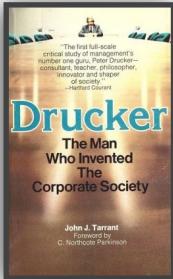


2 

## What is a Functioning Society?

3 by [Peter Drucker](#) contained in [The Future of Industrial Man](#) (1942)

5 How is it possible ↓  
 6 to works toward horizons ↑ ↓  
 7 that aren't on your mental radar –  
 8 at the right point in time? ↓

9

11 [Thinking Broad and Thinking Detailed](#) ↑ ↓12 [Intelligence, Information, Thinking](#)13 ▪ "Most of the **mistakes in thinking** are **mistakes in perception**.

- 14 ❖ Seeing only part of the situation – [broad](#)
- 15 ❖ Jumping to conclusions
- 16 ❖ Misinterpretation caused by feelings" – [Edward de Bono](#)

17 ▪ Awareness without [action](#) is useless18 The [MEMO](#) they – the [enemies of the future](#) – don't want you to [SEE](#)

19

- 20 We do not today have a functioning industrial society.
- 21 We have a magnificent technical machine for industrial production, built and run by engineers, chemists, and skilled mechanics.
- 22 We have a considerably weaker but still very impressive economic machine for the distribution of industrial goods.
- 23 Politically and socially, however, we have no industrial civilization, no industrial community life, no industrial order or organization.
- 24 It is this absence of a functioning industrial society, able to integrate our industrial reality, which underlies the crisis of our times. ...
- 25 The physical reality in which live the overwhelming majority of the five hundred million people on the European and North American continents is that of an industrial world.
- 26 Few of us could live a single day without the products, services, and institutions of the industrial system.
- 27 Everything in our lives which relates to the routine of living is shaped and determined by it.
- 28 Most of us depend upon it directly or indirectly for our livelihood and our pleasures.
- 29 Its social problems are our individual problems; its crises are direct attacks upon our individual security and our social stability; its triumphs are our proudest achievements.
- 30 Western Man has become Industrial Man. ...
- 31 But Western society is still fundamentally preindustrial in its social beliefs and values, its social institutions and economic instruments.
- 32 It is in the last analysis a [mercantile society](#) evolved at the close of the eighteenth century.
- 33 This preindustrial society most successfully organized the physical reality of the nineteenth century.
- 34 But it cannot integrate the industrial reality of today. ...
- 35 Man in his social and political existence must have a functioning society just as he must have air to breathe in his biological existence.
- 36 However, the fact that man has to have a society does not necessarily mean that he has it.
- 37 Nobody calls the mass of unorganized, panicky, stampeding humanity in a shipwreck a "society."

- 38 There is no society, though there are human beings in a group.
- 39 Actually, the panic is directly due to the breakdown of a society; and the only way to overcome it is by restoring a society with social values, social discipline, social power, and social organization. ...
- 40 Social life cannot function without a society; but it is conceivable that it does not function at all.
- 41 The evidence of the last twenty-five years of Western civilization hardly entitles us to say that our social life functioned so well as to make out a *prima-facie* case for the existence of a functioning society. ...
- 42 It is of course not true that a society must grow out of the material reality around it.
- 43 There can be a social organization of 'a physical reality on the basis of values, disciplines, ideals, conventions and powers which belong completely to another social reality.'
- 44 Take, for instance, Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday.
- 45 Undoubtedly they had a society.
- 46 Nothing is more ridiculous than the traditional view of Robinson as the isolated individualist Economic Man.
- 47 He had social values, conventions, taboos, powers, etc.
- 48 His society was not one developed according to the demands of life on a subtropical islet in the southern Pacific Ocean, but basically that of Calvinist Scotsmen developed on the cold shores of the North Atlantic.
- 49 What is so marvelous in Robinson Crusoe is not the extent to which he adapted himself, but the almost complete absence of adaptation.
- 50 Had he been of a different class and a different time, he would surely have dressed for dinner in the evening.
- 51 Here we have a case where a successful social life was built on the values and concepts of a society quite different in its physical reality and problems from those to which it was adapted. ...
- 52 A society may be based on concepts and beliefs developed to organize a specific physical reality.
- 53 Or it may rest on foundations as alien to its surroundings as were those of Robinson Crusoe's society to San Juan Fernandez.
- 54 But it must always be capable of organizing the actual reality in a social order.

55 It must master the material world, make it meaningful and comprehensible for the individual; and it must establish legitimate social and political power. ...

56 The reality of the industrial system, though it grew out of the mercantile society and the market, was from the start different from, and often incompatible with, the basic assumptions on which the mercantile society rested.

57 Yet during the entire nineteenth century the mercantile society succeeded in mastering, organizing, integrating the growing industrial reality.

58 There was tension even in the early years.

59 The history of the conflict between mercantile assumptions and industrial reality, between Jeffersonian policies and Hamiltonian facts, between the market and the system of industrial production, is very largely the social history of the hundred years before the First World War.

60 During the closing years of the last century it became increasingly clear that the mercantile society was disintegrating, and that the industrial system was getting out of hand socially.

61 But it was not until after 1918— maybe not until after 1929— that the mercantile society broke down.

62 By now, however, it has ceased to be a functioning society. ...

63 2.

64 To define what a society is, is just as impossible as to define life.

65 We are so close to it that the basic simple characteristics disappear behind a bewildering and complex mass of details.

66 We are also so much a part of it that we cannot possibly see the whole.

67 And finally, there is no sharp line, no point where nonlife turns definitely into life, nonsociety definitely into society.

68 But, although we do not know what life is, all of us know when a living body ceases to be a living body and becomes a corpse.

69 We know that the human body cannot function as a living body if the heart has ceased to beat or the lungs stopped breathing.

70 As long as there is a heartbeat or a breath, there is a live body; without them there is only a corpse.

71 Similarly the impossibility of a normative definition of

society does not prevent us from understanding society functionally.

- 72 No society can function as a society unless it gives the individual member social status and function, and unless the decisive social power is legitimate power.
- 73 The former establishes the basic frame of social life: the purpose and meaning of society.
- 74 The latter shapes the space within the frame: it makes society concrete and creates its institutions.
- 75 If the individual is not given social status and function, there can be no society but only a mass of social atoms flying through space without aim or purpose.
- 76 And unless power is legitimate there can be no social fabric; there is only a social vacuum held together by mere slavery or inertia. ...
- 77 It is only natural to ask which of these criteria is more important or which of these principles of social life comes first.
- 78 This question is as old as political thinking itself.
- 79 It was the basis for the first sharp cleavage in political theory, that between Plato and Aristotle, between the priority of the purpose of society and that of its institutional organization.
- 80 But though hallowed by antiquity and great names, it is a meaningless question.
- 81 There can be no question of primacy – neither in time nor in importance – between basic political concepts and basic political institutions.
- 82 Indeed, it is the very essence of political thought and action that they have always one pole in the conceptual realm of beliefs, aims, desires, and values, and one in the pragmatic realm of facts, institutions, and organizations.
- 83 The one without the other is not politics.
- 84 The exclusively conceptual may be sound philosophy or sound ethics; the exclusively pragmatic, sound anthropology or sound journalism.
- 85 Alone, neither of them can make sound politics or, indeed, politics at all. ...
- 86 Social status and function of the individual is the equation of the relationship between the group and the individual member.
- 87 It symbolizes the integration of the individual with the group, and that of the group with the individual.
- 88 It expresses the individual purpose in terms of the society,

- and the social purpose in terms of the individual.
- 89 It thus makes comprehensible and rational individual existence from the point of the group, and group existence from that of the individual. ...
- 90 For the individual there is no society unless he has social status and function.
- 91 Society is only meaningful if its purpose, its aims, its ideas and ideals make sense in terms of the individual's purposes, aims, ideas and ideals.
- 92 There must be a definite functional relationship between individual life and group life. ...
- 93 This relationship might lie in an identity of purpose under which there would be no individual life other than social life, and under which the individual would have none but social aims.
- 94 This was basically the position of the great Greek political philosophers, especially of Plato; and the Socratic attack against the Sophists was largely directed against an "individualist" concept of personality.
- 95 The "polis" of the Socratic school is absolutely collectivist in the sense that there is no possibility of distinction between group purpose and individual purpose, group virtue and individual virtue, group life and individual life.
- 96 But it is just as possible to assume no group purpose and no social life except in individual purpose and individual life – the position of the extreme, early nineteenth-century individualists. ...
- 97 There need not even be an assumption of identity between individual and social purposes.
- 98 Indeed, one of the most rigid of all theories of functional relationship between group and individual is the class-war theory of the Marxists, which assumes a permanent conspiracy of the propertied minority against the property-less majority.
- 99 Organized society in the Marxist pattern is the instrument of oppression.
- 100 And to this assumption of conflict, Marxism – otherwise discredited and disproved – owed its appeal during the Depression years; it alone seemed able to explain rationally what was happening at a time when the traditional theories of harmony between individual and social purposes could not make sense at all. ...
- 101 For the individual without function and status, society is

irrational, incalculable and shapeless.

- 102 The “rootless” individual, the outcast – for absence of social function and status casts a man from the society of his fellows – sees no society.
- 103 He sees only demoniac forces, half sensible, half meaningless, half in light and half in darkness, but never predictable.
- 104 They decide about his life and his livelihood without possibility of interference on his part, indeed without possibility of his understanding them.
- 105 He is like a blindfolded man in a strange room, playing a game of which he does not know the rules; and the prize at stake is his own happiness, his own livelihood, and even his own life. ...
- 106 That the individual should have social status and function is just as important for society as for him.
- 107 Unless the purpose, aims, actions and motives of the individual member are integrated with the purpose, aims, actions and motives of society, society cannot understand or contain him.
- 108 The asocial, uprooted, unintegrated individual appears not only as irrational but as a danger; he is a disintegrating, a threatening, a mysteriously shadowy force.
- 109 It is no coincidence that so many of the great myths – the Wandering Jew, Dr. Faustus, Don Juan – are myths of the individual who has lost or repudiated social function and status.
- 110 Lack of social status and function, and absence of a functional relationship between society and individual are at the bottom of every persecution of minorities which either are without social status and function – that is, not integrated into society (like the Negro in America)– or are made the scapegoat for the lack of integration in society (like the Jew in Nazi Germany). ...
- 111 That the individual must have definite social status in society does not mean that he must have a *fixed* social status.
- 112 To identify “definite” with “frozen” was the great mistake of the early nineteenth-century Liberals such as Bentham.
- 113 It was a tragic misunderstanding as it led to a social atomism which repudiated social values altogether.
- 114 Of course, a society may give fixed status and function to the individual.
- 115 The Hindu caste system is the expression of a definite

functional relationship between the group and the individual, integrating them in a religious purpose.

- 116 It obtains its rationality from the religious doctrine of perpetual rebirth until complete purification.
- 117 On that basis even the Untouchables have a social status and function which make society and their individual life in it meaningful to them, and their life meaningful and indeed necessary to society.
- 118 It is only when this religious creed itself disintegrates that the Hindu social system loses its rationality for both, individual and society.<sup>1</sup> ..
- 119 On the other hand, in the society of the American frontier with its complete fluidity, the individual had just as much definite social status and function as the Untouchable or the Brahmin in the Hindu society with its absolutely rigid castes.
- 120 It may even be said that no society ever succeeded as perfectly in integrating its members in a functional relationship between individual and group as the frontier of Jackson, Henry Clay or Lincoln.
- 121 What counts is that the status is definite, functionally understandable and purposefully rational, and not whether it is fixed, flexible or fluid.
- 122 To say that every boy has an equal chance to become president is just as much a definition of a functional relationship between group and individual as to say that the individual is born only that he may try to escape being reborn in the same caste. ..
- 123 It will be clear from the foregoing that the type and form of the functional relationship between society and individual in any given society depends upon the basic belief of this society regarding the nature and fulfillment of man.
- 124 The nature of man may be seen as free or unfree, equal or unequal, good or evil, perfect, perfectible or imperfect.
- 125 The fulfillment may be seen in this world or in the next; in immortality or in the final extinction of the individual soul which the religions of the East preach; in peace or in war; in economic success or in a large family.
- 126 The belief regarding the nature of man determines the purpose of society; the belief regarding his fulfillment, the sphere in which realization of the purpose is sought. ..
- 127 Any one of these basic beliefs about the nature and fulfillment of man will lead to a different society and a different basic functional relationship between society

and the individual.

- 128 Which of these beliefs is the right one, which is true or false, good or evil, Christian or anti-Christian, does not occupy us here.
- 129 The point is that any one of these beliefs can be the basis for a working and workable society; that is, for one in which the individual has social status and function.
- 130 And conversely, any society, regardless of the nature of its basic beliefs, can work only as long as it gives the individual a social status and function. ...
- 131 Legitimate power stems from the same basic belief of society regarding man's nature and fulfillment on which the individual's social status and function rest.
- 132 Indeed, legitimate power can be defined as rulership which finds its justification in the basic ethos of the society.
- 133 In every society there are many powers which have nothing to do with such a basic principle, and institutions which in no way are either designed or devoted to its fulfillment.
- 134 In other words, there are always a great many "unfree" institutions in a free society, a great many inequalities in an equal society, and a great many sinners among the saints.
- 135 But as long as that decisive social power which we call rulership is based upon the claim of freedom, equality or saintliness, and is exercised through institutions which are designed toward the fulfillment of these ideal purposes, society can function as a free, equal or saintly society.
- 136 For its institutional structure is one of legitimate power. ...
- 137 This does not mean that it is immaterial whether nondecisive powers and institutions of a society are in contradiction to its basic principles.
- 138 On the contrary, the most serious problems of politics arise from such conflicts.
- 139 And a society may well feel that a nondecisive institution or power relationship is in such blatant contrast to its basic beliefs as to endanger social life in spite of its nondecisive character.
- 140 The best case in point is that of the American Civil War when the chattel-slavery of the South was felt to endanger the whole structure of a free society.
- 141 Yet the decisive power of ante-bellum America was undoubtedly legitimate power deriving its claim from the

principle of freedom, and exercised through institutions designed and devoted to the realization of freedom.

142 American society did thus function as a free society.

143 It was indeed only because it functioned as such that it felt slavery as a threat. ...

144 What is the decisive power, and the decisive institutional organization in any society cannot be determined by statistical analysis. ...

145 Nothing could be more futile than to measure a society by counting noses, quoting tax receipts or comparing income levels.

146 Decisive is a political, and that means a purely qualitative, term.

147 The English landed gentry comprised never more than a small fraction of the population; furthermore, after the rise of the merchants and manufacturers it had only a very modest share of the national wealth and income.

148 Nevertheless, down to our times it held the decisive social power.

149 Its institutions were the decisive institutions of English society.

150 Its beliefs were the basis for social life; its standards the representative standards; its way of life the social pattern.

151 And its personality ideal, the gentleman, remained the ideal type of all society.

152 Its power was not only decisive; it was legitimate power. ...

153 Equally, laws and constitutions will rarely, if ever, tell us where the decisive power lies.

154 In other words, rulership is not identical with political government.

155 Rulership is a social, political government largely a legal category.

156 The Prussian Army between 1870 and 1914 was, for instance, hardly as much as mentioned in the Imperial German Constitution; yet it undoubtedly held decisive power and probably legitimately.

157 The government was actually subordinated to the army, in spite of a civilian and usually antimilitaristic Parliament. ...

158 Another example is that of British "indirect rule" in certain African colonies.

159 There the socially decisive power is within the tribes.

160 At least in theory the government of the white man yields

no social power at all; it confines itself to mere police matters designed to support and to maintain the social organization of the tribes within a loose and purely normative framework of "law and order."

161 Yet, constitutionally, the governor and his council have absolute power. ...

162 Finally, it should be understood that legitimacy is a purely functional concept.

163 There is no absolute legitimacy.

164 Power can be legitimate only in relation to a basic social belief.

165 What constitutes "legitimacy" is a question that must be answered in terms of a given society and its given political beliefs.

166 Legitimate is a power when it is justified by an ethical or metaphysical principle that has been accepted by the society.

167 Whether this principle is good or bad ethically, true or false metaphysically, has nothing to do with legitimacy, which is as indifferent ethically and metaphysically as any other formal criterion.

168 Legitimate power is socially functioning power; but why it functions and to what purpose is a question entirely outside and before legitimacy. ...

169 Failure to understand this was responsible for the confusion which made "legitimism" the name of a political creed in the early-nineteenth century.

170 The European reactionaries of 1815 were, of course, absolutely within their rights when they taught that no society could be good except under an absolute monarch; to have an opinion on what is desirable or just as basis of a society is not only a right, it is a duty, of man.

171 But they were simply confusing ethical choice with functional analysis, when they said that no society could **function** unless it had an absolute monarch.

172 And they were provably wrong when they proclaimed the dogma that only absolute monarchy was **legitimate**.

173 Actually, after the Napoleonic Wars, absolute monarchy was illegitimate in Europe; the dynastic principle had ceased to be a legitimate claim to decisive power.

174 The revolutionary half century before 1815 had resulted in a change in basic beliefs which made illegitimate any but constitutionally limited government.

175 This change may have been desirable or deplorable; but it was a fact.

- 176 The Legitimists might have tried to make undone this change in beliefs.
- 177 They might have maintained that it would be better for the individual and for society to have an illegitimate absolute rule than a legitimate constitutional one.
- 178 Or they might have invoked a "right of resistance," of secession or of revolution.
- 179 The only basis on which their claim could not be based politically was that of legitimacy. ...
- 180 The functional analysis as to what is legitimate power does not in any way prejudge the ethical question of the individual's right or duty to resist what he considers pernicious power.
- 181 Whether it is better that society perish than that justice perish is a question outside and before functional analysis.
- 182 The same man who maintains most vigorously that society can function only under a legitimate power may well decide that society is less of a value than certain individual rights or beliefs.
- 183 But he cannot decide, as the Legitiinists did, that his values and beliefs *are* the socially accepted values and beliefs because they *ought* to be. ...
- 184 Illegitimate power is a power which does not derive its claim from the basic beliefs of the society.
- 185 Accordingly, there is no possibility to decide whether the ruler wielding the power is exercising it in conformity with the purpose of power or not; for there is no social purpose.
- 186 Illegitimate power cannot be controlled; it is by its nature uncontrollable.
- 187 It cannot be made responsible since there is no criterion of responsibility, no socially accepted final authority for its justification.
- 188 And what is unjustifiable cannot be responsible. ...
- 189 For the same reason, it cannot be limited.
- 190 To limit the exercise of power is to fix the lines beyond which power ceases to be legitimate; that is, ceases to realize the basic social purpose.
- 191 And if power is not legitimate to begin with, there are no limits beyond which it ceases to be legitimate. ...
- 192 No illegitimate ruler can possibly be a good or wise ruler.

- 193 Illegitimate power invariably corrupts; for it can be only "might," never authority.
- 194 It cannot be a controlled, limited, responsible, or rationally determinable power.
- 195 And it has been an axiom of politics – ever since Tacitus in his history of the Roman emperors gave us one case study after another – that no human being, however good, wise or judicious, can wield uncontrolled, irresponsible, unlimited or rationally not determinable power without becoming very soon arbitrary, cruel, inhuman and capricious – in other words, a tyrant. ...
- 196 For all these reasons a society in which the socially decisive power is illegitimate power cannot function as a society.
- 197 It can only be held together by sheer brute force – tyranny, slavery, civil war.
- 198 Of course, force is the ultimate safeguard of every power; but in a functioning society it is not more than a desperate remedy for exceptional and rare diseases.
- 199 In a functioning society power is exercised as authority, and *authority is the rule of right over might*.
- 200 But only a legitimate power can have authority and can expect and command that social self-discipline which alone makes organized institutional life possible.
- 201 Illegitimate power, even if wielded by the best and the wisest, can never depend upon anything but the submission to force.
- 202 On that basis a functioning, institutional organization of social life cannot be built.
- 203 Even the best tyrant is still a tyrant. ...
- 204 What have we proved so far?
- 205 That a society cannot function unless it gives the individual member social status and function, and unless its socially decisive power is legitimate power.
- 206 This may be called a "pure theory of society."
- 207 Like all "pure theories" it is exclusively formal.
- 208 It says nothing about the contents of a society, about freedom, religion, equality, justice, individual rights, progress, peacefulness and all the other values of social life.
- 209 And to think, as a great many social efficiency engineers think today, that functioning is all that matters in social life is a complete misunderstanding of the limits and the

importance of sheer efficiency.

- 210 In itself functional efficiency is nothing unless we know the answer to the question: efficiency to what purpose and at what price? ...
- 211 I cannot dissociate myself sharply enough from the relativists to whom every society appears equally good, provided it functions.
- 212 But I am just as opposed to the extremists on the other side who brush aside all questions of function and efficiency, and who refuse to consider anything but basic beliefs and ideas.
- 213 It seems to me not only that this group – we might call them the Absolutists – refuse to see that basic values can only be effective in a functioning society.
- 214 They also refuse to see that there is only one alternative to a functioning society: the dissolution of society into anarchic masses. ...
- 215 Perhaps the greatest fallacy of our age is the myth of the masses which glorifies the amorphous, society-less, disintegrated crowd.
- 216 Actually, the masses are a product of social decomposition and a rank poison. ...
- 217 The danger does not lie in a "revolt of the masses" as Mr. Ortega y Gasset thought.
- 218 Revolt is, after all, still a form of participation in social life, if only in protest.
- 219 The masses are completely incapable of any active social participation which presupposes social values and an organization of society.
- 220 The danger of the masses lies precisely in this inability to participate, in their apathy, cynical indifference, and complete despair.
- 221 Since they have no social status and function, society to them is nothing but a demoniac, irrational, incomprehensible threat.
- 222 Since they have no basic beliefs which could serve as basis for legitimate power, any legitimate authority appears to them as tyrannical and arbitrary.
- 223 They are therefore always willing to follow an irrational appeal, or to submit to an arbitrary tyrant if only he promises a change.
- 224 As social outcasts the masses have nothing to lose – not even their chains.
- 225 Being amorphous, they have no structure of their own

which would resist an arbitrary tyrannical attempt to shape them.

226 Without beliefs, they can swallow anything provided it is not a social order.

227 In other words, the masses must always fall prey to the demagogue or the tyrant who seeks power for power's sake.

228 They can only be organized by force, in slavery and in negation.

229 And they must be thus organized unless they can be reintegrated into a functioning society.

230 Any society which cannot prevent the development of masses is doomed.

231 That it is the fault of the society which fails to integrate its members rather than that of the masses, which are the unwilling product of social failure, does not change the pernicious character of the amorphous, basically anarchic masses.

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233 <sup>1</sup>\*This is not, of course, saying that the Hindu social system grew out of the Hindu religion.

234 It would be just as compatible with my argument if Hinduism had been "invented" as a rationalization of a system of graduated slavery imposed by a conqueror.

235 Ours is a purely functional analysis and not a philosophy of history.