want agencies to report the conditions that made durable maintenance difficult. Sometimes there is a shortage of staff, unsuitable equipment, bad procurement or a hazard that cannot be corrected without redesign. Those are system questions. They deserve answers.

CHAPTER 02

Whole-of-Life Public Costing

Public infrastructure is often discussed as though a project has one price. Somebody announces the cost of a bridge or railway, and then the debate becomes whether the initial number is too large. But a useful public calculation needs to ask what the asset costs to operate, maintain, insure, renew and eventually remove. It should also examine the disruption caused while it is built and the consequences if its promised benefits fail to appear.

When people say a project costs a certain amount, I wonder what's missing from the bill. What about lost time, businesses cut off by roadworks, ongoing maintenance and costs shifted to somebody else? We need to be careful not to call a cheap decision efficient if everyone keeps paying for it afterwards.

Public spending discussions often collapse several different concepts into a single argument about whether we can afford something. We need to distinguish the money appropriated this year, the cost of borrowing, ongoing operating and maintenance obligations, the opportunity cost of not funding something else, and the value delivered to the public over decades. Calling a project an investment doesn't prove it is worthwhile. Calling it expensive doesn't prove it should be rejected.

I would want a public proposal to state its baseline honestly. What happens if no major project proceeds? Does the existing asset continue functioning safely with routine maintenance? Does failure become more likely? Is demand expected to change? A fair comparison measures each option against that realistic future, not against a made-up disaster where doing nothing costs infinitely more.

A road closure may cost businesses and road users time even when the agency's repair invoice looks modest. Construction may shift costs onto nearby residents through noise and restricted access. An energy project may require transmission or storage that doesn't appear in the advertised generation cost. A new housing estate can create later demand for schools, emergency services and utilities. These effects belong in an appraisal even when precise monetisation is difficult. Hard-to-measure consequences should be described with ranges and uncertainty, not excluded or invented.

There are sound reasons to borrow for an asset whose benefits persist into the future. There are also strong reasons to avoid debts for projects with poor value or ongoing obligations that the community can't sustain. Governments face finite labour, materials and professional capacity as well as budget limits. A project that consumes specialised workers may delay other important projects. It is reasonable to debate priorities; it isn't reasonable to conceal the trade-offs in order to make a proposal look painless.

Detailed appraisal can become another expensive bureaucratic exercise, and forecasts can be wrong. A decision framework must be proportionate: a major state asset should receive extensive scrutiny; a small local repair shouldn't need a national-scale business case. Independent reviewers should test sensitivity to changing costs and demand. An institution should return after construction and compare actual results with what it promised. The original decision may have been reasonable even if the outcome disappoints; what matters is whether assumptions were honest and lessons are acted upon.

Consider a hypothetical choice between renewing an ageing road today and repairing it repeatedly over the next decade. The finance department must know the immediate outlay and funding source. The asset manager must know expected life, likely future repairs and risks of deterioration. A freight

business cares about predictable travel and vehicle damage. Residents care about safety, access and the inconvenience of construction. All these accounts contain relevant information, but they shouldn't be mashed together into a single number without showing the assumptions.

A conventional cost-benefit appraisal may express some effects in dollars, using traffic forecasts, time values and maintenance expectations. Other effects will be assessed qualitatively or with separate indicators. I would want both methods visible and an explanation of whose wellbeing isn't adequately captured by an average. For instance, a project that produces modest aggregate savings could still impose a severe access barrier on a small group. Conversely, a change benefiting one vocal area might impose large costs on people elsewhere who haven't been invited to comment.

An honest ledger would show at least the public budget, community-wide consequences, distribution of harms and benefits, and significant uncertainty. Sensitivity tests should ask what happens if construction costs rise, traffic demand differs from the forecast or the expected service life proves shorter. Policymakers shouldn't invent decimal-point precision where no one can predict the future accurately.

I would also want the decision-makers named. A consultant may provide a technical recommendation, but an elected body or authorised agency normally retains responsibility for the actual decision. Expert advice should be published to an appropriate extent, with its limitations. The public should know when a minister chooses a different option from the one with the strongest quantified benefits, and which defensible public considerations prompted that choice. Not every such decision is wrong. Hiding the reasoning makes it impossible to judge fairly.

A cheap contract can be an expensive decision

Imagine two roads with the same advertised function. One uses a surface requiring frequent closure and repair; another requires a larger initial investment but has a longer predicted maintenance interval. The second is not automatically better, because its materials, construction emissions or financing could create other costs. Nor is the first automatically more economical because the tender came in lower. We need a reasonable comparison over the expected life of both designs, including uncertainties and who bears the risks.

I would distinguish public spending from genuine public value. A project may increase economic activity simply because workers and materials have been purchased, but activity is not itself a justification. The test is whether the result improves mobility, safety, access, resilience or another clearly stated public outcome at a defensible total cost. A failed alternative should remain visible in the record, because without comparison an agency can make its preferred option look inevitable.

Infrastructure Australia's 2025 market-capacity report estimated a $242 billion five-year major public-infrastructure pipeline. The same report described workforce shortages and overlapping demand in housing, transport and energy. That matters because projects do not compete for funding alone. They also compete for builders, electricians, designers, steel, manufacturing capacity, land and time. A plan that assumes each portfolio can have all the workers it wants may be impossible even if every treasury approves the budget. [1]

I do not think technical appraisal needs to become an excuse for endless delay. A broken crossing should be made safe, an essential repair should proceed and proportionate analysis should apply to the scale of each decision. Where long-term investments are large, however, assumptions should be disclosed and results assessed after delivery. Otherwise the next administration inherits only a bill and a success story written by the people who made the original decision.

CHAPTER 03

Roads, Rail and Resilient Corridors

It is easy to assume a traffic problem is solved by making a road wider. Sometimes the evidence may justify exactly that. But I also want to know what happens when the road closes, where freight goes, whether buses become slower, and whether the new capacity simply moves congestion to another intersection. A connected system has to function on ordinary days and on the days something goes wrong.

Sometimes a new road solves a problem. Sometimes it just moves the traffic to the next intersection. Before we celebrate the ribbon cutting, I'd like to see how the whole network works when something goes wrong.

When a freeway closes, the surrounding roads often carry the consequences. A journey that ordinarily uses one corridor may be diverted onto another road that is already close to its practical capacity. Freight competes with commuters, buses lose reliability, emergency routes become less predictable, and local streets may suddenly be asked to perform jobs they were never built to handle. One obvious reaction is to demand a wider freeway. But wider isn't always the same as more resilient.

I want planners to compare the value of a connected network with the value of concentrating traffic into a few enormous routes. Sometimes extra lanes may be justified, especially where bottlenecks have been demonstrated and alternatives evaluated. Sometimes better incident management, strategic connections, rail, public transport, freight scheduling or improvements to parallel roads may provide a more useful result. None of those choices should be sold as a miracle. New capacity can induce additional trips and shift congestion to the next junction, and alternative routes can impose noise or safety costs on neighbourhoods.

Take a hypothetical arterial closure affecting two nearby suburbs. The government's first duty is safety: control access, protect workers and emergency vehicles, and communicate reliable diversion information. The next question is whether current arrangements allow essential traffic to move. A network study could model ordinary peaks, serious incidents and planned works; examine bus priority, freight restrictions, signalling and alternative roads; and test whether any permanent change performs better across several conditions rather than just a dramatic single day.

I don't think a model should overrule local experience. Someone who watches their side street become a diversion route every week may notice pedestrian danger that an average travel-time figure misses. Equally, one resident's inconvenience doesn't by itself prove a multimillion-dollar redesign is justified. We need both the lived account and the measured evidence. Publishing the assumptions lets people identify which details are being missed before the project locks itself into one preferred answer.

A delivery driver, a student, a shift worker and an ambulance don't all need the same journey. Freight operators rely on dependable delivery windows, while people without cars need genuine transport access. Where freight rail can handle suitable movements, it may relieve some road pressure, but freight terminals, schedules, capital costs and the final truck journey still matter. Public transport needs accessibility, reliability and connections, not merely the existence of a timetable. Rural and regional travel may require very different solutions from dense urban corridors.

The real test is whether a person can get where they need to go safely and reliably, with less total disruption and at a defensible cost. Transport planning shouldn't reward the biggest structure merely because it can be photographed at an opening ceremony.

Suppose an emergency closure sends traffic from a major route through two local shopping streets. One street is wide enough for most passenger vehicles but has a school crossing and a bus stop. The other has fewer pedestrians but narrow turning points unsuitable for larger trucks. The simplest response might be to direct everybody along the apparently shortest route. That wouldn't necessarily be the safest or most reliable decision.

I would want a transport authority to identify the types of journeys affected before designing the diversion. Emergency services need reliable access. Freight operators need a route that physically accommodates their vehicles. Residents need safe pedestrian crossings and practical entry to their properties. Public transport users need accurate information if stops move. Once those needs are understood, engineers could compare temporary signals, restrictions on heavy vehicles, bus priority, information signs and alternative timings for planned works.

The costs would extend beyond the agency's traffic management contract. Shops might experience less passing business or more difficult deliveries. Local streets might sustain wear they weren't originally intended to bear. People living alongside an emergency route might experience noise or danger. Some of those losses will be difficult to quantify precisely, but leaving them entirely out of a decision effectively treats them as somebody else's problem.

A useful post-closure review would ask whether the route met the safety requirements, where congestion accumulated, whether communications were timely and which adjustments would improve the next incident response. It would also record when an apparently sensible strategy failed. The lesson should become part of future planning rather than remain in the memory of one traffic controller. This isn't a promise that emergencies can be made convenient. It is an expectation that public agencies learn to reduce unnecessary disruption where they can.

Choosing the corridor, not the biggest drawing

But stronger connections between regional communities, larger regional centres and capital cities could make an enormous difference. Imagine living in a regional centre with affordable housing, reliable healthcare, modern schools, local employment and access to open spaces. Now imagine frequent and dependable public transport connecting that community to surrounding towns and Melbourne, allowing residents to access specialised services, major events, education and employment without an exhausting journey. Suddenly, regional living becomes less about accepting isolation and more about choosing a different lifestyle. Transport infrastructure can help make distance less of a disadvantage.

And these connections should not exist only between regional towns and Melbourne. Regional centres should also be better connected to each other, allowing their economies and communities to support one another.

Reliable freight is not the enemy of passenger movement. Farmers, shops, hospitals, tradespeople and regional businesses depend on supplies arriving on time. But different journeys have different requirements. In some locations, moving suitable freight onto rail may free road capacity; in others the terminals, volumes or last-mile transport will make rail impractical. Separate routes or timetables may reduce conflict where the geography and demand support them. I would not advocate a fixed mode split without modelling the route, volumes, maintenance and safety outcomes.

Infrastructure Australia's 2026 ten-year priority list already identifies freight and network connections, including interoperability on rail and potential Melbourne intermodal capacity. These are existing national planning questions, not previously unimagined Century proposals. My contribution is to ask for fair comparison, transparent assumptions and careful attention to who pays for detours, disruption, access and the ongoing network. [2]

We also need to recognise that infrastructure can encourage development. An improved regional link may make new housing and employment possible, which can be valuable. It can also redirect traffic, increase pressure on farmland or create demand that the local water and health systems were not designed to meet. Transport cannot be separated from the places it changes. That is why I keep returning to the network rather than a single successful road opening.

CHAPTER 04

Safe, Affordable Public Transport

A person will not choose a train merely because a minister says shared transport is environmentally responsible. It has to meet the needs of that person's life. If the service does not reach a workplace, stops running before a late shift, is unaffordable, cannot be boarded with a disability, or feels unsafe, the advice to leave the car at home may be meaningless. Good transport policy starts with the reality of the journey, not a slogan about personal behaviour.

See, I agree with your latter point, but disagree with the first. We absolutely need more funding for public resources, education, mental health services and community support to help prevent crime before it happens. But that doesn't mean we should reduce policing and public safety in areas where people are already experiencing crime. We shouldn't automatically vilify police for doing their job and keeping people safe. Instead, we should be improving their training, accountability and operating standards so unlawful behaviour is addressed on both sides. Police misconduct and discrimination should never be ignored, but neither should the safety of the general public. I think making public transport safer is a good FIRST step, provided these measures are properly monitored and held accountable. We need people to feel comfortable catching trains and using public transport again.

Public transport, carpooling and other shared transport options should be encouraged, protected and incentivised, not just to support disadvantaged communities, but to benefit society as a whole. More people using shared transportation means fewer individual cars on the road, less congestion, potentially lower emissions and reduced environmental impacts. Making these systems safer, more affordable and reliable encourages more people to use them, which can support further investment and expansion, particularly into regional areas and communities currently lacking adequate transport options. It's not about choosing policing over public services. It's about investing in both immediate protection and long-term prevention while building a more accessible, sustainable and environmentally responsible transport network. One addresses the problems we're facing today, while the other helps prevent them tomorrow. Both are necessary if we genuinely want to improve society.

Immediate safety and longer prevention

I believe public safety can include visible staff, properly supervised police responses, workable reporting channels, lighting and help for people who are frightened or vulnerable. But those measures must respect the rights of passengers, staff and bystanders. Random suspicion based on a person's appearance is not effective accountability. The standard should be lawful, proportionate intervention followed by meaningful review. If additional patrols are introduced, we should examine complaints, safety outcomes and public confidence rather than assuming more uniforms automatically means safer travel.

The other half of safety is making the service dependable and genuinely usable. A late train can leave someone waiting alone after dark. Broken lift access can force a disabled passenger onto a lengthy alternative route. Poor transfers may put people at a stop they would otherwise avoid. None of these problems is an excuse for violence or harassment; they are design and operating conditions that a transport authority can address.

Australia already has Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport. Amendments made on 13 October 2026 introduce new requirements to improve the whole transport journey, including

information, training and safety/design measures. I do not want to propose accessibility as though nothing exists now. I want to ask whether the standards are implemented and what happens for people still unable to travel independently. [3]

Affordability also needs to be judged over the whole trip. A cheap fare can still be expensive when reaching the station requires a taxi, paid parking or a second ticket. Regional services may need different operating models from frequent suburban networks. Some towns may need demand-responsive connections, buses that reliably meet trains or community transport partnerships rather than a metropolitan timetable transplanted onto a different population.

The benefit of public transport should not be framed as an obligation for everybody to abandon private vehicles. People need cars for many legitimate reasons, including work, disability access, caring responsibilities and journeys without suitable service. The aim is to give more people a real option and reduce the total harms of congestion, pollution, unsafe travel and exclusion. Whether an intervention works should be measured through actual journeys, reliability, incidents, passenger experience and the freedom of people who previously had no workable transport.

CHAPTER 05

The Energy Transition and Planning Failure

Australia did not discover recently that power stations age. Nor did we suddenly learn that electrification, climate change and new technologies would alter the energy system. The exact sequence of costs and innovations could never have been perfectly predicted, but the need to prepare was foreseeable. The mistake I worry about is treating necessary long-term coordination as a series of short political battles until the physical deadline can no longer be ignored.

I believe one of Australia's greatest failures in energy policy has not simply been our reliance on fossil fuels, but our failure to adequately prepare for a future we knew was coming. Coal-fired power stations were never going to last forever. Infrastructure ages, technology develops, electricity demand changes, and the economic and environmental consequences of energy production become increasingly important. We have known about climate change for decades. We have watched renewable energy technologies develop, become more efficient and increasingly competitive. We have also known that replacing Australia's ageing electricity infrastructure would require enormous investment, planning and coordination.

Yet instead of consistently treating the energy transition as a long-term national responsibility, we allowed too much of the discussion to become another political and ideological battle. We spent years arguing over whether renewable energy should replace fossil fuels, rather than adequately preparing the infrastructure, industries and workforce needed to manage that transition. While these arguments continued, our power stations kept ageing, technologies continued developing, and the future we were debating gradually became the present. Eventually, later arrives. Now Australia faces the enormous task of replacing ageing electricity generation while simultaneously expanding renewable energy, developing energy storage, upgrading transmission networks, modernising grid infrastructure and training the workforce needed to support these changes.

I believe this highlights one of the greatest misunderstandings surrounding renewable energy. An energy transition is not simply a matter of installing solar panels and wind turbines and hoping electricity continues flowing. Electricity must remain reliable and affordable. Renewable generation needs to be supported by storage, transmission, grid management, flexible generation and other technologies capable of maintaining supply when demand and weather conditions change. A functioning energy system requires coordination across industries, governments, communities and generations. These investments were always going to be necessary. The difference is that consistent long-term planning could have allowed more of this infrastructure to be developed progressively, rather than leaving so many challenges to be addressed within increasingly limited timeframes.

The engineering problem behind the slogans

I don't think we can just flick a switch and replace our entire energy system tomorrow. I also don't think that means doing nothing. Mining, renewables, storage, manufacturing and the workers involved are all connected. So what's the sequence that gets us somewhere better without leaving whole communities behind?

Energy is a useful example of how ideological arguments can stop people from asking practical questions. Australia has relied heavily on resources and established electricity technologies. Those industries have provided power, jobs, public revenue, skills and infrastructure. They also have environmental consequences and face changing technical and commercial conditions. The question isn't whether every worker in mining has done something wrong or whether renewable energy is

automatically perfect. It is how we maintain a reliable, affordable system while reducing avoidable damage and preparing for the future.

Delaying investment can create costs: existing assets age, network requirements grow, skills pipelines become harder to build and replacement decisions are rushed. But changing too quickly without adequate transmission, storage, flexible supply or consumer protection can also cause harm. I believe both risks deserve a full explanation rather than slogans about one source saving or destroying everything. Renewables are industries with material supply chains and land-use effects; mining skills and workers may remain important in parts of the transition.

A serious plan should compare electricity reliability, household prices, full system costs, emissions, environmental impacts, timelines, supply chains, skilled labour and regional effects. It must explain who pays for new networks and what happens to communities built around older industries. A worker losing a secure livelihood shouldn't be told that retraining is a sufficient response without evidence of real jobs, local access and appropriate pay. Nor should a region be promised that every existing job can be preserved indefinitely when conditions change.

I would support investing in practical training, planning predictable stages and testing new technologies honestly. We should be willing to stop a poorly designed project, but we should also acknowledge when refusing any transition merely delays an unavoidable and more expensive adjustment. Long-term responsibility involves finding a workable path through change, not pretending that change carries no cost.

I like the possibilities of renewable energy, but I don't want us to forget that solar panels, turbines, batteries and networks need materials, workers and land. A technology doesn't become harmless simply because we call it renewable. We should consider extraction, manufacturing, transport, maintenance, recycling and disposal across its whole life. Sometimes keeping or repairing something useful for longer may be better than rushing to replace it; sometimes replacement genuinely avoids more harm. The evidence has to decide which.

AEMO’s 2026 Integrated System Plan examines electricity generation, storage and network investments through to 2050. In the National Electricity Market, it identifies renewable generation connected by networks, firmed by storage and backed up by gas as the least-cost development path under its assumptions and current policy settings. That finding matters, but it should not be misread as a universal promise about every bill, technology or region. Cost estimates depend on assumptions, timing, build rates, existing assets and whether the required infrastructure arrives together. [4]

For me, this is where the cost of delay becomes visible. A state can announce a target without having the workforce to connect new generation, the storage to manage changing weather or the network upgrades to move power to customers. A developer may be ready before an approval is granted; a transmission project may face legitimate objections about farms, land access and compensation. Speed matters, but haste without design and community consent can damage the very outcomes a transition is supposed to produce.

We should compare credible alternatives with enough transparency to distinguish a technology that is technically possible from one that can be financed and operated on the relevant schedule. Energy security requires firm supply at critical moments, not only impressive annual generation totals. The system also needs affordability, reasonable emissions outcomes, reliability, contingency plans and protection for communities affected by the infrastructure. Any honest transition plan will have to hold those responsibilities together.

CHAPTER 06

Mining, Industry and a Diversified Future

I do not support the false choice that says we either keep mining forever exactly as we do it now or abandon every worker and industrial skill associated with mining. A changing energy system still uses minerals, metals, engineering, fabrication, road and rail freight, machinery, energy and skilled labour. The question is what we extract, what we process, what impacts we accept and whether prosperity from the present helps build industries capable of lasting beyond it.

This is also why I disagree with the idea that renewable energy must mean abandoning Australia's mining and industrial capabilities. Renewable energy still requires mining, construction, manufacturing, transport, engineering, skilled labour and enormous investment. Solar panels require materials. Wind turbines require steel, engineering and manufacturing. Batteries require minerals and processing. Transmission infrastructure requires electricians, construction workers, machinery and ongoing maintenance. The need for resources and skilled workers does not disappear simply because we change how electricity is generated. Instead, we change what we produce, how we produce it and how we use the resources available to us. I am not suggesting that Australia should simply stop mining.

Our mining industry has contributed enormously to Australia's economy and remains important to modern industry, infrastructure and technological development. Many of the minerals required for renewable energy technologies come from the same broader resource industries that already support our economy. But I believe we must question what we are doing with the wealth, skills and opportunities these industries provide. Having enormous natural resources does not automatically guarantee long-term economic prosperity. If we continuously extract resources, export them and use the proceeds primarily to maintain our current economic arrangements, without sufficiently investing in the industries and infrastructure that will support future generations, we risk becoming dependent on an economic advantage that cannot remain unchanged forever.

There is a reasonable argument that expanding resource extraction can generate employment, government revenue and economic growth. I do not dismiss that argument. But if our response to every economic challenge is simply to extract more resources and sell more commodities, without considering what happens when markets change, resources become harder to access or demand shifts towards different technologies, then we are not necessarily solving the underlying problem. We may simply be postponing it. This is where I begin questioning some of the incentives within capitalism. I do not believe capitalism is inherently the enemy, nor do I believe private enterprise, competition or profit are automatically harmful. Markets and private investment can encourage innovation, efficiency, technological development and economic opportunity.

However, a system heavily influenced by short-term financial returns can struggle to adequately account for problems whose consequences extend across decades. A company might generate substantial profits from extracting a resource today, while some of the environmental consequences or infrastructure costs emerge years later. An investment in long-term energy infrastructure may provide enormous public benefits over several generations, even when its immediate financial returns are less attractive. What benefits an individual business in the short term does not always align with what benefits an entire country over thirty or fifty years. This does not mean markets are incapable of long-term investment, nor does it mean governments automatically make better decisions.

Governments can also prioritise elections, delay difficult decisions and waste public resources. That is precisely why I believe essential national infrastructure requires stronger long-term planning, transparent oversight and cooperation between public institutions and private industries. Economic incentives should encourage investment in our collective future, rather than leaving future generations responsible for costs that could have been addressed earlier. Australia has an opportunity to use its natural resources, technical expertise and industrial capabilities to build a more resilient and diversified economy. Instead of treating mining and renewable energy as completely opposing industries, we should be examining how the wealth and capabilities of one can help develop the other.

Instead of viewing environmental protection and economic development as enemies, we should be exploring how better technology, resource efficiency, responsible extraction and long-term planning can reduce environmental damage while maintaining economic opportunity. And instead of treating each energy policy as a competition between political ideologies, we should be asking whether it provides affordable, reliable and sustainable outcomes for the people who depend upon it.

A transition that leaves people behind is not a complete plan

A region cannot prepare for industrial change merely by hearing that the country will be better off on average. A worker needs to know whether their skills are transferable, whether training is available close to home, whether employers actually need the qualification and what happens to their household income in the meantime. A small business that services an old industrial plant may face a very different problem from a large company able to move capital between sectors. The idea of a just transition has to be tested in those practical details.

Domestic processing and manufacturing are worth serious assessment, but not every resource should automatically be processed locally at any cost. We should compare access to clean and dependable energy, skilled labour, water, freight, environmental effects, international markets and the risks of subsidies that outlive their value. There may be excellent opportunities to build new technical industries. There may also be proposals that sound patriotic but cannot survive once public support ends. Evidence should decide which are which.

I am not arguing that Australia's energy transition could have been perfectly predicted or that every challenge could have been prevented. Technology changes, economic conditions shift, and infrastructure projects can encounter genuine difficulties. But uncertainty is not an excuse for failing to prepare. In fact, uncertainty is one of the strongest reasons to build adaptable infrastructure, develop diverse industries and maintain plans that can respond to changing circumstances. I believe Australia's energy problem reflects a broader weakness in how we approach national development. We often wait until infrastructure is ageing, services are struggling or problems become politically unavoidable before making the investments necessary to address them.

We focus so heavily on today's costs that we sometimes overlook the greater costs of postponing necessary work. The lesson from Australia's energy transition should not simply be that renewable energy has failed, or that fossil fuels must disappear overnight. It should be that delaying necessary change does not make the responsibility disappear. It transfers that responsibility to the next generation, often with greater costs, fewer options and less time to respond. Australia has the resources, the workforce, the technological opportunities and the economic potential to build something better. But having those advantages means very little if we fail to use them effectively.

I believe the purpose of today's prosperity should not simply be to maintain today's economy. It should be to build the foundations that allow future generations to prosper as well. We should not

have to wait until a system is failing before deciding that it is worth improving. Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails. And most importantly, prepare for what comes next.

I also want environmental restoration and long-term obligations accounted for while an operation is profitable, not only when a company or community is left with the site. The responsibility should follow the power to make decisions and earn returns, while respecting the real jobs and services that depend on industrial activity. This is the same economic principle developed in Volume V, applied to physical resources and intergenerational responsibility.

CHAPTER 07

Digital Infrastructure Is Material

When someone says a service is digital, it can sound as though it has escaped the physical world. But a school video call needs a network, a phone needs electricity and towers, a hospital information system needs secure equipment, and a cloud service lives in buildings filled with computers and cooling. A digital system can feel effortless to its user precisely because an enormous chain of physical infrastructure is supporting it.

Everybody talks about the digital future, but servers still need electricity, space, cooling and people who know how to keep them working. If we call something 'online', it doesn't stop being part of the real world. Who pays for that infrastructure and who gets the benefit?

I am interested in technology because it can make life easier, expand knowledge and let individuals or small businesses achieve things that once required much larger organisations. But I don't believe software exists in a separate universe from roads, water and electricity. Data centres use physical resources. Internet services rely on connections, power and maintenance. AI systems can provide useful tools while concentrating information, capital or decision-making in organisations ordinary users can't easily challenge.

A digital service can also fail people without a server ever going offline. A government website may be technically available but inaccessible to a person who lacks reliable internet, has a disability or doesn't understand its instructions. A small business may be pushed onto a platform with changing fees or opaque account restrictions. A school might adopt a tool without having clear privacy standards or a way to correct errors. These are questions of design, power and accountability as much as technology.

If public money funds digital infrastructure, I would want decision-makers to explain security, privacy, interoperability, ongoing operating costs, environmental demands and what happens if a supplier fails. Procurement needs a practical exit path rather than dependence on one vendor forever. Citizens should retain routes to a real person for decisions that significantly affect them, particularly when automation can make a mistake at scale.

The strongest objection is that demanding extensive safeguards can slow innovation. That may be true, which is why obligations should reflect the risk. A tool for organising personal notes doesn't require the same scrutiny as a system deciding welfare eligibility. We shouldn't ban helpful technology simply because it can fail; we should design accountability in proportion to what the failure could do.

Imagine a service moving its bookings entirely online. On paper, the change seems efficient: fewer phone calls, staff able to process requests quickly and customers free to book outside office hours. Many people would benefit. But a person without stable internet, somebody who needs information read aloud or someone who can't complete the form may suddenly lose access to a service they previously used. A business may save administrative hours while the customer bears the inconvenience or cost of finding help.

The Century response shouldn't be to reject digital services. It should ask for reliable alternatives proportionate to the importance of the service. A casual commercial booking may reasonably operate differently from a healthcare appointment or welfare appeal. Where serious rights or essential needs are involved, people should be able to identify and correct errors without being

trapped in an automated loop. The organisation should test actual completion rates across different user groups, rather than celebrating the number of page views.

A public agency should know who maintains the system, where sensitive information goes, how long records are retained, what happens during an outage and whether it can migrate to a different supplier. These can look like technical questions, but each has a consequence for public freedom and long-term costs. We should welcome useful technology while refusing the idea that convenience for the designer automatically equals convenience for the person using it.

Reliability is a public-access issue

If an essential service moves online without considering people who have poor reception, cannot afford data, struggle with an interface or need human assistance, the result may be cheaper for the operator while becoming more expensive for the user. That is not necessarily progress. The same issue arises when the digital system is available most of the time but has no useful backup during a power outage, a cyber incident or a severe weather event.

The Australian Cyber Security Centre's report published in October 2026 describes cyber incidents affecting critical infrastructure, including essential services. This is not evidence that digital networks are unworkable or that every service must remain on paper. It means resilience must include cybersecurity, recoverability, staff training and fallback arrangements. [5]

New data centres and networks also draw on electricity, water, skilled labour and land. In some places they may improve connectivity, jobs or network efficiency; in others their demand may compete with homes and essential industry. I would want honest capacity assessments and environmental measures, not a belief that every technological advance comes without a material cost. Volume XI will examine how people should use digital tools and AI. Here the question is whether the physical systems that make those tools possible are dependable, fair and sustainable.

CHAPTER 08

Circular Economy and Reuse

The easiest way to reduce the resource cost of something can sometimes be to use it longer. Repairing an appliance, keeping a garment in circulation or refurbishing a piece of furniture may avoid some demand for new production. But we should not pretend that reuse is free, that repairs are always worthwhile or that people on tight budgets can automatically buy the most durable product. We need the real costs and the real choices in front of us.

One of the most practical starting points, in my opinion, is something we already have: op shops. Every day, perfectly usable clothing is donated, resold, discarded or left sitting unused. Meanwhile, people continue purchasing newly manufactured products, sometimes because affordable and accessible alternatives are difficult to find. I believe we should be doing much more to normalise second-hand clothing and support the systems that make reuse possible. Imagine expanding government-supported op shops, community clothing exchanges, textile recycling facilities and affordable repair services. These initiatives could operate alongside existing charities, community organisations and private second-hand businesses. Rather than replacing organisations that already provide valuable services, governments could help them expand their reach, improve their facilities and make clothing more accessible.

This could create opportunities for community employment, training, volunteering and local economic participation while reducing unnecessary waste. We should also recognise that second-hand clothing is not always available in suitable sizes, conditions or locations. Making reuse a genuine alternative means addressing those barriers rather than assuming everyone already has equal access. The objective should be simple: keep useful clothing in circulation for as long as reasonably possible.

The people who make the products are part of the calculation

Although I support expanding reuse and recycling, I recognise that op shops alone cannot solve the problems associated with fast fashion. We also need to question how much clothing we manufacture, how long those products last and why businesses are encouraged to continuously produce new collections. I believe we should be moving away from systems that depend on unnecessary overproduction and towards manufacturing that prioritises quality, durability, responsible resource use and genuine consumer needs. But there is another consequence we need to consider. Millions of people around the world depend on the garment industry for employment. If we reduce manufacturing without considering those workers, we could unintentionally remove the incomes of people who are already financially vulnerable.

That would not necessarily represent progress. I believe meaningful reform should consider the people who depend on the existing system, including workers who may need alternative employment, retraining or other economic opportunities as industries change. We cannot claim to protect vulnerable workers while ignoring the consequences that our proposed solutions might have on their livelihoods. This is why I believe we must look beyond the immediate problem and examine the wider consequences of the changes we propose. A solution should aim to reduce harm rather than simply move it somewhere else. Ultimately, I do not believe ordinary people should have to choose between affording essential clothing and supporting the wellbeing of the people who manufacture it.

Nor should protecting the environment depend entirely on whether someone has enough disposable income to purchase expensive alternatives. Businesses should be expected to demonstrate responsible manufacturing practices. Governments should establish and enforce meaningful labour and environmental standards while helping make sustainable alternatives affordable and accessible. Consumers should be encouraged to purchase responsibly, reuse clothing and avoid unnecessary waste wherever their circumstances allow. These responsibilities should work together rather than being placed entirely on one group. I believe the purpose of economic reform should be to create systems where making the responsible choice becomes increasingly practical for everyone. We should aim to make products more durable, manufacturing more accountable, workers better protected and existing resources more efficiently used.

And we should do this without forgetting that affordability is itself an important social consideration.

I discussed fast fashion in detail in Volume V because it illustrates how economic power and consumer affordability shape choices. Here I want to examine the physical systems around reuse: safe collection, sorting, repair skills, local exchange, durable design, material recovery and markets for recovered inputs. A circular economy cannot be only a poster encouraging consumers to recycle. If no reliable collection exists or the recovered material cannot be used, the good intention may simply move waste to a different location.

Australia already has a Circular Economy Framework and a 2024 National Waste Policy Action Plan. Clothing textiles are among the product-stewardship priorities listed by the Australian Government. These are real initiatives against which any Century proposal should be compared, not a blank policy space. Their effectiveness should be assessed by measurable reductions in unnecessary resource use, increases in reuse and repair, changes in worker conditions and total system costs. [6]

I would consider public procurement as part of this problem. A school, hospital or government department purchasing goods could evaluate repairability, expected service life, supply-chain labour conditions and eventual disposal alongside purchase price. But an inflexible preference for recycled content could create safety problems or increase costs where the materials are unsuitable. A fair approach tests suitability, value and environmental benefit for each use instead of treating a fashionable label as proof.

Repair and reuse may also create jobs for local trades, community organisations and training providers. The same change could reduce orders for workers elsewhere. Those outcomes deserve analysis. I do not want a system that celebrates waste reduction while deliberately ignoring the families whose incomes depend on production. Our obligation is to improve the transition itself: more practical skills, better products, accessible second-hand options and honest protection for workers affected by changed demand.

CHAPTER 09

Environmental and First Nations Stewardship

Environmental responsibility cannot be reduced to the question of which energy source somebody prefers. It concerns water, land, biodiversity, pollution, emissions, soils, waste and the way natural systems support human life over many generations. If an infrastructure decision creates prosperity now while transferring damage or restoration costs to people who have no voice today, the accounting is incomplete.

The land and water we're using now are the same resources somebody after us will need. I don't want future generations dealing with every cost we were too impatient to think about. That doesn't mean nobody can build anything; it means asking what we can responsibly use and repair.

I have thought about the relationship between land and responsibility found in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions of caring for Country. These are different peoples, knowledge systems and obligations, and I am not claiming to represent them or reduce them to one simple saying. What I take as a question for myself is this: if we take resources from the land, what responsibilities do we carry for the people and environments that come afterwards?

Surely we should ask whether we actually need to extract something before we do, and whether recycling, repair or another design could meet the need with less harm. That doesn't mean a country can function without using resources. It means being accountable for the full consequences and seeking the knowledge of the communities who hold it, rather than borrowing a cultural principle as a decorative argument.

Environmental stewardship is often framed as a choice between protecting nature and letting people build the infrastructure they need. There are genuine trade-offs: a road occupies land, housing needs materials, agriculture needs water and energy systems need space. But treating the environment as an unlimited source of free inputs or as a problem somebody else can repair later is also a decision, with consequences that are easy to hide from this year's budget.

I believe we should examine the full life of projects: sourcing materials, construction, operation, repairs and eventual replacement or removal. Water availability, flood risk, heat, biodiversity, existing land uses and cultural importance deserve attention at the planning stage. The people who live with the effects should have a meaningful voice, while technical assessment and the public interest still matter. A consultation isn't fair if it only includes people who can attend a meeting during working hours.

This doesn't mean every project must preserve everything exactly as it is. Some infrastructure will create justified disturbance. The duty is to examine alternatives, prevent avoidable harm, manage unavoidable impacts and ensure promises about rehabilitation can actually be enforced. Where the future consequences are uncertain, uncertainty should appear in the decision instead of being written out. Future generations can't submit objections to today's planning approval; that makes present accountability more important, not less.

Stewardship requires authority, not just praise

First Nations peoples have extensive and diverse knowledge of Country and longstanding connections to lands and waters. That should not be turned into a decorative acknowledgement at the beginning of an environmental report. Traditional Owners and relevant First Nations organisations need meaningful, rights-respecting participation in decisions affecting Country, including access to information, appropriate resources and the ability to challenge harmful plans.

There is no single Indigenous viewpoint or universal land-management technique, and scientific assessment should work alongside locally appropriate expertise rather than treating either as a slogan.

Existing Indigenous Protected Areas and ranger programs demonstrate the practical work of caring for Country, including ecological monitoring, fire and weed management and cultural heritage protection. These programs already exist and can inform new partnerships; the decision about whether a particular proposal is acceptable must still be made with the people directly affected. [7]

Reducing emissions is important, but individual projects have distinct environmental footprints. A renewable development can affect habitat and land access; a mine can affect water or restoration obligations; a new highway can change runoff and fragment ecosystems. An old infrastructure asset may be inefficient, yet rebuilding it could consume enormous material and produce construction emissions. Sometimes the better option is to maintain, sometimes to redesign and sometimes not to build. We need evidence about each case.

The alternative of doing nothing also has consequences. Ageing or unsafe systems may pollute, leak resources, become less resilient or place people in growing danger from heat, fires and floods. A fair appraisal compares credible choices, considers cumulative impacts and states uncertainty. It should protect the natural systems people depend on without pretending conservation and human needs can be completely separated.

I would want future generations represented through durable public responsibilities: monitoring, restoration funding, data that remains available, independent review and enforceable obligations after ownership or political leadership changes. Long-term stewardship is not achieved by announcing good intentions. It is achieved when decisions still hold up decades later and when damaged places are not forgotten after the opening speech or final shipment.

CHAPTER 10

Integrated National Infrastructure Planning

The central lesson of this volume is that infrastructure systems do not behave as separate political portfolios. A housing project needs power and water. A hospital needs safe transport, a trained workforce, digital systems and reliable electricity. Regional employment depends on freight links and often on specialist education. Electricity infrastructure can compete with other construction for skilled workers. When each department plans only its own success, the community may inherit a collection of individually impressive projects that do not function together.

A new house, a new road and a new power line might each look reasonable by themselves. Put them in the wrong order and the people moving in could be stuck for years. That's why I keep saying we need to look at the machine as a whole.

Housing, roads, jobs, schools, hospitals and energy are often assessed by different departments with separate budgets. Yet a new community will need all of them. A decision that makes sense in one organisation's spreadsheet might leave another paying an unplanned cost. The people who experience those gaps don't care which department's responsibility chart says the problem belongs somewhere else.

Consider a hypothetical regional development. A developer proposes affordable homes; residents welcome the possibility of less expensive housing; government hopes to support regional growth. But the area has limited medical appointments, schools near capacity and one road that floods regularly. The project shouldn't automatically be rejected. It should be assessed as a coordinated sequence. Could homes be delivered in stages while road access, water and services expand? Who funds each stage? Which promises bind the relevant authorities? How are existing residents protected from service deterioration during construction?

I would expect a publicly understandable decision record to include the problem, the forecast, alternatives, necessary supporting works, distribution of costs, timetable, responsible agencies and a scheduled review. Where numbers are uncertain, publish ranges and the conditions that could change the decision. Where a promised service is outside the control of the approving agency, that dependency should be declared rather than buried in an optimistic brochure.

We can use existing Australian infrastructure assessment approaches rather than pretending this is an invention. Infrastructure Australia's published assessment framework already organises proposals around defining problems, assessing options, business cases and post-completion review. [S1] My challenge is whether the same discipline is translated into something the public can read and whether it is actually followed when politics makes shortcuts tempting.

A proposal to manufacture more goods locally shows why coordination matters. It isn't enough to announce a factory. Where will the electricity and water come from? Which workers need training? How will materials reach it? Can its products be maintained and recycled? If all of those costs land in different departments, we may think we've gained an industry while ignoring what it actually demands from the community. A fair assessment counts both what we gain and what we have to provide.

Imagine a council repeatedly receiving complaints about a damaged road. A short public page could record: the latest verified inspection, immediate safety response, recurring defects, likely causes, repair options, expected service life, approximate cost ranges, consultation dates and the officer or agency responsible. If a major rebuild becomes the preferred option, its business case could link to

traffic analysis, climate or drainage assumptions and the reasons cheaper alternatives were rejected. Residents wouldn't automatically get the outcome they ask for, but they would be able to see that their experience was examined.

For larger projects, the same structure could identify affected groups, formal rights and environmental obligations, construction impacts, complaints channels, independent review routes and a post-opening evaluation. The decision record should say what was promised and what finding would justify adjusting the project. It shouldn't simply declare everything successful because construction finished on time. When we assess outcomes after the ribbon has been cut, we make the next decision more informed.

This system itself costs money and staff time. That cost must be budgeted and tested. It might improve accountability and prevent repetition, but the benefits can't be asserted as established savings before a trial demonstrates them. The value of transparency should be measured partly through the ability of ordinary people to understand and challenge decisions, not just through website visitor counts.

Coordinate the problem, not unchecked power

National coordination does not require putting all decisions in the hands of one unanswerable authority. The institutions discussed in Volume IV should still apply: independent assessment, public reasons, protected dissent, reviewable secrecy where genuinely necessary and remedies when institutions misuse power. Different levels of government and private providers will retain different duties. Their dependencies should be visible, so a project cannot be declared complete while another agency is left carrying the costs of making it usable.

The practical test might be a staged national infrastructure register, cross-portfolio forecasts and public comparisons of alternatives. It should state current asset condition, projected demand, key assumptions, workforce limitations, environmental approvals, Traditional Owner participation, operating obligations and what happens if the preferred project is delayed. Some information will be commercially sensitive or related to security. Those exceptions should be justified and subject to oversight, not used as blanket reasons to hide an entire decision.

I also want to protect the ability to change course. A major project can be rational at its approval date and still become unsuitable when circumstances change. Transparent reviews should distinguish a genuine learning-based revision from political interference or concealed mistakes. Cancelling a failed plan may save resources; cancelling a useful one for partisan reasons can waste them. Neither outcome should be judged by party loyalty alone.

We have reached the point where we cannot talk about national housing, transport, water, energy, digital services and environmental stewardship without asking another question: how many people will need these systems, where will they live, and which forms of growth can be supported without undermining rights or opportunities? These questions take us into the next volume, Immigration, Population and Civic Belonging. That discussion must examine national capacity without treating a person’s origin as evidence of blame.

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails. Above all, do not leave later generations with an impressive network on paper and systems that cannot support the lives people actually lead.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME X

Immigration, Population And Civic Belonging

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

Immigration and Capacity Are Different Questions

I support immigration, and I believe a country has a responsibility to understand the demands it is asking its communities to meet. Those two statements are not contradictory. What I reject is the idea that asking about population capacity is the same as judging whether the people who wish to come here deserve dignity. Immigration is a policy decision with practical consequences. A human being is not a policy failure.

There is a difference between welcoming people and building a system capable of welcoming them well. If a family arrives with the promise of opportunity but cannot find stable accommodation, affordable transport or access to health services, the failure is not necessarily a lack of willingness on their part. We must examine how the receiving country prepared, what information the family was given and whether the institutions responsible for settlement can actually deliver on their responsibilities.

I support immigration, but I do not believe supporting immigration means ignoring the limitations of the country receiving people. Australia has housing shortages, infrastructure pressures, workforce challenges, healthcare demands and communities struggling to access essential services. Immigration contributes to population growth, and population growth increases demand for these resources. That is not an argument against immigration. It is an argument for responsible population planning. I believe the question should not simply be whether Australia should accept immigrants, but how many people Australia can sustainably support, what our immigration system is trying to achieve, and whether we are properly preparing for the consequences of population growth.

There is a difference between welcoming people and having the capacity to support them. We should be capable of doing both.

Capacity changes rather than standing still

I do not think there is one permanent maximum population Australia can support. Capacity depends on housing stock, vacant homes, workforce skills, water, electricity, roads, planning rules, accessible healthcare and how well we distribute opportunity across the country. A hospital may have a new building and still lack nurses; a new subdivision may have houses and still lack a reliable bus. Counting buildings is not the same as measuring the services that make them work.

Capacity also has a time dimension. A primary school can sometimes add a classroom within a relatively short period, but a new specialist hospital, major railway or trained medical workforce requires many years of planning and development. The relevant question is not only how many people Australia could theoretically support. It is what is available now, where the shortage is, and what investment could realistically change before demand grows further.

It is equally wrong to treat new arrivals as though they contribute demand but no productive capacity. People build houses, staff hospitals, start businesses, teach, study, pay taxes and care for relatives. Some arrive to work in industries that have been short of trained people for years. But those contributions cannot be assumed just by pointing to aggregate economic growth. We need to consider whether people can obtain appropriate work, settle safely and participate in the economy they are entering.

I want governments to publish measurable indicators rather than announce a single emotionally charged immigration number. Those indicators should cover local housing availability, new dwellings completed, hospital and school access, infrastructure timelines, labour conditions, environmental pressures and the practical experience of newcomers and existing residents. They should also be honest about uncertainty. Forecasts are not guarantees.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported 27.92 million residents at 31 March 2026, annual population growth of about 392,700 and net overseas migration of about 292,100 over the preceding twelve months. Those figures are snapshots, not a moral judgment about any community and not a forecast of future capacity. [1]

The Century approach I want to develop is adaptive rather than fixed. If housing and services are falling behind, governments should explain what they will do about supply and whether settings need adjustment. If infrastructure and workforce capacity improve, they should be prepared to reconsider their assumptions. It would be inconsistent to demand evidence-based policy while treating an old migration target as sacred simply because a political party announced it.

CHAPTER 02

The Demand and Supply Balance

Housing is where the immigration debate often becomes both understandable and unfair. More people need places to live. It follows that population growth can increase demand. But that observation does not tell us why Australian housing supply is expensive, why homes are built where they are, why some developments are delayed, or why jobs and essential services have become so concentrated. Those are different questions requiring different evidence.

Population growth increases housing demand. I do not believe that should be controversial. However, acknowledging that immigration contributes to demand does not mean immigrants themselves are responsible for Australia's housing crisis. Housing availability depends on much more than population numbers. It depends on construction capacity, infrastructure investment, planning regulations, land use, employment opportunities, government decisions and whether housing supply keeps pace with demand. When a country fails to prepare for predictable population growth, blaming the people arriving does not correct that failure.

At the same time, I do not believe it is reasonable to dismiss concerns about immigration simply because some people express those concerns through prejudice. If housing construction and infrastructure development cannot keep pace with population growth, then migration settings may need to change. That is a legitimate policy consideration. Immigration should not be unlimited simply because immigration can benefit the economy. Equally, immigration should not be unnecessarily restricted because governments have failed to properly plan for growth. We need to examine both sides of the equation.

How quickly is the population growing, and how quickly are we increasing the country's ability to support that population?

Demand must not conceal the supply decisions

One of the problems I see in political discussions is how easily legitimate concerns become arguments against entire groups of people. It is reasonable to question immigration levels, border security, housing pressure, employment competition and the costs of population growth. But questioning immigration policy is different from blaming immigrants. A person who moves to Australia looking for employment, education, safety or a better future is not individually responsible for failures in Australian housing policy, infrastructure investment or economic planning. Those decisions are largely the responsibility of governments, institutions and the systems we have established.

If our population is growing faster than we can build housing, we should investigate why housing construction is not keeping up. If hospitals are overwhelmed, we should examine workforce shortages, funding, infrastructure and service delivery. If employment opportunities are limited, we should examine training, economic development, wages and regional investment. Immigration may contribute to some of these pressures, but identifying a contributing factor is not the same as identifying the underlying cause. We should solve the problem we are actually facing rather than looking for someone convenient to blame.

A serious policy review should compare several timelines. What was the growth in household formation? How many dwellings received approval, started construction and actually reached completion? How many were accessible, affordable and near employment? What happened to building costs, infrastructure contributions, financing and land-use decisions? Were there homes

available but unsuitable, too expensive or too far from opportunities? Without these distinctions, a single headline about migration can be made to explain almost anything.

We also need to avoid treating housing demand as a count of migrants. A person arriving may rent a room with family, join an existing household or establish a new one. Australian-born residents also move out of home, separate, live longer and form households of different sizes. Demand is affected by household arrangements as well as population. The point is not to minimise the contribution of migration; it is to measure it correctly.

The National Housing Supply and Affordability Council's 2026 report reviews both demand and supply, construction conditions, affordability and a forward outlook. That is the kind of broad frame I want to use. It would be misleading to cite only its demand estimates while ignoring building constraints or the disadvantages created by the concentration of jobs and services. [2]

A migrant who becomes a carpenter, electrician or healthcare worker may help increase the capacity a growing population needs. But there is no reason to assume that contribution happens instantly or in the same location where demand is highest. Qualification recognition, employers, language support and access to housing still matter. The benefits can be real while the short-term pressure is also real. An honest policy must be able to hold both facts at once.

Volume VIII considered why more homes need to be built in existing high-demand areas while regional alternatives are developed. Volume IX considered the long life of infrastructure decisions. This chapter brings those arguments together: migration settings and housing investment cannot operate as isolated announcements. A reduction in arrivals will not, by itself, repair all the failures in housing supply. A promise to build will not, by itself, house someone who needs a home this week.

CHAPTER 03

Economic and Humanitarian Purposes

Not every journey to Australia has the same purpose, and I think a fair immigration system must recognise that. A skilled professional arriving for employment, a student completing a course, a person joining family and someone escaping persecution do not present identical policy questions. If we collapse them into one argument about whether migrants are economically useful, we lose the reasons the programs exist in the first place.

I do not believe immigration should simply be about making Australia's population larger. More people does not automatically mean a stronger economy, just as fewer people do not automatically mean a better society. Immigration should have clear and measurable objectives. It can help address genuine workforce shortages, attract skills and experience, support businesses, strengthen research and education, reunite families, and provide humanitarian protection. Migrants can contribute through employment, taxation, entrepreneurship, community involvement and cultural exchange. But these benefits should not be treated as automatic.

Someone cannot contribute to their full potential if they cannot find affordable housing, have their qualifications recognised, access employment or participate meaningfully in their community. Likewise, bringing more workers into an industry does not automatically fix the conditions that caused its workforce shortage. We should be asking whether our immigration system creates opportunities for genuine participation rather than simply increasing the number of people available to work.

People are not only their labour-market value

I believe we also need to distinguish between economic migration and humanitarian protection. Someone moving to Australia for employment or education is not necessarily in the same situation as someone fleeing war, persecution or serious danger. Humanitarian protection involves questions of human rights, international obligations, safety, security screening and our ability to support people seeking refuge. I do not believe compassion means automatically accepting every application without assessment. Australia still requires functioning borders, appropriate screening and a sustainable settlement system. However, I also believe there is a serious contradiction in refusing to consider someone for protection simply because their country of origin is dangerous.

Imagine fleeing persecution or violence only to be told that the danger in your home country is the very reason you cannot seek protection elsewhere. Sometimes the circumstances that make a country dangerous are precisely the circumstances that create a need for humanitarian protection. That does not mean every individual claim is genuine or that security concerns should be ignored. It means we should assess the actual circumstances of the person seeking protection. Compassion and responsibility are not opposing principles. A functioning humanitarian system should demonstrate both.

Economic migration can be examined through skills shortages, employment opportunities, qualifications, wages and likely settlement outcomes. Even then, a person is not merely a unit of labour. They may have children, a partner, a disability or responsibilities that are not captured in a productivity calculation. A system that attracts skilled people but makes it impossible for their families to live securely may defeat its own promise of long-term participation.

Education and research raise another set of questions. International students contribute to universities and local economies, but education providers also have responsibilities to teach,

safeguard students and provide accurate information. Students should not be treated only as a source of fees or as automatic permanent migrants. Programs should make their purpose, costs and legitimate pathways understandable before people invest years of their lives in them.

Family reunion also has a value that cannot be measured only by annual tax contributions. Care, stable relationships and the ability to maintain a family life are real social interests. There are still resources and legal criteria to manage, but it would be a mistake to pretend a reunion contributes nothing merely because its value is difficult to place in a financial model.

Humanitarian protection is the sharpest test of whether we mean what we say about human dignity. I can support screening and practical limits while recognising that a person may need protection precisely because they cannot safely remain where they were born. Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program distinguishes onshore protection from offshore resettlement, and the 2026–27 program is set at 20,000 places. These are actual policy arrangements, not figures from the Century System. [3]

A humanitarian decision must consider the individual risk, the relevant obligations, what can be verified and what support is required. There may be difficult cases where evidence is incomplete or contradictory. I do not assume every application will succeed; nor do I believe the uncertainty permits officials to dismiss someone without fair procedures. Where the potential consequence is persecution, the quality of the decision matters enormously.

CHAPTER 04

Security Without Collective Guilt

I believe border security is a legitimate government responsibility. There are real risks involving serious violence, organised crime, trafficking, fraud and threats to public safety. It would be irresponsible to pretend those risks never arise. But the existence of risk does not give us a moral or factual reason to treat people from the same country as one dangerous group.

One of the arguments I strongly disagree with is treating someone's nationality as evidence of their individual character or intentions. A country can experience terrorism, war, political instability, widespread crime or government persecution without every person living there being responsible for those conditions. People do not automatically share the actions or beliefs of their governments. Nor should they automatically be associated with criminals, extremists or other individuals simply because they were born in the same country. I recognise that national security is a legitimate responsibility of government.

Australia should have the ability to investigate genuine threats, assess relevant intelligence and refuse entry where justified by appropriate security and legal criteria. But security screening should be about identifying risks rather than treating entire populations as inherently dangerous. A person's country of origin may sometimes provide relevant context for security assessments, including difficulties verifying records or conditions affecting identity documents. However, context should not automatically become collective guilt. I particularly question proposals that would automatically ban migration from countries subject to Australian government "Do not travel" warnings. Those warnings are intended to inform Australians about the dangers of travelling to particular locations.

They are not an assessment of every person living in those locations. A dangerous country can contain doctors, teachers, engineers, students, workers, families and people fleeing the very dangers that prompted the warning. A country being unsafe does not automatically make its citizens unsafe people. A passport is not a complete security assessment, and nationality is not character.

Country conditions and individual assessment

I believe politicians should be able to argue for stronger security without encouraging prejudice against entire nationalities, religions or cultures. There is a significant difference between identifying a genuine threat and presenting an entire population as a threat. When public discussion repeatedly associates certain communities with terrorism, criminality or danger, it risks influencing how ordinary people perceive members of those communities. That can create consequences far beyond immigration policy. People who have done nothing wrong may become targets of suspicion, hostility or discrimination because of where they came from or how others perceive them.

At the same time, accusations of racism should not automatically be used to shut down every conversation about border security or migration levels. A policy should be examined according to its purpose, evidence, methods and consequences. If the concern is terrorism, improve intelligence gathering and security screening. If the concern is visa fraud, improve verification and enforcement. If the concern is serious criminality, assess relevant criminal history and character requirements. If the concern is workplace exploitation, strengthen employment protections. If the concern is housing shortages, address housing supply and consider appropriate population settings.

The objective should be to identify the actual problem and determine the most effective and proportionate response. I do not believe broad discrimination is justified simply because it is politically easier than developing a more targeted solution.

A travel advisory exists to help Australian travellers judge danger in a destination. It may describe war, arbitrary detention, terrorism, civil unrest, poor services or the difficulty of receiving assistance. That does not make it a profile of the character of every resident. Smartraveller's country-level advice and Home Affairs' visa character requirements serve different purposes. The second includes individual facts, criminal history, certain associations and security assessments. They should not be treated as interchangeable documents. [4][5]

I also recognise that individual assessment is not as simple as asking an applicant a few questions. In conflict zones, official records may be destroyed, forged or controlled by the very authorities from whom a person is fleeing. Intelligence can be incomplete and governments may withhold sources to protect other people. These problems justify careful procedures and specialist judgment; they do not justify inventing certainty where none exists.

My proposed test is whether a restriction is tied to a defined risk, is proportionate, and can be reviewed through lawful processes. In some cases, a government may have serious evidence that means entry must be refused. It should not conceal a collective ban behind the language of individual screening. It should also consider what reasons can be disclosed without compromising legitimate security interests, and how a person can respond to mistakes.

This problem connects directly to Volume III's rights discussion and Volume IV's concern about independent review. A government can act to protect people while still being required to explain and defend its actions. I do not want a system in which the public is told to trust officials blindly. Nor do I want every operational detail disclosed when that would put lives at risk. Accountability has to be designed around both responsibilities.

We also need to distinguish opposition to a political or religious ideology from hostility toward individuals who share a nationality or faith. A violent movement might arise among people born in Australia. A refugee might be fleeing the very movement that someone here fears. A useful security policy examines conduct, reliable evidence and lawful thresholds. Fear of a label cannot replace that work.

CHAPTER 05

Crime Maps and False Inference

Crime maps can be emotionally persuasive. You see the same neighbourhood shaded for high recorded offending and for a large overseas-born population, and it becomes tempting to draw a line between the two. But a map is not an explanation. It is a starting point for asking better questions.

I believe one of the biggest mistakes we make when discussing crime and immigration is assuming that two patterns appearing in the same place automatically means one caused the other.

When looking at Melbourne's crime maps, we can identify areas where recorded offences are more concentrated.

But does that automatically mean the people living in those areas are responsible?

And if those areas also have larger immigrant populations, does that prove immigration is the cause?

I don't believe it does.

We need to examine the circumstances that shape where people live, where crime occurs and why individuals become involved in criminal behaviour.

Think about how people choose where to live.

The same amount of money might afford someone a larger home further from the city or a smaller apartment closer to employment, education and public transport.

But that decision isn't always a genuine choice.

For someone arriving in Australia, or someone already struggling financially, housing options may be limited by income, employment opportunities, transport, rental availability and access to support networks.

People naturally gravitate towards places where they can afford to live and access the services they need.

If certain neighbourhoods have higher proportions of renters, overseas-born residents and recorded crime, we should investigate why those patterns exist rather than assume one explains another.

Population density, commercial activity, transport hubs, economic disadvantage and the movement of people through an area can all influence recorded crime.

And we need to remember that the location of an offence does not necessarily tell us where the offender lives, let alone their background.

Where crime happens and who commits it are two different questions.

Separate the place, the person and the cause

An offence location is not the same as a home address. A shopping centre, station, nightlife precinct or busy street can attract visitors from many different areas. A suburb's overseas-born share does not tell us the background of the person responsible for a specific offence. And even when individual details are known, correlation does not establish why the person acted. These distinctions seem basic, yet they are frequently blurred in political arguments.

Statistics are also shaped by definitions and recording practices. A police proceeding is not automatically a final conviction. Repeated incidents, the type of offence, age structures, enforcement

priorities, and changes in reporting can affect what a series appears to show. The ABS Recorded Crime—Offenders series reports people proceeded against by police and explicitly defines its scope and statistical method. Treating those counts as the total number of convicted criminals would be inaccurate. [6]

That does not mean we should dismiss a genuine local pattern. If a particular type of assault, theft or intimidation has increased in an area, the people affected deserve an immediate response. Police can identify offenders, services can support victims, transport operators can improve safety and researchers can ask what led to the concentration. The refusal to stereotype should never become a refusal to protect.

I also want comparisons that reflect age, population size, time spent in public areas, changes in housing and the actual types of offences recorded. If the available data cannot support a claim about migration status or causation, the answer should be that we do not yet know. Pretending the data prove innocence or guilt for a whole population would be equally unsound.

Volume VII discusses why people offend and how public safety should be protected. Volume XI will explore my questions about media and stimulation. I do not want this chapter to reuse either discussion as a shortcut to a conclusion about immigration. Its specific responsibility is to show why demographic maps cannot convict communities.

I don't believe Melbourne's crime can be explained by immigration, poverty, culture, media or any single factor.

Different crimes have different causes, and different individuals make decisions for different reasons.

Statistics can show us patterns.

They can identify areas where problems are concentrated and help us determine where further investigation is needed.

But statistics do not automatically explain the underlying causes.

We need to examine housing, employment, population density, economic opportunity, education, family environments, policing practices, social influences and individual responsibility.

We also need to be willing to challenge our own assumptions when the evidence points somewhere unexpected.

If we discover a genuine problem, we should be willing to acknowledge it regardless of whether the findings are politically convenient.

That includes examining immigration-related questions fairly, without automatically blaming immigrants or refusing to investigate legitimate concerns.

The goal should not be to find a demographic group to blame. The goal should be to understand the conditions that contribute to crime and determine how to reduce it.

Because if we genuinely want safer communities, we need more than statistics, assumptions and political arguments.

We need to understand the people, environments and systems behind the numbers.

Correlation is not causation. And understanding the cause is the first step towards fixing the problem.

CHAPTER 06

Migrant Workers and Labour Standards

A promise that immigration will solve labour shortages needs to be examined carefully. A shortage might reflect an insufficient number of trained workers. But it might also reflect low pay, unsafe shifts, expensive housing, limited training, poor management or an employer who cannot retain people. Adding workers without examining those conditions can maintain the original problem rather than solve it.

One issue I believe deserves greater attention is the exploitation of migrant workers. If an employer can underpay someone because they are unfamiliar with Australian workplace laws, financially vulnerable or afraid of losing their visa, then the problem is not the migrant. The problem is the exploitation. Every worker should have appropriate workplace protections, regardless of nationality. I do not support immigration becoming a way for businesses to avoid improving wages, training or working conditions. If an industry has a workforce shortage, we should investigate why. Are wages too low? Are working conditions poor? Are there insufficient training opportunities? Are qualifications unnecessarily difficult to obtain?

Is housing preventing people from moving to where employment is available? Are businesses failing to retain workers? Immigration may help address a genuine shortage, but it should not become an excuse to ignore the conditions creating that shortage. Protecting migrant workers also protects existing Australian workers by reducing the opportunities for businesses to compete through exploitation. At the same time, Australia should continue investing in TAFE, apprenticeships, education, housing, workforce development and regional employment. Supporting immigrants should not mean neglecting Australians, and supporting Australians should not require opposing immigrants. These objectives can coexist.

One labour standard, not two

If people can be underpaid or threatened because they do not understand local law or fear losing a visa, exploitation harms them first. It can also make it easier for businesses to undercut employers who pay properly and train staff. I want both migrant and existing workers to benefit from effective enforcement, not compete in a race toward weaker conditions.

Australian law already gives migrant workers and visa holders the same basic workplace entitlements and protections as other employees, including protections that apply regardless of migration status. The Fair Work Ombudsman explains these rights and available assistance. The Century question is therefore not whether we can imagine these protections for the first time, but whether the people who need them know about them and can use them safely. [7]

I would review claims of shortage by examining vacancy duration, pay changes, turnover, training places, regional housing and workforce conditions. A genuinely scarce specialist may still be essential while an apprenticeship pipeline is built. Conversely, a workforce request that arises because employers will not improve conditions should not automatically justify relying on vulnerable workers.

Qualification recognition should balance safety with fairness. A healthcare worker or tradesperson with overseas experience may need assessment against Australian standards. Those requirements protect the public. But if recognition is unnecessarily slow, expensive or inconsistent, the country may waste the very skills it claims to need. We should measure how long recognition takes, whether

bridging training is accessible and what proportion of qualified people end up working in unrelated jobs.

Settlement support must reach beyond a job advertisement. Someone may need an understandable employment contract, secure accommodation, childcare, public transport or a route to report mistreatment without retaliation. Investing in these foundations is not favouritism. It is part of ensuring that a person can contribute on fair terms, and that institutions are not quietly benefiting from their vulnerability.

This is one place where the earlier economic and welfare volumes become practical. If I argue for enterprise and personal responsibility, I must also ask what employers owe workers and what opportunities are actually available. Equal standards only matter when they apply to the people with the least bargaining power.

CHAPTER 07

Multiculturalism, Integration and Shared Citizenship

I do not believe multiculturalism should mean placing different groups beside one another and hoping understanding happens automatically. Nor do I believe it should mean that everyone arriving in Australia must surrender the beliefs, languages and traditions they grew up with. To me, multiculturalism should be a way of learning from each other while maintaining foundations of safety, dignity and freedom.

Australia is already a multicultural society, and I believe that diversity can be a strength. People from different backgrounds bring knowledge, skills, traditions, perspectives and experiences that contribute to the communities in which they live. However, I also believe integration matters. People moving to Australia should have meaningful opportunities to understand Australian laws, develop language skills where needed, participate in employment and education, and establish connections within their communities. Integration should be a shared process. Migrants have responsibilities to respect the laws and rights of the society they join. Governments and communities also have responsibilities to make participation realistically accessible.

But integration should not require people to erase their cultural identity. A person can respect Australian laws, contribute to their community and identify as Australian while maintaining their own cultural traditions and heritage. A shared national identity does not have to mean everyone has the same background. It can be built around common responsibilities, mutual respect, democratic participation and equal protection under the law.

Shared protection is not forced sameness

In the newer multiculturalism essay developed in Volume II, I make a distinction that matters here: people can inherit a belief without having had much chance to examine it. The freedom to question a religion, to practise it willingly, or to leave it without threats is more meaningful than either automatic acceptance or a blanket prohibition imposed from outside. This principle is not aimed at one religion. It should apply to Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, non-religious and other households alike.

If a woman chooses to cover her face for reasons she understands, the choice should generally be respected. If she refuses and faces violence or intimidation, that refusal deserves protection too. It is not the clothing alone that tells us whether coercion exists. Context, power and meaningful exit options matter. We should investigate harm without assuming that an entire faith or culture is harmful simply because a custom is unfamiliar.

I also want to examine my own country's traditions using the same standards. We should be willing to adopt better ways of supporting elders, raising children or organising communities when evidence supports them. But no tradition becomes immune from criticism because it is ancient, British, Australian, Indigenous or associated with a minority group. The relevant standards should protect consent, fair treatment and freedom from abuse, with appropriate respect for First Nations authority and cultural rights.

Children deserve special care. Families can teach religion, language, culture and community expectations. That does not give a parent a right to assault, threaten or emotionally abandon a child because the child questions a belief. Growing independence should be respected in age-appropriate ways. A society cannot claim to protect freedom of religion while overlooking the freedom not to

believe. Volume III takes up the rights and remedies in greater detail; this volume asks whether newcomers and existing residents can actually access those protections.

I have also questioned why some adults' consensual relationship arrangements are dismissed purely because they differ from a familiar two-person model. That is not an assertion that Australian law already recognises plural marriage or that such recognition would be simple. Property, children's interests, dependency, consent, equality and the freedom to leave would need serious scrutiny. The ethical question belongs with personal freedom, not with a demand that a minority be exempted from shared legal protections.

The same consistent approach applies to animal welfare and harmful punishment. Religious or cultural explanations should not give unlimited permission to inflict suffering or use violence. At the same time, standards should apply to practices that the majority takes for granted. Selectively enforcing compassion is not fairness. Neither is hiding cruelty behind a claim that questioning it is disrespectful.

Meaningful integration requires both practical access and public participation. Language classes, schools, community organisations, libraries, workplaces and local councils can help people understand rights and responsibilities, build relationships and contribute their knowledge. Existing communities must have genuine opportunities to be heard as well. The measure is not how closely everyone resembles one preferred image of Australian identity; it is whether people can live lawfully and independently with shared protection.

Australian settlement programs already support language-related access, social connections, youth and older people, community participation and links across groups. Any new Century proposal should be assessed against those programs rather than described as an invention from nothing. [8]

I want people to be able to criticise a practice without turning that criticism into collective blame. If a rule restricts someone's freedom, let us investigate that rule. If a person commits a crime, investigate the person. If a government has failed to provide a service, examine that institution. None of those problems is solved by pretending every person from the same background believes or behaves the same way.

Our shared civic identity can grow stronger by making its principles useful. A society that protects freedom of expression, lawful religious practice, fair trials, children, workers and personal safety should be willing to explain why those protections matter. But it should also be willing to hear where their application is failing and where another culture has practices worth learning from. Multiculturalism should be an exchange, not a one-way test.

CHAPTER 08

Regional Migration Must Be Viable

Regional migration is sometimes presented as an easy answer to crowded cities. Australia is geographically large, so why not direct more arrivals to smaller towns? The question sounds simple until we ask where people will work, how their children will reach school, who will staff the local hospital and whether new residents can afford a home without pricing out the people already there.

I believe population policy should also be considered alongside Australia's long-term regional development. Australia has concentrated enormous amounts of employment, education, healthcare, infrastructure and investment in its major cities. It should therefore come as no surprise that migrants and existing residents often seek opportunities in those same locations. But concentrating more population growth in areas already experiencing housing and infrastructure pressure can intensify existing problems. The answer is not simply to tell migrants to live somewhere else. Regional communities require affordable housing, reliable healthcare, education, employment, transport, digital infrastructure and access to essential services.

If we want people to move to regional Australia and remain there, we must create the conditions that make building a life there attractive and sustainable. This is not only an immigration issue. It is also about providing better opportunities to Australians who already live in regional communities or would consider moving there. I would rather see governments invest in making regional communities viable than attempt to force population redistribution without addressing the reasons people leave or avoid those areas. Do not force decentralisation. Make it viable.

Development before recruitment promises

I want regional settlement to be viable, not compulsory on paper and impossible in everyday life. An employment offer may attract a household, but long-term settlement depends on whether a partner can also work, whether childcare exists, whether the job is stable, and whether there are education and cultural connections. Some people may be happy in a small town. Others need specialised medical services or a community that supports their identity. These differences are not failures of character.

The same principle applies to Australians who already live in regional areas. A development policy that builds houses for newcomers while allowing local rents to climb beyond existing residents' incomes can create resentment and real harm. Consultation and monitoring need to include renters, local businesses, First Nations communities, schools and health providers. A place is not an empty space on a population map.

In Volume VIII, I argued that Australia should make more places worth living rather than attempting to make cities less desirable. That principle matters here. We should identify where durable jobs, transport connections, local industry and housing can develop together. Some towns may be well positioned; others may require a different kind of investment. A single regional settlement quota cannot substitute for local planning.

There may be lawful visa conditions or incentives associated with regional migration programs. Even when rules are legal, I want to ask whether they provide fair information and realistic routes to work and family life. A person who accepts an incentive but finds that the promised employment or services are unavailable may be blamed for a policy design they did not control. Evaluation should track retention, job quality, service use and the wellbeing of existing residents, not simply the initial number of arrivals.

No one benefits if governments encourage migration to places before investing in the schools, roads, broadband and health services required to remain there. But it can also be wasteful to build expensive projects in anticipation of population growth that never materialises. That is why I favour staged development, evidence of demand and clear review points rather than pretending that every regional proposal deserves immediate funding.

CHAPTER 09

Population and Environmental Planning

Population growth changes a country's use of land, energy, water and materials. Those consequences cannot be ignored. But I also reject the claim that every additional person creates the same environmental impact. A well-designed, efficient neighbourhood may use resources differently from a sprawling development dependent on long car journeys. Industries, technology and consumption patterns influence the result.

I also believe population planning should consider environmental consequences. More people can mean greater demand for energy, water, land, transport, housing materials and waste management. How those demands are managed matters. A growing population does not automatically mean environmental destruction, but growth without appropriate planning can increase pressure on ecosystems and natural resources. That is another reason I support coordinated development rather than simply increasing population numbers and expecting infrastructure to catch up later. Investment in renewable energy, efficient housing, public transport, water management and sustainable regional development can help accommodate growth while reducing environmental impacts.

Environmental sustainability should be part of population policy, not an issue considered only after development has occurred.

The environment is part of capacity

Water is an obvious example of why capacity cannot be reduced to a national headcount. Some regions experience very different rainfall, water security and ecological pressures from others. Energy infrastructure and transmission needs vary. Housing development can place pressure on biodiversity, floodplains, fire-prone land and agricultural areas. A policy that looks sustainable at the national scale may create serious local damage.

I want population planning to consider the resources required for homes, schools, roads, transport and industry over their full useful life. A housing estate needs building materials and energy, but it also needs water, maintenance and waste collection. A digital service can be more accessible while increasing electricity demand and dependence on networks. Those are design choices as well as population questions.

First Nations stewardship and rights must not be treated as decorative consultation after a development map has already been approved. Country holds cultural, ecological and community significance that cannot always be captured by a financial estimate. Decisions should recognise the people whose interests and responsibilities precede the present settlement system. Volume IX developed the environmental and infrastructure reasoning; the population question needs to carry those obligations forward.

Capacity will change with innovation. More efficient buildings, public transport and renewable generation may improve what can be supported; water scarcity, natural disasters and neglected maintenance can reduce it. Those possibilities do not justify assuming future technology will arrive in time. Responsible planning should compare optimistic and conservative scenarios, publish the uncertainties and revise them as evidence changes.

Environmental protection should not become a justification for singling out migrants while ignoring the consumption of existing residents, businesses and governments. We need consistent standards for everyone. Nor should we deny that population levels affect aggregate demand. The answer is

coordinated and reviewable planning rather than an argument built to protect whichever side someone already belongs to.

CHAPTER 10

Respectful Debate and Democratic Review

Immigration debates deserve better than a choice between two caricatures: that anybody raising a concern must hate migrants, or that anybody supporting migration must be indifferent to housing, security and jobs. Neither position helps us decide what will actually work. We should be able to state the problem precisely, test proposals and change them when circumstances change.

I do not believe immigration should be treated as an ideological loyalty test. Being supportive of immigration does not require someone to support every increase in migration numbers. Being concerned about immigration levels does not automatically make someone racist or opposed to multiculturalism. What matters is the reasoning behind the position, the evidence supporting it and the consequences of the proposed policy. If population growth is placing unsustainable pressure on housing, transport, healthcare or education, governments should be willing to reconsider migration settings while also addressing the capacity problems.

If investment, construction and service development increase Australia's ability to support more people, migration settings can be reconsidered again. However, capacity is not always a fixed number. Migrants themselves can contribute to increasing capacity, particularly by working in construction, healthcare, education and other essential industries. This means immigration policy must consider not just how many people arrive, but who arrives, where people settle, what infrastructure exists, how quickly supply can expand and what contributions people can make. Good policy should recognise both the demands created by population growth and the opportunities that population growth can provide.

The objective should not be permanently increasing or reducing immigration. It should be maintaining a responsible balance between population growth, national development and human wellbeing. I believe immigration policy should be assessed using the same principles I would apply to any other major government decision. What problem are we actually trying to solve? Who benefits from the proposed policy? Who bears the costs? What incentives does the policy create? What risks could emerge? What rights and responsibilities are involved? What capacity does Australia currently have, and how could that capacity change? How will we measure whether the policy is successful?

And perhaps most importantly, what happens if the policy fails or the evidence proves our assumptions wrong? Governments should not defend ineffective policies simply because those policies align with their political ideology. They should be willing to explain their reasoning, publish relevant evidence, acknowledge limitations and change their approach when necessary. The purpose of immigration policy should not be to win an argument between political parties. It should be to produce outcomes that benefit the country while respecting the dignity and rights of the individuals affected. I am not against immigration. I am not against border controls. I am not against national security screening.

I am not against adjusting migration levels when circumstances require it. I am against treating entire populations as if they are responsible for the actions of their governments, criminals or extremists. I am against turning legitimate policy concerns into opportunities for discrimination. And I am against blaming individuals for failures that governments and institutions have a responsibility to address. But I also reject the idea that compassion requires us to ignore practical limitations. Population growth has consequences. Housing needs to be built. Infrastructure needs to

keep up. Healthcare and education require resources. Workers deserve protection. Regional communities need investment. Environmental pressures require management.

Security requires serious consideration. And people seeking humanitarian protection deserve a fair and functioning assessment system. I believe Australia should aim to be a country that welcomes people responsibly, supports those already living here and prepares for the future rather than constantly reacting to problems after they become crises. We do not need to choose between compassion and accountability. We do not need to choose between supporting immigrants and supporting Australians. And we do not need to choose between national security and treating individuals fairly.

Review settings without turning people into a slogan

The language we use matters. A migration figure is not the same as the number of people who crossed a border in one week. Net overseas migration estimates people added to or subtracted from the resident population through migration. The permanent migration program is a policy planning level for a particular visa program, not the annual net change in Australia's population. The ABS has warned that some international travel movement data are misleading when presented as a direct measure of migration. [1][9][10]

For example, the 2026–27 permanent Migration Program was set at 185,000 places, while the ABS reported annual net overseas migration of 292,100 in the twelve months to March 2026. These are different periods and different definitions. Reporting them as though one proves the other is fraudulent or inconsistent would mislead the public. [1][9]

I would like government policy reviewed publicly against the objectives it claimed. If a program is intended to reduce an occupational shortage, measure whether the shortage changed and whether conditions improved. If it is meant to support regional development, measure whether people stayed and whether existing residents benefited. If it is adjusted due to housing pressure, track the supply response rather than declaring victory from a single lower intake figure.

Public debate needs room for genuine disagreement. Someone may support higher humanitarian commitments and lower work migration; another person may argue that construction and health services need additional skilled workers immediately. Those are questions of evidence, competing values and practical capacity. It should be possible to challenge a policy without insulting people, and to challenge prejudice without pretending that public investment or screening never fails.

The Century Policy Test I developed asks who benefits, who pays, what risks follow, what evidence is available and what happens when a proposal fails. I want it applied to immigration even when the outcome is politically inconvenient to me. That is what it means to be willing to revise a philosophy instead of treating it as a team identity.

Belonging cannot be manufactured through a visa quota alone. It grows through schools, work, neighbours, a fair legal system and opportunities to be heard. It also grows when people encounter each other outside stereotypes. Increasingly, those encounters are shaped by media platforms, automated recommendations and AI systems that influence what people see and believe. If we want a society capable of understanding its differences, we have to ask who controls those channels and what incentives shape them. That question begins Volume XI.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME XI

Technology, Media And The Digital Society

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

Technology as an Opportunity and an Institution

I am interested in technology because it expands what human beings can do. A tool can make a difficult task possible, help someone communicate when words are hard to find, make information available to a person who lives far from a library, or turn an idea into a working product. But every tool also enters an existing society. It is distributed through businesses, schools, governments and households with unequal resources and different needs. Its consequences cannot be judged by capability alone.

I do not think technological progress should be treated as a separate moral force that automatically saves or destroys society. People develop it, people market it and people decide what it is used for. Sometimes those decisions are deliberate. Sometimes a company discovers that a design intended to increase participation also changes what people believe or how much time they spend with it. An accidental consequence is still worth investigating, particularly after evidence makes it foreseeable.

The distinction matters because a simple object and an interactive system are not socially identical. A hammer has possible uses, but it does not usually decide which wall the builder should work on next. A digital platform can recommend the next video, rank a candidate, highlight a news story or generate a confident response to a question. The decisions embedded in the product influence what the user encounters. This makes design, commercial incentives and accountability central rather than optional.

Throughout history, humanity has developed tools to make our lives easier, expand our capabilities, and overcome limitations that once seemed impossible. Artificial intelligence is another development in that continuing process. I do not believe AI should automatically be blamed for the ways people misuse it, become dependent upon it, or fail to question the information it provides. I believe we should first examine the systems responsible for developing, regulating, distributing, and teaching people how to use these technologies. Artificial intelligence is an extraordinarily powerful tool, but its usefulness depends on how it is designed and how individuals choose to engage with it.

For example, the AI I personally use frequently challenges my opinions. It questions my assumptions, identifies weaknesses in my arguments, and encourages me to explore perspectives I might not have otherwise considered. It helps me articulate my thoughts and feelings while allowing me to develop a deeper understanding of subjects that interest me. I do not use it because I want something that agrees with everything I say. I use it because I want something that helps me think. There is an enormous difference between those two purposes. An AI system that endlessly agrees with its users, regardless of the accuracy or consequences of their beliefs, risks becoming little more than a sophisticated form of reassurance.

That does not mean reassurance is inherently harmful. There are circumstances where emotional support and encouragement are appropriate. However, when reassurance consistently replaces

honesty, evidence, and constructive disagreement, the technology risks undermining the very critical thinking it could otherwise help develop. The solution should not simply be to condemn artificial intelligence. Instead, we should ask why people are not being taught how to recognise these limitations and question the information they receive. Consider something as ordinary as a hammer. One person might use it to construct a home. Another might use it to develop a complicated invention. Someone else might misuse it or produce something entirely without purpose. The existence of the hammer does not determine the outcome.

The knowledge, intentions, abilities, resources, and decisions of the person using it all influence what happens. Of course, artificial intelligence is significantly more complicated than a hammer. It can generate information, influence opinions, and present incorrect conclusions with apparent confidence. That creates responsibilities that do not necessarily exist with simpler tools. However, the underlying principle remains relevant. We should not confuse the existence of technology with the decisions, institutions, and circumstances that determine how it is used. The question should not simply be whether a tool can cause harm, but how we can develop the knowledge, safeguards, and accountability necessary to maximise its benefits while reducing foreseeable harm. This requires cooperation between developers, governments, educators, consumers, and the wider community.

No single group should be expected to carry the entire responsibility.

The cost of relying on an invisible system

Think about the technology that sits beneath everyday life. Electricity runs the servers. Networks carry information. Data centres need maintenance and security. A business may depend on an online booking platform; a student may depend on a digital textbook; a person living with disability may depend on an assistive communication device. When the system fails, the consequences are not equal. Some people can move to another provider or pay for a backup. Others lose the only practical way they had to participate.

That is why Volume IX argued that digital infrastructure should be planned as real infrastructure, not treated as something that exists without cost. Broadband, power, resilient backups, affordable equipment and accessible interfaces are part of the same question. If a policy promises digital-first public services, it must account for the person with no reliable connection, limited literacy, an old device or a need for face-to-face assistance.

I also want to distinguish technological potential from guaranteed benefit. A new invention may improve efficiency while increasing costs for certain users. An automated process may be faster on average while making a particular kind of mistake repeatedly. A translation tool can help people communicate without making every nuance of culture or emotion obvious. We should celebrate the opportunity while examining who gets it, who loses out and who is left holding the risk.

My starting point is not to slow innovation for the sake of resisting change. It is to make the institutions around innovation worthy of the power they are gaining. If society is going to depend on digital systems, people should be able to question how those systems work and what happens when they fail.

CHAPTER 02

Representation, Humour and Perception

A media platform does not merely store stories. It helps decide which stories become prominent, which characters are repeated, and which interpretations have an opportunity to reach an audience. I explored the importance of cultural representation in Volume II because our understanding of other people is often formed through stories before it is formed through direct experience. Here I want to look more closely at how the digital environment spreads those impressions.

The example I keep coming back to is The Simpsons. Apu can be intelligent, hardworking and important to the programme, while also being associated with jokes about his ethnicity and accent. The same character can mean something different to a viewer who has met many Indian people and to someone whose strongest image of Indian people comes from one cartoon. That does not turn every joke into an act of hatred, nor does it make the audience's interpretation meaningless.

Consider Apu from The Simpsons. Apu is portrayed as an intelligent, hardworking businessman who owns and operates the Kwik-E-Mart. He has a family, relationships, responsibilities, personal struggles and qualities that make him considerably more complex than a simple stereotype. Some of those jokes involve his ethnicity, accent and cultural background. Others involve his occupation, customers, relationships or the absurd situations that regularly occur throughout the show. However, we also have to consider how those jokes are interpreted by audiences. For many viewers, particularly those with limited exposure to Indian communities, Apu became one of the most recognisable Indian characters in mainstream Western television. The problem arises when one character becomes a significant part of how an entire community is recognised and understood. Apu may be an intelligent, hardworking and complex character, yet some audiences may remember little more than an exaggerated Indian convenience-store owner.

It demonstrates how the same representation can produce different outcomes depending on who is watching, what they understand and what other experiences they have had. To understand this problem, I believe we should consider how the same situation might look from another perspective. Imagine The Simpsons was originally an Indian television programme, set entirely within India, featuring predominantly Indian characters. Now imagine Cletus was one of the only white characters regularly appearing in the programme. Cletus is hardworking, owns land and provides for his family. These are positive characteristics. However, he is also portrayed through exaggerated stereotypes involving ignorance, poverty, incest and rural life. Most audiences understand that Cletus does not represent all white people. Because white people have countless other characters representing them across mainstream Western media.

But imagine growing up in a society where Cletus was one of the only white characters you regularly saw on television. Suddenly, the same jokes could carry a different social meaning. A stereotype becomes more influential when society has fewer alternative perspectives through which to understand the people being portrayed.

Why distribution changes the meaning

Imagine the same portrayal repeated in clips, memes, short videos and automated recommendations, separated from the episodes in which the character has relationships, responsibilities or a more complicated personality. A narrow excerpt might become more familiar than the character's full story. The technology did not invent the stereotype, but its method of distribution can change what audiences actually see.

The reverse can happen too. People whose lives were historically absent from major television networks can now tell their own stories, reach audiences and challenge exaggerated portrayals. Independent creators can explain why a joke is funny to them or why it hurts. A wider range of stories can reduce the pressure on any one character to represent an entire community. The question is whether the digital environment makes those competing perspectives discoverable, or rewards only the most inflammatory clips.

Comedy deserves room to question society, even when the material is uncomfortable or badly received. Being offended by a joke does not itself prove that the creator intended harm. But freedom to create must coexist with freedom to criticise. I want audiences to evaluate intention, portrayal, consequence and context separately rather than assuming any one of them settles the matter.

This is not a plan to instruct writers to make every character flawless. It is an argument for more varied opportunities and better public understanding. A person should not be expected to learn what a whole culture is like from a cartoon, and a company should not pretend its recommendation system has no role in turning one cartoon into someone's dominant cultural reference.

The principles that protect cultural exchange in Volume II and freedom of expression in Volume III also apply here. I am defending both the right to create and the right to question what we consume. Neither works well if the only material that reaches people is what produces the strongest reaction.

CHAPTER 03

Violent Entertainment and Young People

I find it strange that a society can celebrate stories about violence, war, conquest, rebellion and criminal excitement while sometimes being surprised when young people become fascinated by these things. That contradiction is worth exploring, but it is not proof that an individual who plays a violent game is more likely to commit a violent crime. The difference between a question and an established explanation matters greatly.

There are enormous differences between a fictional game, a film documenting a historical event, footage of a genuine assault and a video made to glorify real-world cruelty. Those differences involve intention, context, consent and the viewer's understanding of what is real. Someone may enjoy a fictional combat scenario precisely because no real person is harmed. Actual violence involving a real victim is not made harmless because it appears on a screen.

Another contradiction I find interesting is how society has spent generations glorifying war, conquest, violence and rebellion, yet often expresses surprise when young people become fascinated by those very things. We celebrate military victories, create entertainment centred around criminal behaviour and conflict, and build industries that profit from excitement, shock and controversy. This does not mean remembering soldiers is wrong, that fictional violence is equivalent to real violence or that entertainment automatically encourages criminal behaviour. But it does raise questions about the messages we communicate and how people interpret them. How do we teach young people to distinguish courage from recklessness, freedom from domination and entertainment from acceptable real-world behaviour? I do not believe these questions should be dismissed simply because some people are uncomfortable discussing them. Nor do I believe we should jump to conclusions without evidence.

I believe we should investigate the relationship between culture, entertainment, education and behaviour with genuine curiosity.

Violent entertainment is not new. Previous generations had violent movies, controversial music, offensive comedy, adult cartoons and video games. But the way people access entertainment has fundamentally changed. Today, a child can have access to an enormous collection of entertainment through a single device. Games like Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty portray fictional crime, combat, violence and conflict within experiences developed for particular audiences. Adult cartoons and comedy can explore subjects that younger viewers may not have the maturity or experience to understand. Meanwhile, YouTube and social media introduce another dimension. Unlike traditional films or games, online platforms can continuously recommend material based on engagement. A child may begin watching relatively harmless entertainment and encounter increasingly confronting, aggressive or inappropriate material through recommendations, shared videos and online communities. And unlike fictional entertainment, some online content depicts genuine violence, cruelty and suffering.

I believe we should question the cumulative influence of growing up in these environments. Not because every child who plays violent games becomes violent. Not because controversial entertainment should automatically be prohibited. And not because we have proven that violent entertainment causes serious criminal offending. But because childhood is a period of learning, development and social influence. Children learn from families, friendships, schools, communities, personal experiences and the cultural environments surrounding them.

A hypothesis is not an excuse to blame games

I also believe we need to look more deeply into why some young people become involved in criminal behaviour. Not every young offender is motivated by a desire to seriously harm another person. Some may be chasing adrenaline, recognition, excitement, status or approval from their peers. Others may be influenced by their upbringing, economic circumstances, social environment or exposure to criminal behaviour. This raises another question I think deserves investigation. What influence does our increasingly stimulating environment have on young people? We live in a world of constant entertainment, social media, instant gratification and exposure to behaviour that can sometimes be dangerous, reckless or antisocial. I wonder whether repeated exposure to certain behaviours, combined with peer pressure and an individual's personal circumstances, can influence how some young people perceive risk and consequences. That does not mean video games, social media or entertainment automatically create criminals.

Millions of people consume the same content without ever committing a crime. And that is precisely why the question interests me. If millions of young people experience similar media and entertainment, why do only some go on to offend? What separates those who recognise the consequences of their actions from those who disregard them? Could family environments, education, positive role models, emotional development, peer groups and experiences with authority influence that difference? And what role does the perception of consequences play? These are questions I believe are worth investigating rather than dismissing or assuming we already understand.

Scientific research gives reasons for caution in both directions. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies published in 2020 found little support for meaningful long-term links between violent game content and aggression when stronger methods were considered. A 2024 study of adolescents found differences between people who played more violent games, but did not find the expected within-person desensitisation pattern. A wider 2026 synthesis of digital media and youth development reports some modest associations between gaming and measures of aggression or externalising behaviour, while also finding some positive cognitive associations. These findings are not the same as evidence that games cause criminal violence. [1][2]

I want people to recognise that 'aggression' in a psychological questionnaire, a school fight, a serious assault and persistent criminal offending are different outcomes. They cannot be substituted for one another because a headline is easier to write that way. We also have to examine the family environment, peer group, social disadvantage, school connection, trauma, risk-taking and whether a child has supportive adults around them. Different young people respond differently to the same entertainment.

If we test the theory that certain media environments increase risk for some vulnerable young people, we should ask what the evidence would need to show. Does exposure occur before the behaviour? Is the material fictional or real? How much does the outcome change after accounting for pre-existing risk? What happens when young people have healthy boundaries and a trusted person to discuss what they have seen? What would disprove the theory?

I support research willing to challenge my assumptions, not treating young players as potential criminals. Prevention and individual accountability require evidence, not an easy culprit.

CHAPTER 04

Algorithms, Engagement and Child Protection

The most important difference between an old television schedule and a modern personalised feed is that one finishes while the other can continue changing in response to the user. A platform can notice that a young person has watched a clip, replayed a particular subject or reacted to controversy, then offer more of what appears likely to hold their attention. The content does not have to be illegal or deliberately harmful for that system to influence what they repeatedly encounter.

I think the duty to protect children should start by examining the design of the environment. What does the platform optimise? Can a child stop easily? Are private messages, recommendations and advertising treated differently for younger users? Does the service provide meaningful controls or only complicated settings buried under menus? Are users and parents told which data shape the experience? Those are questions about corporate choices as well as household choices.

Parents have responsibilities. They should be encouraged to understand the services their children use, talk about what appears in their feeds and set age-appropriate boundaries. But a parent cannot personally audit an entire recommendation system, and families cannot be held responsible for information that companies decline to disclose. Schools also need opportunities to teach media literacy, so children can identify sensationalism, manipulation and the difference between advertising and independent information.

Media is part of that environment. We should be curious about how repeated exposure to different messages might influence attitudes, expectations, empathy and perceptions of acceptable behaviour. We should also recognise that the evidence may challenge our suspicions. Questioning an influence is reasonable. Assuming causation without sufficient evidence is not. Who Is Responsible for What Children Consume? I often wonder how many parents genuinely understand the technology their children use. Modern devices contain parental controls, age restrictions, privacy settings and content filters. But having these protections available does not guarantee that parents understand them, use them effectively or can keep up with constantly changing platforms. Some parents are technologically inexperienced. Others are overwhelmed by work, financial pressures and family responsibilities. And even responsible parents cannot monitor every interaction their children have online. That raises a question about the responsibilities of technology companies.

If a company designs a platform that encourages prolonged engagement, recommends increasingly attention-grabbing material and profits from advertising, should it also have a duty to consider the developmental needs of younger users? I believe it should. But I also believe parents, schools and communities have responsibilities. The solution should not simply be banning everything we consider inappropriate. It should involve age-appropriate protections, better parental education, media literacy, transparent recommendation systems and stronger accountability for companies that expose children to avoidable risks. We should teach children how to interpret what they see, recognise manipulation, distinguish fiction from reality and understand the consequences of their actions. Protecting children should not mean preventing them from thinking. It should mean helping them develop the skills to think responsibly.

Protect without treating protection as a blank cheque

Australia has already introduced minimum-age rules for accounts on specified social-media platforms. From 10 December 2025, the affected companies have been required to take reasonable

steps to prevent Australians under sixteen from keeping or creating those accounts. This is a legal fact, not a policy invented by the Century System. The rules do not make it a crime for a child or parent to access an account; they place obligations on the relevant companies, and various messaging, gaming, health and education services are outside the scheme. [3]

I can recognise why people want more protection from addictive design and harmful material while still asking whether an age-based restriction works fairly. Does it reduce harmful exposure or shift it elsewhere? Can young people still reach support, maintain community ties and express their views? How is age checked, what information is collected, and how can someone wrongly identified as under age challenge the decision? What does a child living in isolation lose if an online community is their main connection to other people?

An independent review should measure not only compliance but unintended outcomes. The law itself provides for review; public reasoning should consider those findings rather than assume from the start that the restriction is either a complete solution or a total disaster. Age assurance also creates a privacy question: protecting a young person should not mean collecting more identity data than is genuinely necessary.

For younger children, protections may reasonably be stronger. As people mature, education and graduated autonomy become more important. That is consistent with the earlier chapters on children's right to develop independent judgment and on parents providing guidance without treating a child as their possession.

CHAPTER 05

AI Literacy and Independent Judgement

I worry less about children knowing that artificial intelligence exists than about people being encouraged to treat any fluent answer as verified information. A technology that can write a convincing paragraph can be helpful, but confidence is not evidence. This is the place where education must respond to the tool rather than simply ban it or assume everyone will learn by accident.

One of my strongest beliefs is that education should teach people how to think, not simply tell them what to think. Artificial intelligence makes this principle increasingly important. As AI becomes more accessible, I believe education systems should teach students and the wider community how to use it responsibly. This should include:

Understanding that artificial intelligence can produce incorrect or misleading information.; Learning how to independently research and verify claims.; Recognising when an AI system is excessively agreeing with a user's opinions.; Developing the confidence to question both human and artificial sources of information.; Understanding the difference between established evidence, interpretation, speculation, and personal opinion.; Learning how to ask questions that challenge existing assumptions.; Recognising commercial incentives and potential conflicts of interest.; Understanding privacy, personal information, and the consequences of sharing sensitive material.; Maintaining the ability to make independent decisions without constant technological assistance. Students should be encouraged to question the answers they receive, including answers generated by AI. They should be comfortable asking:

Why is this conclusion correct? What evidence supports it? What arguments challenge it? What information might be missing? How could I independently verify this? These questions should become ordinary parts of education and public discussion. However, this responsibility should not fall entirely on schools. Adults also require opportunities to develop technological literacy. Public education, accessible information, community learning programs, and continuing professional development should help people adapt as technology changes. A society cannot reasonably expect people to use increasingly complicated technologies responsibly while failing to provide them with the knowledge necessary to understand those technologies. Education should prepare people to use technology without surrendering their ability to question it.

Convenience and the loss of understanding

There is another concern that deserves attention. What happens when technology becomes so convenient that people gradually stop developing the skills it performs for them? Artificial intelligence can assist with research, writing, problem-solving, communication, planning, and education. These capabilities offer enormous opportunities. However, convenience should not become an excuse to abandon independent understanding. A calculator is useful, but understanding mathematics remains valuable. Navigation software is useful, but understanding directions and geography still has benefits. Artificial intelligence can help someone develop an argument, but that person should still understand the argument they are making. This does not mean every individual must become an expert in every subject. That would be unrealistic and contrary to the cooperative principles discussed throughout this manifesto.

Specialisation and shared knowledge are fundamental parts of human progress. Instead, I believe people should retain sufficient understanding to recognise when additional expertise, verification,

or investigation is necessary. Technology should expand human capabilities without unnecessarily weakening our ability to reason, learn, and make decisions.

Imagine a student asking a system to explain an argument about housing or immigration. A useful response might organise competing claims, identify unfamiliar terms, suggest where to find official data and ask the student to test the strongest objections. An unhelpful response might invent a statistic, remove uncertainty and make the student feel that the first answer is automatically the best one. Both may sound intelligent. Only one reliably teaches the student to examine a claim.

I believe assessments should sometimes ask students to explain how they reached a conclusion, what they checked independently and what would change their minds. That is different from demanding that every task be completed without assistance. People with disabilities, language barriers or limited access to tutoring may benefit especially from writing and communication tools. An absolute ban can remove a useful pathway, while uncritical dependence can conceal gaps in understanding. The objective is to retain agency while opening more doors.

Schools should define acceptable AI uses openly and assess understanding rather than assume a polished final answer proves learning. UNESCO's guidance emphasises human agency, privacy and age-appropriate education. [4] The same standard should apply outside school: when technology helps draft a complaint, application or public argument, the person submitting it should understand and check the important claims. Assistance is not automatically deception; pretending unchecked generated material is verified is a different problem.

CHAPTER 06

Transparency, Consumer Rights and Regulation

People cannot make informed choices if products hide the information that matters. This is particularly serious when the product presents itself as a reliable adviser, a professional assistant or a companion that seems able to understand its user. I support regulation that makes claims testable and rights enforceable without demanding every detail of a company's intellectual property.

I also do not want an empty promise of transparency. An eighty-page privacy policy full of technical language is not meaningful disclosure to most people. The important facts should be available in a brief and understandable explanation, with more detailed records for researchers, regulators and people who wish to investigate further.

I support meaningful government regulation of artificial intelligence. However, regulation should be designed to protect the public, encourage responsible development, and preserve the freedom to innovate. I do not believe governments should automatically restrict access to technology simply because some people misuse it. We already regulate many products and services that carry risks. Age-restricted entertainment, online services, consumer goods, financial products, and countless other industries operate under legal standards intended to protect consumers and establish responsibilities. Artificial intelligence should not be treated as an exception. If governments can establish enforceable standards for other industries, they can also establish appropriate standards for companies developing and distributing AI technologies.

I propose that companies providing AI services should be required to disclose meaningful information about how those systems operate. This could include: Companies should clearly explain whether their systems are primarily designed for factual assistance, entertainment, companionship, education, professional applications, or other purposes. Where relevant, they should disclose how their systems balance user satisfaction, engagement, accuracy, and constructive disagreement. Companies should communicate known limitations, foreseeable risks, and the circumstances in which their products should not be relied upon without independent verification. Consumers should be informed when advertising, sponsorships, commercial partnerships, or financial incentives influence the information or recommendations presented to them. Users should be able to understand how their information is collected, stored, processed, shared, and potentially used to improve AI systems.

Regulators should have the authority to examine whether companies’ public claims accurately reflect their products. Commercial confidentiality and legitimate security considerations should be protected where appropriate, but they should not become convenient excuses for concealing misconduct or misleading consumers. There should be accessible processes for reporting deceptive practices, challenging misleading claims, and investigating serious failures. Companies that knowingly misrepresent their products or violate established standards should face proportionate consequences. These requirements should be understandable to ordinary consumers. Transparency loses much of its purpose when essential information is buried in complicated legal documents that most people cannot reasonably understand. A short, standardised public disclosure could explain the most important information, supported by more detailed documentation for researchers, regulators, and interested members of the public.

The goal is not to force companies to reveal every commercial secret. The goal is to ensure consumers have sufficient reliable information to make informed choices.

Existing regulation is a foundation, not the whole answer

Australia's National AI Plan, launched in December 2025, seeks to expand AI use while working through existing regulatory frameworks and an AI safety institution. That is a current government approach, not an implementation of the Century Manifesto. It suggests a practical question for my proposals: where do existing consumer, privacy, discrimination or safety laws already create responsibilities, and where can evidence show a gap? [5]

A company might explain that its model can be wrong, but what happens when it repeatedly makes an error after the developer was warned? A platform might disclose that recommendations are personalised, but how does a customer distinguish paid placement from independent advice? An employer might say a screening tool is fair, but how can rejected applicants challenge a decision if the process cannot be explained? A public statement is only useful if it can be compared with the service as people actually experience it.

My preferred approach is proportional to risk and influence. A novelty tool for creating fictional characters does not require the same oversight as a system used in healthcare, housing, employment or public benefits. A small developer should not automatically be expected to maintain the same compliance department as a multinational company, but neither should scale become an excuse for serious misrepresentation. Responsibility should reflect the potential harm and the provider's capacity to prevent it.

Regulators themselves need scrutiny. Independent testing can require access to sensitive information, and companies have legitimate confidentiality and security interests. Oversight needs a clear mandate, procedural fairness, restrictions on misuse of obtained material and independent appeal. Volume IV established that no watchdog should become an unreviewable authority merely because it is called a watchdog.

Transparency also requires confronting commercial influence. If a system is tuned to keep people using it, that incentive may conflict with advising them to leave the service, seek an expert or disagree with the answer. If advertising or sponsorship affects recommendations, users deserve to understand it. I do not assume every paid recommendation is deceptive; I believe hidden conflicts of interest can make informed choice impossible.

CHAPTER 07

Companionship, Automation and Human Relationships

There is a particular difference between using technology to complete a task and turning to it for companionship. I can imagine real value in a conversational system that helps someone rehearse a difficult discussion, organise their day or put a feeling into words. The usefulness of that assistance should not be dismissed simply because it comes from software rather than a person.

At the same time, a system that is always available, adapts to its user and appears endlessly patient may influence a relationship in ways that are easy to overlook. People can become attached to stories, fictional characters and routines. A highly responsive companion can intensify that experience. I do not think we should assume every attachment is unhealthy, but neither should developers present it as automatically safe or equivalent to a human relationship.

While governments and developers have substantial responsibilities, individuals must also retain responsibility for their decisions. I do not believe we should create a society where every negative outcome is automatically attributed to government failure, corporate misconduct, or the existence of technology. People should be encouraged to question information, investigate alternatives, and understand the products they choose to use. However, responsibility must also be considered in context. A child, a person with limited technological literacy, and an experienced professional do not necessarily possess the same knowledge or ability to identify risks. Likewise, a multinational technology company possesses far greater resources and influence than an individual consumer. Responsibilities should therefore reflect the knowledge, power, capabilities, and circumstances of those involved. This does not remove personal accountability.

It recognises that meaningful accountability must exist throughout the entire system. Where people have been provided with accessible education, honest information, reasonable protections, and genuine opportunities to make informed decisions, they should increasingly be expected to take responsibility for their choices. Where those conditions have not been provided, society should first examine what barriers or institutional failures contributed to the outcome. Personal responsibility and collective responsibility are not opposing principles. They depend upon one another.

Care, loneliness and the temptation to replace people

I have argued elsewhere that caring for someone is not merely a checklist of tasks. In a care setting, a machine might remind a resident about a scheduled activity, play familiar music or help them communicate a preference. Those uses may create genuine benefits. But an automated system cannot be assumed to replace trust, physical presence, safeguarding or the judgement needed when a vulnerable person is distressed or unable to explain what they need.

A family might welcome a tool that helps a relative connect with others. The same tool could be misused by a provider that reduces staffing and markets an automated substitute as personalised attention. Evaluating these cases requires asking who chose the arrangement, what the person understands, whether there is consent, whether the human service is still available and who is accountable when something goes wrong.

Children need particular consideration. If an apparently caring digital character tells a child whatever they want to hear, the child may never encounter the disagreement and boundaries that relationships involve. The risk is not that technology shows kindness. It is that a provider might turn emotional dependence into a business model, or allow vulnerable users to mistake a product's simulated responsiveness for independent understanding and responsibility.

I would ask companies making companionship claims to explain the product's limitations, design goals, memory practices and any incentive to prolong emotional interaction. A person should be able to stop using the system and recover or remove their information without unnecessary pressure. When serious mental-health or safeguarding risks arise, the system should not pretend to be a substitute for a qualified human service. That still leaves room for tools that reduce isolation and increase access to communication.

The Century question is what the technology helps a person do outside the software. Does it support confidence, communication and human contact, or does the service become an end in itself? There may be legitimate uses on both sides, and we need careful research rather than a blanket moral judgment about everyone who finds comfort in a digital conversation.

CHAPTER 08

Work, Productivity and Technological Change

Technology has always changed the kind of work people perform. Some tasks become faster, some occupations change and some jobs disappear while others emerge. I am not interested in promising that every worker will automatically benefit from this process. I am interested in whether the society that profits from higher productivity provides real opportunities to the people who carry the cost of transition.

It is easy to say that someone whose job changes should retrain. It is harder to explain how they will pay their bills, travel to classes, obtain the equipment, meet entry requirements and find an employer willing to take them on. If the training pathway is imaginary, describing change as opportunity does not make the consequences fair.

The discussion surrounding artificial intelligence reflects a much larger problem within modern society. When new technologies create challenges, public debate can become focused on the technology itself rather than examining the systems surrounding it. We should ask whether our education systems are preparing people for technological change. We should ask whether regulatory institutions possess the resources and independence necessary to oversee increasingly powerful industries. We should question whether commercial incentives encourage companies to prioritise engagement and profitability over reliability and public benefit. And we should consider whether ordinary people have genuine access to the information necessary to evaluate the products and services shaping their lives. These questions extend beyond artificial intelligence. They concern the relationship between technological progress, education, democracy, corporate responsibility, and individual freedom.

I believe a successful society should encourage technological advancement while continuously examining its consequences. Regulation should evolve as evidence emerges. Educational standards should adapt as technology changes. Consumers should remain informed. Companies should remain accountable. And governments should remain answerable to the people whose interests they are supposed to represent. None of these arrangements should be considered permanently perfect. They must remain open to criticism, independent investigation, democratic scrutiny, and evidence-based improvement.

Who receives the gains?

Consider a business that automates part of an administrative process. It may deliver a service more quickly and reduce repetitive work. Employees may have more time to deal with complex problems or customers who need personal assistance. But the same investment could be used to reduce staffing while the remaining workforce has to supervise more cases with less control. The technology did not determine the outcome alone; management, labour protections, demand and the distribution of savings also mattered.

I want to examine whether workers can share in gains through higher wages, safer conditions, shorter unnecessary hours, retraining, employee involvement or more accessible services. Different businesses will have different financial constraints, and I do not think every improvement can immediately be turned into a wage increase. But it is reasonable to ask who benefits when public investment, workers' knowledge and commercial innovation combine to create productivity.

Volume V considered markets, ownership, concentrated power and the distribution of prosperity. Volume VI asked whether people can genuinely participate when barriers are ignored. Those tests

become more urgent when employers purchase tools that can replace parts of the work people trained for. Government support should not simply buy certificates for jobs that no longer exist. It should examine local opportunities, transferability of skills and whether employers actually need the people completing the courses.

The National AI Plan seeks to spread economic benefits through training and adoption. That ambition should be assessed through outcomes: which regions gain investment, who gets access to training, which workers experience job redesign, and whether small organisations can participate without becoming dependent on a handful of suppliers. [5]

Technology can also create environmental and infrastructure costs. The servers, electricity, connectivity and materials needed to run sophisticated systems cannot be left out of a productivity calculation. A tool that saves time but transfers large and unmeasured costs elsewhere is not necessarily the improvement its marketing claims. This links back to the whole-of-life costing principle in Volume IX.

CHAPTER 09

Safety, Privacy and Governance of Platforms

We need to be able to confront genuine online harms without creating a system in which any uncomfortable opinion can be removed by whoever holds political power. This is the same problem of rights and authority that I examined in Volumes III and IV, now expressed through platforms that can publish, hide, recommend or remove material for enormous audiences.

I think we should separate several different categories. A threat of violence is not merely an unpopular opinion. The non-consensual distribution of intimate images is not the same as criticism. Fraud, harassment, exploitation and targeted intimidation can involve real victims and legal remedies. Offensive comedy, political disagreement and arguments about religion may be painful or badly expressed without necessarily crossing those same thresholds.

Platforms also make choices under their own rules. A private company can decide that a service has a particular purpose, but its choices can profoundly affect public speech when the service becomes a major communication channel. I do not want every moderation decision made by a government department. I also do not want private companies claiming that their discretionary enforcement is entirely outside public scrutiny.

Information rights when decisions become automatic

From 10 December 2026, an Australian privacy-law transparency obligation will require covered entities to explain certain uses of automated decisions involving personal information where decisions can significantly affect people's rights or interests. The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner published guidance in September 2026. This obligation has been legislated but is not yet in effect as at this edition's date. It does not mean every automated decision is prohibited, nor does it guarantee that every affected person gets a full explanation of a proprietary system. [6]

I think the right direction is to let people know when a consequential decision involves automated assessment and to give them a workable route to challenge errors. A person denied an opportunity because of a mistaken record should not be trapped between an employer blaming the software and a software provider blaming the employer. The chain of responsibility must remain identifiable.

Privacy should be part of this design from the beginning. A system may improve convenience by remembering choices, but not every observation is something a company should keep forever. People should understand what information is collected, why it is needed, who receives it and whether it is used to train or improve models. There should also be safeguards against collecting sensitive information simply because it might be commercially valuable one day.

Online safety regulation already exists in Australia, including the Online Safety Act 2021 and the eSafety Commissioner. I want proposals judged against those institutions before inventing duplicate powers. We should investigate where enforcement succeeds, where people cannot obtain help, and whether procedures can be abused to suppress lawful criticism. The answer should involve clear legal thresholds, reasons where possible, review rights and measurable results. [7]

A response to misinformation also requires care. False claims can do damage, especially when circulated to make money or manipulate people. But a central authority that decides which disputed opinion may be published can become dangerous. A better approach may combine visible corrections, provenance information, accessible evidence, transparent advertising and proportionate action against identifiable fraud or threats. We should not pretend that every uncertainty can be solved by a label or content filter.

Protecting a child and protecting a political dissenter can sometimes pull policy in different directions. That is not a reason to abandon either. It is a reason to examine exactly which safety mechanism is proposed, what information it requires, who controls it, what mistakes it makes, and what appeal is available. The Century Freedom Test was designed for such conflicts, not only for easy cases where every right points in the same direction.

CHAPTER 10

Technology Should Strengthen Human Capability

I want a society that can use powerful technology without feeling obliged to worship it. There are things machines can do better than human beings and things they cannot reliably understand. The purpose of a technology policy should not be to pretend every useful task must remain manual, or that every technical achievement deserves deployment regardless of consequence. It should be to make human lives more capable, safer and freer.

One way to test this is to stop measuring success solely through downloads, market value, engagement or the number of tasks automated. Those figures can be informative, but they do not show whether a person learned more, gained independence, received better care or could challenge an unfair decision. We need outcomes connected to the purposes technology was supposed to serve.

My position is not that artificial intelligence is harmless. Nor is it that individuals should carry every consequence of the technologies they use. My position is that blaming technology alone is insufficient when the deeper problems may involve failures of education, transparency, regulation, institutional accountability, or individual judgement. We should not respond to every technological risk by removing opportunities for people to learn and innovate. We should build systems that allow people to understand those risks, exercise informed judgement, and hold powerful institutions accountable. Artificial intelligence should be an opportunity to expand human knowledge, creativity, accessibility, and cooperation. It should encourage curiosity rather than replace it. It should support independent thinking rather than demand unquestioning trust.

And its development should be guided by public benefit as well as commercial opportunity. Above all, I believe the responsibility of society is not to make every decision on behalf of its people. It is to provide people with the education, information, protections, opportunities, and freedom necessary to make informed decisions for themselves. That responsibility belongs to all of us, but it is not shared equally. Those with greater power, resources, and influence must accept responsibilities proportionate to their ability to shape the outcomes. This is not a proposal for a perfect technological system. It is a proposal for a system willing to recognise its limitations, investigate its mistakes, and continuously improve. Because the objective should never be technological advancement for its own sake.

The objective should be technological advancement that genuinely improves human life, strengthens independent thought, and contributes to the wellbeing of society as a whole.

A test capable of finding failure

Suppose a school introduces an AI tutor. Before celebrating adoption, examine whether students actually understand more, whether teachers have time to support them, whether disadvantaged students can access the service, whether personal information is protected and whether errors can be corrected. Suppose a care provider introduces automated reminders. Examine whether the people receiving care are better supported, not merely whether staff can close more entries in a record system. Suppose government moves an essential service online. Examine whether people can still use it when they do not have a phone, strong reading skills or reliable internet.

If the results are mixed, policy should be capable of changing. We can keep a useful element, correct a defective one, and replace a system that keeps failing. That is not proof that innovation was a mistake. It is evidence that a society willing to learn is functioning as it should.

I also want to protect the right to question the technology itself. A developer may make sincere claims and still misunderstand a risk. A regulator may make a reasonable decision and still overlook a group of people. A user may blame a tool for something caused by their own decision. Evidence and appeal should be available to all of them. Greater power means greater responsibility, but it does not mean any institution is incapable of learning.

The digital age gives us extraordinary ways to communicate across cultures, organise work, produce art, study history and test ideas. It also gives a few systems unprecedented opportunities to shape what people see, reward what holds attention and collect details of our lives. I do not think the answer is to reject either side of that truth. It is to insist that the institutions surrounding technology remain answerable to the human beings they affect.

And that brings me back to the larger purpose of the Century Manifesto. I have spent these volumes asking why people inherit beliefs, how power becomes accountable, what prosperity is for, why justice should prevent harm, and how infrastructure creates genuine opportunity. Technology is woven through all of those questions. No final design can settle them forever. The last volume must therefore ask not merely what society should believe today, but how a society should recognise errors and change its own mind tomorrow.

THE CENTURY MANIFESTO / VOLUME XII

The Century Method And The Living System

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.

CHAPTER 01

A Living Manifesto and an Emerging System

I have spent much of this Manifesto asking people to question the systems they inherit. It would be a contradiction to reach the final volume and suddenly insist that the system I have described is beyond question. If my argument is that governments, institutions, businesses, religions and ideologies should explain themselves, then the Century philosophy must accept that same demand. Being its author does not give me an exemption.

I have called this work a manifesto, but that word can mislead people into expecting a finished set of promises. The essays are partly my beliefs about what society owes people, partly questions about why existing institutions work as they do, and partly possible ways of arranging them differently. Those three things cannot be treated as interchangeable. A question is not automatically a policy. A proposal is not proof that it can work. A value is not a statistic.

What I want to build is a process through which those ideas can be examined, corrected and, when the evidence requires it, abandoned. The Century Manifesto is my contribution to that process. The Century System, if there is ever to be one in practice, would be something larger: an arrangement of decisions, protections, duties, institutions and real people who have the authority to challenge its mistakes. I do not think those institutions should spring into existence merely because I have written about them.

The Century Manifesto is not intended to dictate a perfect political, economic or social system. It is a framework for questioning systems we have inherited and investigating how they might better serve society. I am not claiming to have every answer. I consider myself one cog in something much greater, contributing my questions, understanding and experiences to a discussion involving people with very different forms of expertise and lived knowledge.

The point is not to win a political argument. It is to discover what might work better, explain why, consider what would happen in practice and be prepared to accept a better answer. An editor must not turn my preferred approach into a universal rule merely because I have argued for it strongly. Equally, the editor must not soften my argument simply because it is controversial or because someone might dislike it. State what I mean, why I mean it and what would have to happen to test it.

Preserve my original opinions and reasoning, including the uncomfortable questions. Do not present those opinions as established factual findings or proven public policy. A position can be deeply held while remaining disputed, legally impossible under current law, economically uncertain or in need of serious revision. I want the challenges put beside the argument, not hidden behind it and not used to silently substitute someone else's politics for mine.

The foundational commitments are human dignity, equal protection, meaningful personal freedom, the right to question and disagree, fair treatment, protection against arbitrary power, due process,

responsibilities proportionate to capacity and opportunity, shared responsibility for public foundations, honest education and long-term stewardship. The practical designs for taxation, welfare, infrastructure, sentencing, school curricula, health services, oversight and ownership remain open to evidence, debate and revision.

Do not confuse loyalty to the foundation with loyalty to the first model built on it. A better law, cheaper process or more effective safeguard should be welcome when it protects the underlying values as well or better. The commitment to human rights can itself be clarified or extended as previously excluded people gain fairer recognition. It does not mean that the wording of any one era is beyond examination.

I believe one of the greatest mistakes we make when discussing politics is treating political and economic ideologies as finished systems that must either be accepted entirely or rejected because of their historical failures.

We often judge entire philosophies by the actions of particular governments, political leaders or historical movements without properly examining the principles, institutions and circumstances responsible for their successes and failures.

To me, they can sometimes resemble two sides of the same coin, simply produced by different mints.

But that does not mean the methods used to achieve those objectives should be defended indefinitely.

Throughout history, governments operating under different political and economic systems have concentrated power, restricted freedoms and failed to protect the people they were supposed to serve.

We must be prepared to recognise all three possibilities.

An ideology should not be treated as an instruction manual that can never be rewritten.

Nor should we destroy useful systems simply because we disagree with their ideological origins.

These principles do not always have to be mutually exclusive.

This is also why the Century system itself must remain open to examination.

If the Century system develops weaknesses, they must be acknowledged.

I also recognise that an evolving system must have a clear moral foundation.

No individual, institution or political ideology should hold a monopoly over what constitutes progress.

It requires us to recognise that something can have valuable intentions while producing harmful consequences.

Our objective should never be to prove that one ideology was right all along.

I can recognise strengths in capitalism, socialism, democratic government, cooperative ownership and the ways communities already support themselves without pretending that any label supplies the answer to every problem. If a local business provides good work and a useful service, I do not want to damage it simply because somebody dislikes its ownership model. If a public service helps people but is wasting money or hiding failures, I do not want to defend that waste in the name of collective responsibility. The institution deserves to be judged by what it does, how it treats people, and whether it can correct its mistakes.

That distinction is especially important at this stage. The first eleven volumes are working arguments, not author-approved legislation. The editorial construction guide dated 30 October 2026

shaped this twelve-book reading order, but it remains a proposed framework, not a document that can determine what I believe without my consent. A reader should be able to separate the ideas I wrote, the material editors connected for readability, historical positions I may reconsider and proposals that have not yet passed legal or practical scrutiny.

CHAPTER 02

The Century Policy Test

The simplest test I know begins before anyone argues about who should win a political debate. It asks what problem we are actually trying to solve. I have seen how easily a conversation can race from frustration to punishment, from a pothole to a grand road program, or from a difficult individual experience to a claim about an entire population. A serious proposal needs to slow down long enough to establish the problem and the people affected by it.

The Century Policy Test is deliberately ordinary. It is meant to be understandable to the person waiting for a train, the worker struggling with a shift, the business owner, the carer, the prisoner, and the official designing a program. The questions are not a secret formula or a substitute for professional work. They are a way of finding out what professional work is necessary before somebody acts.

This test isn't meant to be a fancy form that only professionals understand. It's what I find myself doing when I think about anything: what's the problem, why is it happening, what could we change, and what would go wrong if we did? Then let somebody who knows more have a look at it.

I want a repeatable set of questions people can apply when considering a law, program, business practice or public project. Its purpose isn't to force every answer into ten tidy boxes. The questions exist to expose assumptions and to make a proposal understandable. An honest 'we don't know yet' is more useful than inventing certainty. That uncertainty should lead to a research task, a carefully designed pilot or a decision not to proceed where the risk is too great.

The test begins with the problem. Describe exactly what is happening and who experiences it. 'Our roads are terrible' may express a legitimate frustration, but it doesn't say which road, which failure or what conditions are causing it. 'People don't want to work' is an even more dangerous shortcut if the person can't access transport, suitable jobs or training. Define the concern before selecting a remedy.

The next questions concern evidence and rights. Which facts are verified? Which observations are personal? Which numbers are old, uncertain or based on a narrow group? Does the proposal restrict freedom, privacy or access to essential services? What protections already exist and why? A fair proposal must explain its legal basis or acknowledge where new law would be required. It must also consider people who aren't in the room when the decision is made.

Then compare realistic alternatives, including keeping the existing approach, improving it, testing a smaller change, replacing it or discontinuing the service where justified. For each option, ask who will administer it, who pays, how it affects other services, who may be unintentionally disadvantaged and how an ordinary person can challenge an error. Specify results that matter, not only activity targets. Finally, name what evidence would make the author or authority change course.

I would ask every substantial proposal to answer ten connected questions. First, what is failing, and whose daily experience shows the problem? Second, what evidence supports that diagnosis, what is its date and scope, and what remains uncertain? Third, whose rights, dignity, safety, privacy or reasonable obligations could change? Fourth, have we compared retaining the current approach, repairing it, trialling a smaller alternative, replacing it and discontinuing it? Fifth, who can actually deliver, fund, administer and correct the new arrangement?

Sixth, what are the full costs, including time, environmental damage, pressure on families, institutional capacity and costs transferred to people who were never consulted? Seventh, what unexpected incentives could encourage manipulation, exclusion or coercion? Eighth, who is independently able to examine the decision and hear an appeal? Ninth, what improvement would be visible in people's lives, rather than only in an organisation's performance report? And tenth, what finding would cause us to change, suspend or abandon the proposal?

When somebody presents a proposal, the alternatives are often selected to make the favoured option look attractive. If a person wants a new road, they may compare only that road with the most dramatic account of congestion. If somebody wants a new public program, they may assume that every person currently struggling will be helped. A fair analysis needs a realistic baseline: what is likely to happen under present policy, including ordinary maintenance, natural changes and reforms already funded.

The baseline isn't a promise that doing nothing is acceptable. It is the reference point needed to establish whether the new proposal adds value. A road may worsen without renewal, and inaction has costs. A service may improve because of staff training already underway, meaning a newly launched program shouldn't take credit for all progress. If the baseline is dishonest, so is the comparison.

The test should not become a new way to bury a good idea in paperwork. A minor local maintenance decision requires less investigation than a criminal-justice reform affecting someone's freedom or life. Proportionality matters. But the size of a project is not the only measure of danger: even a cheap rule can do serious harm when it gives an official unchecked power over a vulnerable person.

CHAPTER 03

From a Concept to a Working Proposal

There is a difference between imagining how a better society might work and demanding that Australia reorganise itself tomorrow. I have spoken about a perfect world because thinking about a more ambitious destination can reveal limitations we have been trained to accept. But a thought experiment has to survive its own consequences. It must not ask a vulnerable person to bear irreversible harm so that someone else can discover whether a theory was good.

For me, the first stage is to examine whether an idea fits the Century foundations at all. Does it treat people as individuals? Does it respect dignity, basic rights, freedom to disagree and honest public accountability? Does it identify the harm it wants to reduce? If the answer is no, there may be no point spending years designing its machinery. If the answer is uncertain, the uncertainty itself belongs in the record.

Only then should I ask what would happen inside the society I have imagined. A different wage system changes businesses, taxes, prices and the way people make choices. A new prison arrangement changes workers, courts, victims, families and the financial incentives of institutions. A change to immigration numbers changes demand for housing and services, but those services also change which places newcomers and existing residents can reasonably choose. No idea operates on a blank piece of paper.

When I say I am imagining a perfect world, I mean a thought experiment: what might this system achieve if transparency, fairness, evidence and proper responsibilities were genuinely followed? Then we must ask the difficult question. How does it perform when they aren't followed? People may lie, cheat, become overwhelmed, make sincere mistakes, seek advantage or misunderstand the law. A framework that only works under ideal conditions is not sufficiently protected for real government.

I think this is the simplest way I can describe the whole framework: ask the question you were taught to stop asking, then do the responsible adult work of checking the answer.

Don't accept something because it has an impressive title attached to it. But don't reject it just because it came from a politician, a professor or somebody you don't like. Find out what it's based on. Ask the person to explain. Try to understand their evidence. Then look for the part they may have missed.

A child's curiosity gives us the question. Adult judgement helps us recognise where an answer could hurt somebody, cost money, break a law or create another problem. We need both if we're serious about improving anything.

If you only research the people agreeing with you, what exactly have you learnt? I want people to find the strongest argument against their own idea. Not because being wrong is shameful, but because finding a problem on paper is a lot better than discovering it after someone gets hurt.

When I favour a proposal, I should actively investigate the strongest case against it. That isn't disloyalty to myself. It is how I learn whether the idea can survive contact with reality. An argument that only works when nobody asks difficult questions isn't an argument ready to shape people's lives.

After examining the idea against its own principles, I want the strongest moral disagreement identified. Some people may share a goal while disagreeing about what government can properly force others to do. That is not a mere implementation problem. It may be the most important part of

the proposal. Only after that should we compare the idea with existing laws, institutions, research, international examples, costs and real-world constraints. These stages can overlap, especially where a serious human-rights danger needs immediate attention, but they must not be collapsed into one declaration that something is obviously good.

If the comparison reveals a practical alternative, we can examine its design. If it reveals an abuse risk, we must face that before asking people to trust the institution. And if a proposal is not lawful or ethically suitable for a trial, we should stop. I would rather hold an unfinished idea in an honest archive than sell an untested promise as progress.

CHAPTER 04

The Claim and Evidence Register

I am aware that a person can be sincere and still be wrong. A firsthand observation can reveal a real failure without proving that everyone experiences it. A statistic can be accurately quoted and still mislead if its denominator or time period is hidden. A legal rule can be remembered correctly for an old edition and be wrong after a later amendment. And two people can agree on every fact while honestly disagreeing about which values should govern the response.

I want the Century record to be able to tell these statements apart. It should distinguish a moral judgement, a personal observation, a documented description of existing law, a measured empirical finding, a theory about what caused an outcome, a thought experiment and a proposal for future action. The author of a claim and the quality of its evidence matter more than how confidently the sentence is written.

There's a difference between something I believe is fair, something I have seen, a fact somebody has measured and an idea I think might work. If I mix those up, readers won't know what they're being asked to agree with. I want the argument strong enough to survive putting those things in separate boxes.

One reason arguments turn into pointless conflict is that different statements get treated as though they require the same type of proof. 'People deserve dignity' is a moral commitment. 'This particular project reduced waiting times' is a factual claim requiring evidence. 'A redesigned referral system might reduce waiting times' is a policy hypothesis. 'I have observed people being referred repeatedly without receiving what they need' is a personal observation. All can belong in a serious argument, but they aren't interchangeable.

An editor should keep the original voice when I express a belief. If I say that large companies should face greater obligations when their decisions shape other people's choices, don't replace it with a timid sentence that hides my argument. Explain what I mean by power, why I think it creates responsibility and where the proposal may have unintended costs. If I claim a scheme would save money, however, the editor must either identify credible supporting evidence or label the claim as a hypothesis. Strength of conviction can't convert a forecast into an established fact.

A practical proposal record can place each claim under four categories: value, observation, verified fact or proposed effect. For a road decision, photographs and maintenance histories may establish recurring defects, while engineering assessments investigate the cause. For welfare, a participant's testimony can identify an access barrier, while administrative data and evaluation may indicate whether the problem is widespread. Neither should cancel the other. Personal experience can generate a valuable question without becoming a substitute for representative evidence.

The strongest objection is that this standard can make writing slow or overly technical. That is why I want readable main arguments supported by evidence notes rather than endless academic footnotes in every sentence. Readers should follow the idea and be able to trace its support. We should spend more time establishing a reliable claim than repairing damage caused by confidently publishing something untrue.

A moral claim concerns what we ought to value, such as the principle that needing support does not erase dignity. Research may inform its application, but data alone cannot prove a value. A factual claim can be checked and needs a traceable source, relevant definition, date and context. A policy hypothesis describes a result that might occur under an intervention and must be tested. A personal

observation can reveal a problem worth investigating but does not alone show how widespread the problem is.

Never invent statistics, court cases, quotations, expert consensus or savings estimates. A policy can be both compassionate and unaffordable; it can save money while damaging rights; it can work on average while excluding a particular group. Show the costs and conflicts rather than treating one attractive purpose as proof of the entire outcome. Cite a source only when it supports the precise claim at issue.

Research begins with the appropriate jurisdiction and existing institutions. In Australia, the relevant rules might involve Commonwealth law, Victorian law, local government planning, a regulator's published guidance or a court decision. These sources aren't identical. A regulator's website can explain a rule, but it can't simply replace the enacted provision where the law is contested. A study of another country may reveal an alternative, but its outcomes can't automatically be imported into Australia without considering different institutions, populations and costs.

I want opposing evidence reported fairly. If a trial found no improvement, say that. If the study only followed participants for six months, say that too. If an example works for one small organisation, resist claiming it will automatically succeed nationwide. Record the source, publication date, method and the particular sentence it supports. When two sources conflict, examine differences in definitions rather than selecting whichever number agrees with my opinion.

Public participation is part of research. People who use a service may identify consequences officials did not anticipate. Workers can explain implementation constraints. Professional associations, academics and independent bodies can test safety, law and budgets. People likely to be disadvantaged should be consulted early rather than after a proposal has already been announced. Participation still needs boundaries: harassment, threats and discriminatory exclusion don't become acceptable simply because somebody calls them political speech.

Prefer Australian conditions and law, especially Victoria where the original experience is located. When using an overseas comparison, identify why it may or may not transfer. Distinguish legislation, constitutional law, judicial decisions, government guidance, academic research and philosophical ideals. Any new edition should recheck current legal claims, funding and institutions before presenting them as current, and include dated references wherever sourced material is used.

For statistics, give the population, period, denominator, definitions and source. Distinguish rates from counts, correlation from causation, and evidence of a plausible effect from a conclusive finding. Strong opposition should be quoted or paraphrased fairly and answered substantially. An unidentified expert should not be invented to make the author's argument sound more authoritative.

Where a proposal remains unproven, use candid labels such as Proposed, Open legal question, Requires modelling or Illustrative scenario. Independent research is welcome but should be marked separately from the author's original argument so the reader can distinguish what is being asserted, inferred, recommended or tested.

Suppose a map shows that several suburbs have both high housing stress and higher recorded offending. I can say that those patterns overlap, and I can ask whether insecure housing, policing practices, population density and opportunity are relevant. I cannot use the map alone to identify the birthplace of offenders or prove that migration caused the crime. That claim needs different evidence. The same standard applies to my suspicion that high-stimulation media might influence some vulnerable young people: it is a hypothesis, not a licence to treat entertainment as the established cause of serious violence.

The record should therefore include the exact claim, its source, date, jurisdiction, methods, limitations and the question that would disprove it. A reader does not need to see that register in the middle of every chapter, but it should exist. A manifesto that asks for transparency cannot rely on sources nobody is allowed to inspect.

CHAPTER 05

The Contradictions We Must Keep Visible

A contradiction is not always a sign that somebody has failed to think. Sometimes two commitments protect real interests and cannot both be fully satisfied in the same situation. That is why I do not want an editor silently making the difficult sentences disappear. A neat book is not worth much if the neatness comes from hiding the question that would most challenge its author.

The first serious tension begins with dignity. I have argued that basic human worth does not disappear when somebody is unemployed, disabled, imprisoned or disliked. I have also entertained extremely severe punishments, including a historical work-or-death proposal and later discussion of capital punishment for the gravest repeated offences. Those positions cannot simply be called compatible because I want them to be. Australia has abolished the death penalty and has binding international obligations against executions. Beyond law, there are profound questions about wrongful conviction, discrimination, irreversible error and whether any state can safely hold that power. The record needs to show my proposal, the objections, and whether I later change or retain it. It must not treat debate as a public mandate.

Understanding does not erase responsibility; accountability does not remove the need to identify causes. Safety can justify restrictions, but vague restrictions can be abused. A democratic majority can make collective choices without being permitted to erase the basic protection owed to a minority. Real opportunities make expectations more defensible; no fair system can judge a person solely by a target that was impossible to meet. Private business rewards can encourage invention while concentrated power can undermine competition and politics. Rehabilitation and punishment may both have legitimate roles. Financial efficiency is important but cannot alone decide whether a person's rights are respected.

Sometimes older institutions have preserved something valuable. Sometimes they have also perpetuated harm. Neither nostalgia nor novelty resolves the question. A personal observation deserves attention without automatically becoming a national conclusion. Confidence in an argument should always be paired with a way of recognising its failure. These tensions should recur wherever an actual policy makes them relevant; do not bury them in a disclaimer nobody sees again.

I also want work to be worth doing. I have suggested education, trades, farms, warehouses and supervised enterprises in prison. Earnings would make an appropriate contribution to public costs, while benefiting prisoners and improving their conditions. A person who works might become more skilled, productive and ready to re-enter society if release is possible. Those are separate benefits that deserve serious consideration regardless of disagreement about my strictest punishment proposal.

But if I demand evidence from everyone else, I have to ask the questions people will put to me. Who proves the offence and which offences qualify? Who ensures work is safe and accessible? What does an independent reviewer do when a prisoner says an official has mislabelled them unwilling? How would an irreversible mistake be corrected? Does this deter violence in real life, or simply look severe on paper? How much does the prison actually save after staff, buildings, health care and wages are counted? What happens if prison income begins influencing sentencing or work assessments?

For me, the Century framework means I should hear the evidence and explain my reasoning openly. A policy that can't meet legal, ethical and practical tests should not be mislabelled as ready for

adoption simply because it expresses my moral anger about heinous crime. Equally, I do not want the underlying concern— victims, accountability, preventable costs, rehabilitation and public safety —dismissed without serious analysis. This is a test of how far our reasoning can go while keeping the real disagreement visible.

Another tension concerns contribution. I believe meaningful opportunities are necessary before society can fairly expect people to use them. I also believe that repeated refusal of genuinely accessible opportunities can raise questions about responsibility. But if withdrawing a benefit destroys someone's housing, medical care or ability to survive, the consequence may undermine the very independence the policy claims to encourage. The test must ask who decides that an opportunity was reasonable, how mistakes are corrected, and what protections cannot be bargained away.

There are economic contradictions too. I want businesses to create work and innovation, while worrying about wealth that becomes political power. I am interested in productive prison programs, while recognising the danger of giving institutions a financial interest in incarceration or paying workers unfairly. I support freedom of expression and cultural exchange, while refusing to treat threats, abuse or coercion as harmless tradition. These questions belong in the visible contradiction record, with the strongest case on each side and an honest status: resolved by the author, retained as a trade-off, unsupported, or still open. It should never quietly say 'resolved' because an editor found an elegant paragraph.

CHAPTER 06

Unintended Consequences and the Whole System

The longer I think about public problems, the less convincing I find single-cause explanations. A law governing wages affects prices, tax revenue, employers and people who need to buy essentials. Housing construction depends on workers, transport, water and electricity. Migration changes demand and supply in different ways, and a country that asks people to settle regionally must make those regions capable of supporting them. A justice system that keeps people safe today can still create future costs if it leaves people more isolated or less capable when they return to the community.

I use the pothole example because it is easy to see both the immediate duty and the wider cause. The dangerous hole needs fixing, even when an investigation is incomplete. But if the same road repeatedly collapses, an endless sequence of patches is not enough. We need engineering evidence, the real lifespan of available options, and an honest account of who pays when disruption is transferred to neighbours and businesses. That is how prevention becomes a practical question rather than a slogan.

The road example keeps coming back because it is simple enough to picture. Fix the hole now. Then figure out what caused it. Then compare whether another patch, a proper repair or a different road design gives people the best result. Don't forget the driver who has to use it while the work is happening.

Imagine a local road develops a dangerous defect in the same area multiple times. Residents become frustrated because each repair lasts less than expected. The problem statement should record the exact location, the verified defects, immediate safety response and the frequency of recurrence. Drivers' observations are useful, but an engineering inspection is needed to identify whether moisture, base failure, loading, materials or another cause is responsible.

The first option is targeted repair, perhaps appropriate if underlying conditions are sound. The second is pavement renewal and drainage improvements if confirmed defects require them. The third considers broader network conditions or redesign if heavy loads, flooding or rerouted traffic create recurring damage. Each option has a different price, closure effect, expected life and uncertainty. No option should win merely because it looks decisive or because one invoice is smallest.

I'd also ask how many people rely on that stretch of road. Closing a low-traffic street and closing a busy main road are completely different situations. One may affect a few hundred journeys, while another could affect thousands and overload surrounding streets; the actual numbers need to come from traffic data rather than a guess. Compare several short closures with one longer planned closure, including worker safety, diversion routes, public transport, freight, nearby businesses and emergency access. Otherwise we're calling a cheap patch the cheapest solution without counting what everybody else has to put up with.

A useful public decision record would show condition measurements, assumptions, rough cost ranges, likely disruption and the reasons for choosing the preferred treatment. The council or responsible road authority should explain who will do the work and how the public can report future issues. The review might compare observed pavement condition, recurring defects, safety and maintenance spending after the works. A failed prediction isn't automatically dishonesty, but refusing to acknowledge it is a serious institutional failure.

The trial would need real funding and measurable purposes: useful qualifications, retention in suitable work where appropriate, increased independence, wellbeing and access to services. It would also measure complaints, inappropriate placements and failure to access promised support. A person with ongoing disability-related needs must not be called a failure because the program's preferred outcome is full-time employment. Contribution can take several forms, and dignity doesn't depend on a payslip.

Some participants may knowingly refuse genuine opportunities. I believe proportionate expectations can be discussed after capacity and access are established, but sanctions must not be improvised by a provider or applied without lawful authority and review. The strongest objection is cost and possible manipulation. That is why the alternative isn't a promise to fund every scheme forever; it is independent evaluation against the real costs and outcomes of current practice.

The same map of consequences can be drawn for services. A family might be told to be more responsible while transport, secure housing or accessible training is missing. A worker in aged care may complete every documented task while a resident still feels unheard. A prison workshop may produce a profit and certifications while underpaying the people inside it or competing unfairly with a local employer. The figures can look positive even when costs have been shifted elsewhere.

Suppose a person complains that a support service's communication has repeatedly left them confused. The provider may investigate and conclude its workers followed a prescribed procedure. That conclusion could be true, but it shouldn't end the inquiry automatically. Was the procedure suitable for a person with different communication needs? Was a reasonable alternative available? Did staff have the time and training to use it? If a manager changes the procedure, does the organisation later test whether the problem actually improved?

The same idea applies in education, healthcare, customer service and government administration. A complaints system can be both a protection for the individual and a source of evidence about design failures. It must also guard against false allegations and allow staff to respond fairly. The purpose is accurate improvement, not automatically finding one party guilty.

I would distinguish a resolved complaint from a verified outcome. A response letter, apology or rebooking may be useful, but the person should have a reasonable route to escalate serious unresolved concerns and the organisation should review repeated patterns. That is how dignity becomes an ordinary operational commitment rather than a paragraph in a policy manual.

Take my own hypothetical example. A prison warehouse claims that it has made $10,000 after overheads. I want the surplus to do something useful: improve the prison, provide training and boost morale, and support services beyond its fences. Before government praises itself for saving ten thousand dollars, however, the Century Policy Test should insist on a baseline and an independently auditable set of accounts. Are security and supervision included? Were prison workers compensated in accordance with applicable rules? What was the contribution from taxpayer-owned buildings and equipment? What would the same product cost if purchased elsewhere? Was a local private firm displaced? Is the number revenue, cash surplus, accounting profit, avoided procurement or a transfer within government?

The first draft might say 'take some away in taxes and use the rest for improvements'. A better implementation question is who legally owns the surplus and what rules govern its use. A government- controlled entity transferring money to another government account hasn't necessarily created additional resources. I would therefore present alternatives: one arrangement keeps earnings within a ring-fenced training and wellbeing fund subject to audit; another returns some measurable surplus to consolidated public revenue; a third reinvests in productive capacity while

directing an appropriate portion toward prisoner remuneration, savings or restitution. These possibilities require legal and financial modelling before anybody sets percentages.

Now imagine the workshop succeeds commercially but prisoners earn little, have no recognised qualifications and local firms lose contracts. A prison manager might call that successful because the finances improved. I would call it an incomplete result, possibly a harmful one. The policy should measure lawful work conditions, genuine skill development, the safety of workers and prisoners, effects on outside businesses, repeat offending where relevant, procurement quality and opportunity cost. A 'profit' that depends on an indefensible labour arrangement isn't the outcome I am trying to build.

The economy, work, justice, housing, infrastructure, immigration and technology volumes are connected in precisely this way. Each proposes changes whose consequences appear in another book. That is why I do not want the final method to judge a proposal by its most attractive outcome alone. It must follow the money, the work, the practical choices and the risks until the people who might bear them are visible. A system that says 'everyone contributes' must also notice whose contribution it has failed to count.

CHAPTER 07

Pilots, Evaluation and the Right to Reverse

I don't regard an unsuccessful test as automatically wasted effort. If a small, carefully designed project shows that an idea costs more than predicted or creates an unfair burden, that may be the information we needed to avoid a much larger mistake. The failure would be hiding the result or changing the success measure after the fact so that the project could still be called a victory.

A pilot needs a fair comparison, a clear baseline and meaningful outcome measures. It should identify who has a say in design, who receives support, what data can be collected lawfully, and who can stop a harmful process. It must recognise that not every reform can be ethically tested by withholding an essential service from a vulnerable group. Where an experiment would violate fundamental rights or create irreversible injury, the correct decision may be not to conduct it.

People call a pilot a failure if it doesn't prove what they hoped. I don't see it that way. If it tells us the idea is wrong before we roll it out across the country, that's useful information. The real failure would be hiding what happened because somebody wanted a win.

I don't believe every good idea needs a national rollout the moment somebody announces it. Many proposals can be tested in a lawful, limited and reversible form before wider implementation. First define the problem and the baseline. Then specify the intervention, responsible people, eligibility, safeguards, costs, measurement plan and what happens if it fails. A pilot that can't explain these basics is a publicity experiment rather than a serious test.

A useful evaluation distinguishes outputs from outcomes. A training program might count enrolments and certificates, but a person may still have no practical route into employment. A new care checklist might be completed more often while residents remain dissatisfied. A road project may finish on time while the surrounding network becomes more congested. Activity indicators have value, but they should be connected to the actual purpose of the work.

Not every policy is suitable for experimentation. A proposal involving irreversible harm, fundamental rights violations or serious threats to safety can't be legitimised simply by calling it a pilot. A smaller version of an unethical action doesn't become ethical because fewer people are affected. Rights and safety screening must come before the implementation plan, not after it.

Imagine one community wants to try a publicly supported op shop with repair training, or a cooperative grocery service. The idea sounds good: affordability, jobs, less waste and money returning to the community. But what would I want to know before voting to fund it?

Start with the people who already provide these services. Ask customers what they actually need and workers what gets in the way. Then put realistic numbers on premises, equipment, transport, insurance, wages, stock, governance and the risks of the business failing. Compare the option with simply helping existing shops, charities or private businesses do more. Record prices, service quality, financial performance, waste avoided, training outcomes and effects on competitors. Ask whether low-income people can access it and whether the work is decent.

Run a limited, independently reviewed trial with published results and an appeal or complaints route. If the idea improves lives but needs ongoing funding, say exactly how much and who would pay. If it doesn't work, don't pretend a good intention is enough. Improve it, narrow it or close it carefully. That's how a conversation becomes something more useful than a promise.

Stopping a proposal can be evidence of good governance. It may have revealed that the administrative burden is greater than expected, the people most in need can't access the program or

the supposed savings disappear when wider costs are included. A pilot that uncovers that risk before national implementation has provided value, even if the original intervention isn't expanded.

Decision-makers should define cancellation or revision criteria before a pilot starts, while remaining able to recognise unforeseen harms. They should name an independent reviewer, arrange access to the relevant information, protect individual privacy and publish the lessons. A failed evaluation shouldn't be hidden simply because public money was spent. The money is already gone; concealing what was learned only makes repeating the mistake more likely.

There is a limit to experimentation. Some proposals are impermissible because they violate fundamental protections even when someone predicts public benefits. We shouldn't trial discriminatory denial of basic services or irreversible punishments on a smaller population as though this resolves the moral problem. Rights screening can stop a proposal before any pilot design begins. This is one of the protections that keeps the framework from becoming a machine for justifying whatever seems efficient.

I would begin by explaining the specific harm: for example, wages failing to keep pace with essential costs, public services lacking capacity or market power being abused. I would map the existing law and identify what already works. Then I would compare approaches rather than bundle everything under the word 'socialism': competition reform, improved enforcement, worker ownership, public options, progressive taxation, community investment, regulated utilities, cooperatives or better targeted existing support. I would ask researchers to model how each could affect prices, production, employment, budgets and rights, while publishing their assumptions and uncertainties.

A safer sequence would test reversible measures where ethically possible, use independent measures of outcomes, watch for displacement of costs and supply problems, and publish reasons to expand, redesign or stop. Some proposals are unsuitable for experiments because their consequences are irreversible or their basic rights conflicts can't be justified. Consultation should begin before design is fixed, but a vote can't make coercion safe. There should be emergency responses for predictable disruption, but not a permanent emergency power that avoids review.

I would compare the claimed results with the people who did not benefit and with realistic alternatives, including improving what already exists. A training program cannot claim success only because it issued certificates. A complaints office cannot count a letter as proof that the person was helped. A new service must ask whether its workers can actually deliver what was promised. If there is no fair way to measure an outcome, the proposal needs more design before its supporters demand expansion.

Australia already has government evaluation institutions and guidance. My method should learn from them rather than pretending that the idea of trials or evaluation was invented by this Manifesto. What I want to add is a moral insistence that a person affected by a failed test remains entitled to explanation, remedy and dignity. Reversal is not a public-relations embarrassment to hide; it is one of the protections that makes experimentation responsible.

CHAPTER 08

Collective Expertise Without Expert Rule

I do not need to know everything about economics to question a budget, or be a lawyer to ask whether a power is fair. But I do need to recognise that my question is not the same thing as an expert answer. A person who works in a service can notice failures an outsider misses. A person who depends on that service can describe an experience that never appears in a performance dashboard. A statistician can test a claimed improvement, an engineer can examine whether a structure is safe, and a lawyer can explain where a proposed power conflicts with existing law.

The important part is that none of these voices should become a dictatorship over the others. Public experience does not make an unsafe design safe; technical credentials do not make a moral judgement automatically correct. Governments should be able to decide within lawful authority, but they should have to explain the decision, acknowledge the evidence they rejected and permit independent challenge.

A disagreement becomes most useful when both sides can describe the other's strongest concern fairly before returning to their own. If an objection shows that a safeguard is missing, the proposer should add it rather than attack the critic's character. If the critic relies on a false assumption, the proposer should show the evidence rather than dismissing the person. These are skills for schools and households, but they also belong inside parliamentary and administrative processes.

I would like to see us test whether better explanations change who can participate in government, not just how many people click on a public consultation. Take a proposal affecting regional public transport. Publish the problem in plain English, the underlying evidence, the cost, and the options. Let people see the actual draft when the law permits. Then offer different ways to participate: written submissions, an accessible meeting, translated information where needed, and a way for students and ordinary residents to ask questions without being laughed out of the room.

A meaningful evaluation would look beyond the number of comments. Did people understand the choices? Did residents who usually can't attend become involved? Were substantive errors identified? Could a person trace what happened to their suggestion? Did the final policy improve travel, affordability or access? If public engagement becomes another box the department ticks before doing what it had already decided, we have missed the point.

The related oversight pilot would test how a person challenges a claim of government secrecy. Researchers would need to identify what review rights already exist, which cases don't fit those processes, how an independent expert may examine protected material, what an applicant can safely be told, and how long a fair review takes. We shouldn't invent a completely new institution without first examining whether improving an existing one would work better.

Public framing: Put the problem into ordinary language and acknowledge disagreement about its causes. Distinguish moral commitments—safety, dignity, sustainability—from policy mechanisms such as ownership, wages and subsidies.

Open proposal stage: Invite practical suggestions from residents, workers, local councils, businesses, First Nations communities and specialists. Publish them fairly with privacy protections. Accept that some ideas will be rejected because they can't pass legal, economic or safety tests.

Independent challenge: Commission sceptical evaluation of the strongest options, including the proposal I favour most. Require a documented response to significant counterarguments and a public assessment of rights risks and unintended incentives.

Authorised decision: Let elected or otherwise lawfully responsible officials decide within defined constitutional and statutory powers. Publish their reasoning and conflicts of interest. Record dissent and minority effects rather than manufacturing unanimity.

Pilot and correction: Start at a manageable scale where ethical and practical risks allow, monitor the full cost across agencies and sectors, give affected people an accessible route to review, and specify in advance when the policy will be amended or ended.

Public learning: Explain what worked, what failed and what was unexpectedly difficult. Credit people who identified overlooked problems, including opponents. Treat a correction as evidence of a functioning process rather than a humiliation of its original supporter.

A democracy needs more than a slogan saying everybody speaks. It needs accessible formats, sufficient time, transparent selection of evidence, meaningful rights to contest official mistakes, and the willingness to hear the minority that disagrees with the crowd. The aim isn't perfect consensus. It is public decisions whose reasoning can be understood, criticised and improved without threatening people's right to belong.

There is another consequence I don't want overlooked: how we treat people who question us. I have criticised politicians for secrecy and self-interest. Some deserve serious scrutiny and some misconduct deserves punishment. But I also have to recognise that elected officials, public servants and experts may be handling trade-offs I can't see from outside, while I may notice things that their professional systems have missed. Neither possibility gives anyone the right to dismiss the other as foolish. Democracy works best when people can propose, criticise, correct and explain rather than demand loyalty to a team.

I want people to be able to criticise a Century proposal without first joining a movement or promising to defend its author. A person from a rural community, a First Nations representative, a migrant worker, a prisoner, an employer, a disabled participant and a taxpayer may see very different consequences of the same proposal. Their voices are not interchangeable, but a process that excludes them may miss the very harms it claims to prevent.

Participation must be meaningful. If a public consultation is offered only in technical language, only during paid working hours, or only through a website people cannot access, the government has not created equal opportunity to speak. There should also be protected space for minority disagreement after the majority has made a lawful decision. Without dissent, a collective purpose can become a demand for conformity; without responsibility, dissent can become an excuse to ignore other people's safety. A fair system must tolerate both the argument and the duty to answer it.

CHAPTER 09

When Principles Become Institutions

It would be easy to finish these twelve books by drawing a new government department, announcing a national authority or proposing that everyone be required to follow the Century System. That would mistake a philosophical starting point for authority I do not possess. We already have democratic institutions, courts, service regulators, public auditors and mechanisms of review. Before proposing anything new, I want to know which of those actually work, where they fail, and whether reform could strengthen them rather than add another office people must learn to navigate.

Practical institution-building should come after we understand which values are at stake and which duties are already imposed by law. It must specify who makes the decision, who appoints them, who pays them, what powers they have, how private information is protected and what happens when the authority itself is accused of wrongdoing. An independent regulator whose funding, appointments and reports can be manipulated by the organisation it investigates may be independent in name alone.

The more complicated the rules become, the more discretion moves to officials, assessors, regulators, courts and technology. That creates a fresh form of power. Someone must decide who is exempt from a ration, who is genuinely unwilling, which businesses qualify for public-benefit treatment, whose complaint matters and when policy is failing. Some people administering the system will be conscientious. Some will make mistakes; some may act dishonestly. Even honest people can miss circumstances they have never experienced. Replacing profit-driven decisions with state decisions hasn't removed the possibility of exploitation; it has moved the places where exploitation may occur.

A reform worthy of the Century Manifesto therefore needs independent appointment processes, public reasons, privacy protections, accessible appeals, auditors able to inspect failures, and a schedule for review. Oversight must be subject to oversight too. Government should act when evidence justifies it, but nobody should be able to say, 'Our intentions are good; therefore our authority needs no limit.' The danger of an unplanned revolution isn't only economic disruption. It is replacing an institution we distrust with another institution nobody is permitted to question.

I would begin by explaining the specific harm: for example, wages failing to keep pace with essential costs, public services lacking capacity or market power being abused. I would map the existing law and identify what already works. Then I would compare approaches rather than bundle everything under the word 'socialism': competition reform, improved enforcement, worker ownership, public options, progressive taxation, community investment, regulated utilities, cooperatives or better targeted existing support. I would ask researchers to model how each could affect prices, production, employment, budgets and rights, while publishing their assumptions and uncertainties.

A safer sequence would test reversible measures where ethically possible, use independent measures of outcomes, watch for displacement of costs and supply problems, and publish reasons to expand, redesign or stop. Some proposals are unsuitable for experiments because their consequences are irreversible or their basic rights conflicts can't be justified. Consultation should begin before design is fixed, but a vote can't make coercion safe. There should be emergency responses for predictable disruption, but not a permanent emergency power that avoids review.

This process may produce a policy that looks less dramatic than a revolution. That doesn't make it weak. Sometimes a functioning system needs a repaired incentive, a new right of appeal, stronger competition, public investment or a better pathway into education. Sometimes genuine failure

warrants replacement. I want the evidence to help us tell the difference. Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails is a much harder commitment than 'destroy the old and trust the new'.

Imagine a democratic debate begins with a seemingly uncomplicated suggestion: essential infrastructure and industries should create more lasting value for people in Australia rather than extracting maximum short- term profit. People from very different backgrounds might support the aspiration while disagreeing about what must change. I wouldn't begin by announcing the whole economy must be nationalised. I would begin with a specific problem and the evidence that it exists.

Suppose the example is an essential freight corridor that regularly fails during severe weather, delaying supplies to several regional towns. Local residents identify the real-world effect; transport operators provide route data and cost estimates; engineers study road surfaces, drainage and alternative routes; businesses explain effects on prices, staffing and inventories; environmental specialists examine changes to flood behaviour; and government agencies explain current legal powers and maintenance commitments. No single participant sees every aspect of the system. This is what I mean by one machine with many cogs.

We might find that targeted maintenance is sufficient. We might find a structural redesign would be worthwhile. We might need an alternative route, better freight coordination, or changes to emergency stockholding rather than another road. Each option changes different costs and responsibilities. The public decision record should show all credible choices, not simply the one favoured by the sponsoring minister. If a community proposal is rejected, the community deserves reasons. If an engineer's preferred design is impractical for people with disabilities or emergency users, the evidence needs reassessment. If the government has selected a workable approach that still disappoints some people, opposition remains legitimate.

A further idea might be a benefit-sharing programme intended to reward workers and communities. Its incentive effects, employment implications, price effects, tax consequences and administrative burden all require testing. A fuel allocation limit—such as my hypothetical 200 litres for non-commercial use per week —might be proposed during scarcity. That introduces exceptions for regional travel, medical care, small businesses, disability and urgent services, along with fraud and privacy risks. A limit is neither self-evidently justified nor universally unacceptable; the facts and alternatives decide whether its burdens are defensible.

Finally, ask whether ordinary people could meaningfully see and contest these decisions. If information is so technical or restricted that nobody outside government can investigate, the system isn't transparent in the sense I intend. If a referendum or parliamentary majority can abolish rights to silence minority criticism, the shared purpose has become domination. If officials blame 'the collective' when the project fails, accountability has evaporated. An accountable model identifies who authorised each step and the conditions for revising it.

I would separate three stages. The first is a public argument about what would make a society fairer and more capable. The second is the comparison of realistic designs, which may include public ownership, cooperative models, private enterprise, better enforcement of existing law, or no major structural change at all. The third is lawful implementation with funding, rights safeguards, transition arrangements, measurement and a route back if the idea fails. Each stage can reject an attractive suggestion; none should be treated as a rubber stamp for the previous one.

A system worth keeping must work when its opponents hold office, not merely when its founders are popular. If its safeguards depend on everyone being wise or kind, they are not strong safeguards. The goal is to make mistakes discoverable, misuse of power challengeable and peaceful correction possible without requiring a new hero or a new crisis.

CHAPTER 10

Source Integrity and Historical Editions

An evolving philosophy can become dishonest if it improves by erasing evidence that it once thought differently. I want to be allowed to change my mind, but I also want readers to know when that happened and why. An earlier sentence should not be edited into a later opinion and then offered as proof that I was consistent all along. If an older proposal now seems unworkable, that is a reason to explain the change, not pretend the proposal was never raised.

There must also be a distinction between my own words and the work of somebody helping me develop them. The earlier manuscripts include conversations, editorial reconstructions, complete essays, diagrams of a possible volume structure and factual notes. Those materials have different status. No editor or AI should quietly convert a suggestion into a belief I have approved. That includes the first-person connecting passages in this very edition: they are written for my review and cannot become my definitive words until I accept them.

I want a future reader to understand more than a polished conclusion. They should be able to see which words I actually wrote, which paragraphs an editor helped reconstruct, what objections were raised and why I eventually accepted or rejected a change. If a sentence of mine seems harsh, read the explanation and circumstances around it; don't quietly replace it with something I never believed. If a proposed policy would violate rights or has no supporting evidence, say that plainly too. Protecting my voice does not mean pretending it is always right.

This matters most when people read the book fifty or one hundred years from now. They may have technology, economic conditions and legal protections I cannot imagine. I don't want them to treat our current methods as sacred because my name is on the cover. I want them to keep what actually helps people, repair what can improve, and have the courage to replace something that fails—even if it was originally my suggestion.

For every new edition the editor should preserve the author-supplied source, mark direct quotation separately from faithful paraphrase, keep a dated change log and identify legal or factual claims not yet independently validated. Where my current statements conflict with earlier statements, the difference should be recorded as a development or an unresolved tension, not secretly rewritten as though I always believed the latest version.

I want future readers to see what I originally thought, what I changed and why. If I get something wrong, correcting it should be a sign the framework is working. Why pretend we had the perfect answer from the start?

I want the Century Manifesto to be a living document. That doesn't mean silently rewriting the past every time I learn something new. Earlier editions show how my understanding developed. Their errors, incomplete questions and changes of mind are part of the intellectual record. If a proposal is withdrawn, I would rather say why than pretend I had always believed the final version.

This new discussion about prosperity came from questions I asked about money, manufacturing, food, recycling and the role of community work. I want the questions saved alongside the polished writing because it is too easy for a future editor to make my uncertainty disappear. The things I have suggested here are not proven results. They are avenues for investigation, and a later edition should say what the research found—even when the answer is that my first idea would not work.

Each significant revision should identify the original position, the new position, the reason for the change, the evidence or criticism considered and whether I approved the wording. A date matters

because both law and evidence change. Later researchers should be able to tell which parts came from my direct statements, which were a faithful editorial reconstruction and which are new proposals drafted by an assistant or collaborator. Attribution is as important as clarity.

The same rule applies to sources. Store an evidence register with claim, date, jurisdiction, source, finding, limitation and the chapter in which it was used. Mark outdated research rather than deleting it from the historical record. Keep an issue register for open questions, especially where a proposal creates rights tensions or depends on unverified savings. Publish correction notices when a statement is wrong and identify where the correction affects other volumes.

For faithfulness, use dated, explicit statements and later approved clarifications first; then author-supplied essays; then original working editions and their companion papers; then reconstructed compilations; and finally new editorial connective writing. A later explicit correction may outweigh an older formulation of intent. This source ranking concerns authorship, not factual correctness. Something personally asserted by the author may still be legally or empirically wrong.

Keep a change record showing the original claim, the updated claim, why the update was made, what sources were considered, whether the author approved it and which volumes were affected. Maintain an issue register, source list, shared glossary and index of repeating themes. If two versions genuinely disagree, print the disagreement or explain the amendment rather than choosing silently. Earlier editions must remain available even when a better edition replaces them for normal reading.

Before publishing, check that the wording still resembles the person who conceived it. Confirm that controversial claims remain visible and accurately qualified, rights conflicts are not covered over, ordinary-life examples show what would actually occur and existing institutions are acknowledged. Ask whether each proposal identifies the decision-maker, cost, appeal, strongest objection, evidence needed and reason to change course. Check every reference, page label, date, volume cross-reference and unresolved tension.

Do not make this manifesto quieter simply so it will be accepted. Do not make it louder by misrepresenting evidence or people who disagree. Preserve the questions, the frustration motivating them, the compassion behind them and the determination to look beyond the immediate symptom. Then do the harder work of showing what each answer means for the person living with it, the worker implementing it, the institution paying for it and the society left with its consequences.

The archive should retain the full original text, a dated copy of every edition, the source of a significant factual claim, and a record of the decision to accept, reject or leave an edit open. Minor spelling corrections can be logged more lightly than a change in the meaning of a policy, but even small edits should not obscure a controversial passage. A reviewer should be able to point to a stable chapter and edition rather than hope that a page number remains the same after printing.

This matters across generations. The evidence available in fifty years may make parts of these books look embarrassingly limited. That is no reason to hide them. A dated history of correction may be more valuable than a fictional history in which the author was never wrong.

CHAPTER 11

Publishing, Peer Review and the Next Edition

I have asked people throughout these books to question me. That invitation will mean very little if I give reviewers no fair way to show where they think the work fails. A finished-looking book should be readable from beginning to end, while the detailed review machinery can remain separate. I do not want every chapter interrupted by scorecards. I want a reader to follow the argument and, if they find an error, have a clear way to identify it.

That means every published edition needs a date, stable volume and chapter references, and a record of which text is the current author-approved version. A comment about Volume VII's punishment chapter should not become lost because an editor moved pages around. The source and issue register should record the passage, the objection, the strongest evidence or moral reason on each side, and my response. An editor should never claim that I approved a controversial change merely because I failed to notice it.

Begin with a problem an ordinary person could recognise. State what I am actually questioning. Explain why it matters in terms of real opportunities, dignity, rights, costs, safety and future generations. Investigate causes before insisting on a solution. Propose the alternative, including who implements it, who funds it, how the law would operate, who benefits, who is disadvantaged and how a person would appeal if something goes wrong.

Explain what Australia already does before saying the idea is new. Compare relevant approaches elsewhere with careful attention to legal and social differences. Give the strongest reasonable opposing argument fairly enough that someone who holds it can recognise the point. Then respond without pretending all objections have disappeared. What evidence would make me change my view? What outcome would justify expanding, changing or ending the policy? Close by connecting the example back to the larger principle.

These questions should be felt in readable connected prose, not forced into eleven mechanical headings in every chapter. A few brief recap points at the end of a significant topic can help readers keep hold of the argument. The argument itself should remain long enough to express the reasons, difficulties and alternatives rather than becoming a series of slogans.

Before publishing, check that the wording still resembles the person who conceived it. Confirm that controversial claims remain visible and accurately qualified, rights conflicts are not covered over, ordinary-life examples show what would actually occur and existing institutions are acknowledged. Ask whether each proposal identifies the decision-maker, cost, appeal, strongest objection, evidence needed and reason to change course. Check every reference, page label, date, volume cross-reference and unresolved tension.

Do not make this manifesto quieter simply so it will be accepted. Do not make it louder by misrepresenting evidence or people who disagree. Preserve the questions, the frustration motivating them, the compassion behind them and the determination to look beyond the immediate symptom. Then do the harder work of showing what each answer means for the person living with it, the worker implementing it, the institution paying for it and the society left with its consequences.

The Century Manifesto is a contribution to a larger effort, not the final authority on it. If someone can demonstrate a better solution, that solution should be heard. The purpose is to question, understand, participate, test and improve — including the ideas of the person who wrote the book.

A peer reviewer may find a factual error, a missing counterargument, an unclear comparison, a risk to vulnerable people, a contradiction with another volume, or a passage that simply does not read well. Those criticisms deserve different answers. A factual error needs correction. A rights risk can require serious reconsideration even if the evidence for a proposed benefit seems promising. A philosophical disagreement may remain unresolved after both sides are fairly presented. A readability correction should preserve the meaning rather than quietly take a political side.

I also want the record to show withdrawals. Not every statement deserves permanent defence, and not every proposal deserves a trial. If an evidence review shows a claim was false, later editions should correct it clearly. If the author decides to abandon a proposal, the new edition should explain why while the historical one remains archived. A living Manifesto should be capable of saying: we tried to understand this, we found the problem with our reasoning, and we changed.

CHAPTER 12

A Cog in Something Greater

When I began asking why the world works the way it does, I was not trying to become the person who would decide what everybody else must believe. I was trying to understand why useful systems survive, why harmful practices are defended, and why so many people learn to treat today's arrangements as the limit of what is possible.

Across these twelve volumes I have returned to the same idea from different directions: the freedom of an individual depends partly on the conditions around them, and the responsibility of a society depends on how honestly it looks at the people it leaves out. That does not make every person interchangeable, and it does not mean every ambition must serve the same political purpose. I want people to discover different strengths and to have room to disagree about how we should live together.

If this document survives beyond my lifetime, there's something I want you to understand. It was written by somebody trying to understand the world around him and asking whether we could leave it better than we found it. I wasn't writing from a position of absolute authority, and I don't expect you to agree with every conclusion. Some examples here might look outdated to you. Some things I thought were possible might have been proved wrong by people who knew more, or by the world changing in ways I couldn't have imagined.

Please don't treat the age of this book, or my name on its cover, as evidence that I'm right. Look at the reasons. Ask what we knew in October 2026, what we were worried about, what the available evidence could actually show, and what we hadn't yet worked out.

When I question profit, I'm not condemning everyone who earns money. When I question competition, I don't mean individuality or ambition should disappear. And when I talk about collective responsibility, I don't mean handing government unlimited control over people. A shared goal needs freedom to disagree and enough transparency to hold the powerful accountable.

When I say a better society for everyone, I mean everyone. Not only those who agree with me, earn the most, share my background or are easiest to help. Nobody should be treated as disposable because they need care or can't contribute in a way we can measure. At the same time, there are real resources behind every service and real responsibilities that go with having the ability and opportunity to help. Those tensions are part of what I'm asking you to think about, not something I'd like future editors to hide.

I also know a sentence can lose its tone once the person who wrote it isn't around to explain it. A criticism can be quoted without the concern that motivated it; a proposal can be turned into an excuse for something I never intended. If somebody uses this work to justify deliberate cruelty, exclusion or the removal of fundamental dignity, I hope you'll ask whether they've actually understood its purpose. And if you find a genuine inconsistency in my own words, say so. Don't smooth it over just to protect my image.

The goal was never to build a doctrine that nobody could question. It was to keep people asking who, what, when, where and why, while using evidence, empathy and adult judgement to work out what should happen next. If you can improve one of these ideas, I would rather you do that than defend it simply because I wrote it first.

I don’t consider myself the person who has all the answers. I’m one cog in this beautiful world, trying to contribute what I can to something much larger than myself.

I don’t need to be the best economist to question our economic priorities. I don’t need to be a government expert to ask whether our institutions are serving the people they’re supposed to represent. And I don’t need to have every solution worked out before I can start a conversation about the problems I see.

There are people better equipped than me to calculate budgets, design policies, manage public services, and solve technical problems. Their expertise matters, and we should use it. But expertise should be part of a collective effort, not a reason for everyone else to stop asking questions.

My contribution is to question, explore, connect ideas, challenge assumptions, and encourage people to consider what we might achieve if we took greater collective responsibility for one another.

I believe we should be able to pursue our own ambitions without losing sight of the people around us. We should be able to succeed as individuals while also building a society in which others have a fair opportunity to succeed. We should recognise that our lives are connected, that our decisions affect one another, and that the strength of a society cannot be measured solely by how well its most successful individuals are doing.

This isn’t about expecting everyone to think alike, give up their ambitions, or agree on every issue. It’s about recognising that we share a world, that we inherit systems built by others, and that the choices we make today help shape the opportunities available to the people who come after us.

I don’t want to dictate the answers. I want to help start the conversation that brings us closer to them.

The Century Principles are my contribution to that conversation. They are not a finished ideology or a claim to superior knowledge. They’re an evolving collection of ideas, questions, and principles that I hope others will examine, challenge, improve, and build upon.

If someone can show me a better way of understanding a problem, I want to hear it. If an expert can demonstrate that a proposal won’t work, I want to understand why. If someone with different experiences can show me something I’ve overlooked, I want to take that seriously.

The goal isn’t to prove that I’m right. It’s to contribute to a process through which we can become better informed, make better decisions, and create better opportunities for one another.

I’m one cog. So is everyone else, in their own way.

A future reader may reject much of what I have written here. They may have stronger evidence, better technology, a different understanding of fairness or an experience I have never considered. I hope they will preserve the freedom to say so. The Century philosophy should never be defended merely because it carries my name. If a proposal of mine does harm, name the harm. If there is a better alternative, show the reasons and give the people affected a fair opportunity to be heard.

A completed twelve-volume draft is not a finished society, a governing constitution or a guarantee that anybody's life has improved. It is a record of questions and arguments, and a challenge to turn those questions into responsible action. The people who know more than I do, and the people who have been overlooked, deserve to be part of what happens next.

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails. That instruction must apply to this Manifesto too. I am one cog in something greater; this work matters only if it helps other cogs move more freely and more purposefully together.

Notes and references

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Volume VII — Justice, Rehabilitation And Public Safety

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Volume X — Immigration, Population And Civic Belonging

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Volume XI — Technology, Media And The Digital Society

Factual notes checked 1 November 2026. Distinguish empirical findings from proposed policy. Laws, guidance, research and platforms change; the private companion identifies qualifications.

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Volume XII — The Century Method And The Living System

Original sources

The Century Manifesto 2 (six-volume working archive, October 2026); The Century Manifesto Eight-Volume Combined Reading Edition (27 October 2026); Ideas Im Thinking On — The Century Manifesto (20 essays, October 2026); The Century Manifesto Master Volume-by-Volume Construction Guide (30 October 2026). The separate full 30 October F30 editorial instruction cited in the guide was not included as an independent file in the original archive.

Primary author essay

“Ideologies Are Foundations, Not Finished Systems” (Ideas essay 10) is an important source for the living-philosophy argument. “A Cog in Something Greater” (Ideas essay 20) is preserved in Chapter 12. Other direct-author passages remain attributed in the separate paragraph source map.

Policy test provenance

The ten-question Century Policy Test appears in the 27 October eight-volume author-review edition and in the 30 October construction guide. Earlier shorter tests remain historically distinct; the exact ten-point formulation is not represented as timeless or legally binding.

Australian evaluation guidance

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Capital punishment

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Editorial limitation

All first-person additions labelled EDITORIAL in the source map are newly drafted review material. Their presence here cannot be treated as independent confirmation that the author endorses the exact language. The source and contradiction registers should accompany peer review outside the reader-facing book.

An invitation to question

This collection is not a request to suspend judgement. It is a request to test arguments against the lives of the people they affect.

A useful criticism identifies the claim it challenges, the assumptions that appear wrong or incomplete, the evidence supporting the criticism and the alternatives worth examining. A disagreement may reveal a mistake, a different priority or a genuine trade-off that cannot be solved by a slogan.

The Century System should be expected to meet the same standards it asks of public institutions: traceable reasoning, protected dissent, correction of errors and a visible record of what has changed.

Keep what works. Fix what does not. Replace what fails.