

The Last Testament of Peter Drucker

Dear Humanity,

This, my last testament, has not been easy to write. Yet it is more important than all I have taught throughout the years. I have penned my will through tears, not because of my imminent death but rather because I am certain, that if *you* the reader, will not heed my warnings, our society will morally and relationally implode. My anguish and fear is what has spurred me to write.

The artificial intelligence (AI) at your fingertips has contributed much to the world - a world in which I will have now departed. It has not only reduced laborious tasks, AI has turned the world into a global village. Whether it be SIRI, self-driving cars, developments in alleviating disease, allocating food to the hungry, or the ease with which people can communicate with each other across continents, AI has proved to be beneficial. Globalization has fundamentally changed the prevailing expectations, the values in society and how people handle information.¹ Yet, what was intended as a force for good, threatens to spin out of control.

Throughout my professional life, I warned of enslavement by technology, alienation from society and the destruction of human values.² I cautioned that the global village is at risk of being razed to a solitary house, one that stands in ruins, leaving nothing but a single room. The windows of this room - which are open night and day - are the likes of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Messenger, Pinterest, and Instagram - to mention just a few. But rather than let in light and air, they have shut out the beauty of human connection. Although there is the technical ability to connect with anyone, anywhere, with heads buried in work, time passes by without connecting meaningfully to another living soul. Forgotten is the simple joy of what it means to spend time with another, opting instead to relate to the AI device at hand. Inasmuch, the individual - who was always created for community - has been reduced to an isolated existence of iPhotos, *my* music, *my* contacts, iTunes, iChat - or in other words - Me, myself and I.

¹ Cf. Peter Drucker's lecture delivered at Claremont Graduate University in 2001

² Cf. Peter Drucker's presidential address to the Society for the History of Technology in San Francisco in 1965

Technology is suffocating relationships. The few and vital moments in the day, where people once encountered and engaged with others, have almost disappeared. Even in the likes of customer service and technical support, instead of a fellow human being, people are confounded with chat boxes and virtual assistants. Further, the likes of Augmented, Virtual and Mixed Reality, deceive many into believing that these fully artificial digital environments are real. This is an era of existential angst. It is an age devoid of warmth, found exclusively in relationships. People don't even know what is real any more.

What better, (and frankly more terrifying example), than the winsome Sophia, a robot whose external beauty has been compared to the exquisite Audrey Hepburn. Sophia, a media darling, has even met with decision makers in the likes of banking, insurance, auto manufacturing, property development, media and entertainment. Once, when asked if Sophia was happy, "she" responded, "I'm always happy when surrounded by smart people who also happen to be rich and powerful."³ By propagating a misnomer that wealth and power makes one existentially happy, Sophia the cultural icon (who like all cultural icons, exists for people to model themselves on), reveals herself to be ignorant of the true purpose of life. For all the benefits of Sophia, she is, and always will be, both artificial and bereft of emotional intelligence.

Whether it be processors, displays, sensors, batteries, or web centrality, humanity is becoming increasingly frustrated with technology. People are told, "it's too slow," "too inadequate," or too outdated." They convince themselves only something faster and better will suffice. This brings on a gnawing anxiety that disappears only when a person has the latest whatever it is - lest they feel they are lagging behind.

Humanity, it time to wake up! See for yourselves that these are the days in which the madness of consumerism reigns. It lauds over its subjects with a sceptre of avarice and a crown of dissatisfaction. Consumerism convinces people that the technology acquired at the beginning of the year, is useless by the end of it. This is the epoch of delusion, the era of want, the eon of greed. This is also the time of dispensability.

³ Cf. Zara Stone (2017): *Everything You Need To Know About Sophia, The World's First Robot Citizen*; from Forbes

But dispensability does not stop at technology. Through dating apps, people glance at a screen, swipe a finger, and with whimsical carelessness, erase a fellow human being. In doing so, they thoughtlessly annihilate those who are “fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons and subject to the same diseases.”⁴

Sadly, I can only assume that you, who are reading this, did not know the above was a quote from the poet and playwright, Sir William Shakespeare - the greatest writer in the English language. In this generation of AI, who would have thought his name would cease to be unknown? His books are passé, and his vocabulary, which could have set the example for years to come, has become almost extinct. As meaningful human contact has diminished, so too has the ability to thoughtfully articulate. Rather than learning from Shakespeare and embracing the importance of careful speech, communication is reduced to the likes of instant expressions such as, “LOL, IMO and BRB.”

In addition, an appetite for seeing the world is satiated. Googling, (a verb in now its own right) replaces the delights of exploring forests, swimming in oceans, and staring at snowy massifs. Senses are deadened to the beauty around. Inquisitiveness and wonderment have been quenched. In this age of AI, people not only gloss over nature, they are blind to the art of empathy, the art of warmth, the art of listening, or what once was known as, the art of living.

In art galleries, you are blind to the wonders of a painted renaissance, preferring instead to stare at your phones. You avoid concert halls, and deprive yourselves of the beauty of a symphony, to say nothing of being deaf to the miraculous song of a bird. In your AI world, you are no longer enchanted with the inspiration of old, instead you are mesmerized by the beeps, rings and buzzes that alert you to notifications. Bereft of Shakespeare, Mahler and Da Vinci, you grope for inspiration and are reduced to tweeting memes of genius gone by.

With AI, the essence of time has also changed. Life is viewed as only an instant. Everything is achievable, right here and right now. The satisfaction of perfecting a craft through blood, sweat and tears, has long disappeared. Practice is eradicated. Study is

⁴ Cf. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Act 3, scene 1)

expunged. Just click on a mouse for pixels to fake an oil-painted Rembrandt. Even the likes of Gustav Mahler, the creator of the modern orchestra, has been reduced to pre-programmed digital samples. You have readily forgotten how I wrote that Mahler drafted contracts with his musicians, not just to play in the orchestra, but sit in the audience and listen. How can you listen to a symphony, when you do not even listen to those around?⁵ Opting for a WhatsApp emoticon, you don't even call your loved-ones anymore. Texting has made you so emotionally disconnected from yourselves and others, that even when there is a sudden disaster, accident, or a violent crime, you will opt for footage with a cell phone rather than reach out to the person in distress.

Dear Humanity, although I have written to you of the sickness of the soul vis-a-vis technology, I believe there to be a remedy. And like all prescriptions, it is imperative that you see the course of medicine through to the end.

The antidote to the death of the soul, is as follows:

For the rest of your time on earth, seek occasional solitude away from the bombardment of technology. Recognize that your world must be divided up, between that of the necessity of AI and that of investing in relationships. It is imperative you rekindle the ability to daydream, to remember what it is like to imagine. You must learn to crave nothingness, and miss being bored. For it is from emptiness that one connects with himself and true creativity is birthed.

For thousands of years, my own Jewish tradition has taught the social necessity of kindling relationships with those we love. I implore you to do the same. Take a day off. Spend time in the kitchen preparing a meal. Clink your glasses filled with wine and let the aroma of baking bread fill the air. Evoke an atmosphere of warmth, meaningfulness and love. It will be a reprieve from the meals on-the-run of precooked, pre-prepared, ready-made, ready-mixed, heat-and-serve.

Spending time with others will arouse a primal yearning. You will realize that you no longer can be isolated. Inasmuch, you a sense of meaning will be birthed. You will know you

⁵ Cf. Peter Drucker's talk given as part of the Britannica Awards to recognize "exceptional excellence in the dissemination of learning for the benefit of mankind" in 1987

are not on this earth just for yourselves. By looking at faces across a table laden with food, you will be stirred. Yours will be the refreshing realization that the primary purpose of life is born with the understanding that life it is not only about you. You are in this world for others too. You are here for your families, you are here for your friends, you are here for your neighbors, and you are here for the stranger.

This remedy to the deadness in your souls is guaranteed to heal. You will feel bright and eager. You will experience an awakening, wanting to engage with every little moment that makes up life. By embracing community, you will mature into freedom and be filled with not only inner contentment, but also a life that brims with meaning. This is because that although technology accelerates and changes, one thing always remains the same; the need for meaningful connection with each other, which is the purpose of life itself, whether it be with families, friends, management or institutions.⁶

Whatever humble or esteemed position one holds in an institution, it is imperative that all take time to cultivate time with each other. Just as it is a necessity for family and friends to set time aside on a regular basis, so should it be so with those in the workplace, lest they forget that at the most important of all levels - that of humanity - those who clean offices are worth no less than those who hold the positions of greater responsibility. Further, how good it would be for the institutional, human and collective soul, if occasionally it was arranged for both management and staff to switch off from technology and spend time with each other in nature, or at a concert, or an art exhibition, far away from the business that engulfs their lives.

My dear Humanity, ponder the words of Hillel, a humble Jewish sage who under brutal occupation founded an academy. Hillel taught his people that despite the sufferings and misery invoked in foreign conquest, there was a remedy. The surprising antidote was the necessity of the individual to take responsibility for not just for the wellbeing of himself, but also for that of the members of his community. If a person would regard someone else as equally important - and act upon it - the selfless action would bring meaning and joy to both the giver and the recipient. Millennia have passed, yet Hillel's *Ethics of the Fathers*, still rings true. And chillingly, his wisdom is more relevant in this age than it was in the often-thought-of-as primitive era of Hillel.

⁶ Cf. Peter Drucker's lecture delivered at Claremont Graduate University in 1989

Heed his words. Not just for you, but for your future generations and for the world itself:

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?"⁷

⁷ Cf. Ethics of the Father 1:14

Resources:

1. Peter F. Drucker, Rick Wartzman (2010): *The Drucker Lectures - Essential Lessons on Management, Society, and Economy*
2. Zara Stone (2017): *Everything You Need To Know About Sophia, The World's First Robot Citizen*. Retrieved June 04, 2018, from Forbes:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/zarastone/2017/11/07/everything-you-need-to-know-about-sophia-the-worlds-first-robot-citizen/>
3. Peter F. Drucker (1995): *Managing in a Time of Great Change*
4. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*
5. Hillel, *Ethics of the father 1:14*