

# The Calling of Regeneration

## Decoupling Innovation from Creative Destruction

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Situated at the intersection of sociology, economics, philosophy, and ethics, the article illuminates the urgent choices facing society amid stark global challenges such as poverty and misinformation. It contrasts the utopian promise of “innovation for regeneration” with the darker reality of “disruptive innovation,” represented metaphorically by the global arms race. Drawing from a broad range of theories—including sustainable development, existentialist philosophy, and conflict theory—the article explores the complex socio-economic and ethical dimensions of these choices.

We stand at a pivotal juncture with far-reaching implications for the course of our common future. Whichever direction we turn our gaze, we encounter the puzzling interplay between innovation oriented towards regeneration and the widely recognised phenomenon of “creative destruction.” While the immediate debate frequently revolves around the business domain, our curiosity compels us to adopt a more expansive viewpoint. It calls for a rigorous analysis—an intellectual endeavour enriched by philosophical and sociological dimensions—dedicated to scrutinising, contemplating, and defining the choices that hold the power to mould our collective future.

Nevertheless, this thematic consideration should be far from a mere academic exercise; instead, it ought to form a compelling account intricately interwoven with every facet of our existence, exerting its influence over prevailing economic system, global and national political configurations, individual ethical contemplations, and collective psychological dynamics.

As we embark on this inquiry, it is crucial to acknowledge the gravity of our present-day global challenges. We inhabit an era characterised by stark paradoxes: the simultaneous presence of cutting-edge technological advances and persistent poverty, heightened global connectivity juxtaposed against deepening national divisions, and the ubiquity of the information age coexisting with the deliberate propagation of misinformation for vested interests. These convergent forces have bestowed upon us a volatile terrain where innovations driven by human creativity possess the power to either elevate or disrupt individuals and societies.

In this article, I undertake a reflective examination of these complexities, with the aim of elucidating the choices that

will delineate our trajectory in this transformative epoch.

It is within this precarious context that the concepts of innovation for regeneration and disruptive innovation take on a heightened sense of urgency. The dialectic between these two forces is not new. It has roots in the earliest philosophical traditions, echoes in the annals of economic thought, and reverberations in the modern discourses of social and political theory.

Innovation for regeneration offers a utopian vision, a promise of a better future where technology and social structures evolve in harmony to create a more equitable, sustainable world. This vision, though lofty, is not entirely bereft of practicality. It draws from theories of sustainable development, from ethical imperatives of social justice, and from the burgeoning field of green technologies. It is a vision that calls for a rethinking of our entire political economic system, from the capitalist mantra of perpetual growth to a more nuanced understanding of prosperity that incorporates social and environmental variables. Names like E F Schumacher (1973), who proposed “Buddhist Economics,” and Sen (1999), with his focus on “Development as Freedom,” come to mind as champions of such holistic viewpoints.

Conversely, we confront the concept of disruptive innovation within the business sphere, epitomised most vividly by the ongoing global arms race—an unceasing cycle of innovation not motivated by the promise of creation but by the inevitability of destruction. The arms race serves as a stark manifestation of humanity’s darker impulses, which permeate the realm of business pursuits: greed, fear, and an insatiable thirst for power. This phenomenon has undergone extensive analysis through various theoretical lenses, ranging from critical theory and institutional economics to game theory’s “Prisoner’s Dilemma” and realpolitik’s keen focus on power dynamics. If left unchecked, it charts a trajectory towards a future characterised by conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation.

The choice between these two paths—innovation for regeneration and disruptive

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innovation—is not just a policy decision to be made by governments or a strategic choice for business corporations. It is a moral, ethical, and existential dilemma that each one of us, as participants in this complex system called “global community,” must grapple with. The urgency of this choice is compounded by the accelerating pace of change. With each passing day, the stakes get higher and the decisions more irreversible.

### Regeneration: A Utopian Vision?

As we step into the complex riddles of innovation for regeneration, we find ourselves face to face with a vision that is as captivating as it is intangible. At its core, there is a utopian idealism for a society that seeks to regenerate or reproduce natural and human preconditions of social production. It presents a future where technological innovation and human progress coalesce to form a symbiotic relationship, one that enriches both the individual and the collective, the economic and the ecological.

But what do we mean by “regeneration,” and how does it differ from the more commonly invoked terms like “sustainable development” or “circular economy”? To answer this, let us consider the origins of the term and its theoretical underpinnings.

The concept of regeneration is intrinsically tied to the broader movement of sustainable development, which gained global prominence after the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987. This seminal text offered a foundational definition of sustainable development as a model of civilisation that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Yet, critics of the sustainable development movement, such as environmental economist Daly (1996), argue that it often serves as a smokescreen for continued exploitation under the guise of “sustainability.”

Regeneration takes the discourse a step further. It does not merely seek to “sustain” but aims to “regenerate,” to rebuild what has been lost and to restore what has been damaged. In essence, it is a perspective grounded in systems thinking, echoing the work of scholars like Meadows (2008), who emphasised

the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic systems in her pivotal work, *Thinking in Systems*.

What sets regeneration apart is its holistic approach. It transcends technological solutions to incorporate social, cultural, and economic dimensions. The theory borrows heavily from the field of ecology, incorporating concepts like resilience, adaptability, and systemic health into the economic discourse. This is reminiscent of Schumacher’s (1973) “Buddhist Economics,” which challenged the fundamental tenets of capitalism by questioning the relentless pursuit of profit at the expense of spiritual and ecological well-being.

However, this idealistic approach to creativity is not without its critics or its contradictions. One of the primary criticisms comes from the realm of sociology, especially from scholars like Ulrich Beck (1992). In his seminal work *Risk Society*, Beck (1992) argues that the modern industrial society, even in its most “regenerative” form, produces new kinds of risks that are often invisible, incalculable, and irreversible. Beck contends that these “manufactured uncertainties” create a new social paradigm where old distinctions between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, are replaced by a universal vulnerability to systemic risks.

Moreover, the idealistic aspiration to rebuild society upon the principles of regeneration frequently encounters the harsh political and economic pragmatism of the contemporary landscape. The shift from a capitalist economy centred on ceaseless capital accumulation to a regenerative model emphasising sustainability and fairness is replete with formidable obstacles. It necessitates the restructuring of entrenched power structures, the revision of legal paradigms, and, most crucially, a profound alteration in societal values and norms.

Here, the works of philosophers like John Rawls (1971) and his *Theory of Justice* come into play. How do we distribute the benefits of innovations for regeneration in a manner that is not only economically viable but also socially just? Can Rawls’ principles of distributive justice offer a framework

for equitable growth in a regenerative economic model?

### Arms Race as the Epitome of Disruptive Innovation

Viewed through the lens of inspiration and hope, innovation for regeneration stands as a beacon. In stark contrast, innovation for the arms race serves as its metaphorical counterpart—a sober reflection of the harsh realities that permeate the business world. Indeed, the business domain often resembles an arena where an unending “arms race” plays out, although not in the conventional military sense.

At first glance, the term “arms race” may evoke images of Cold War-era conflicts, with its connotations of nuclear arsenals and ideological struggles. However, it is crucial to recognise that the arms race is not a relic of the past; it remains very much alive, continually evolving, and presents a pressing counterpoint to the utopian ideals of a regenerative industrial society.

The arms race extends beyond being a mere contest for military supremacy; it constitutes a multifaceted social construct that encapsulates a spectrum of human emotions—fear, insecurity, ambition—and channels them into an unending cycle of technological and strategic competition. This phenomenon transcends geopolitical borders, affecting not only nations but also corporations, communities, and individuals within the intricate tapestry of the business world.

From a sociological standpoint, the arms race can be viewed through the lens of Conflict Theory, which posits that society is in a state of perpetual conflict due to competition for domination and supremacy. This perspective, rooted in the works of Karl Marx and later developed by scholars like Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), provides a framework for understanding the underlying tensions that fuel the arms race, both real and metaphorical. It is not just about weapons, it is also about power, influence, and the control of resources, be they material or ideological.

The economic implications of the arms race in the military realm are equally complex and paradoxical. On the one hand, military spending has often been credited with spurring technological

innovation. The internet, for example, was initially a project funded by the US Department of Defense. Economists like Joseph Schumpeter have even argued that this form of “creative destruction” is essential for economic progress. However, this viewpoint has been vehemently contested. The opportunity cost of military spending—resources that could be allocated to education, healthcare, or sustainable development—is astronomically high. Galbraith (1958), in his work, *The Affluent Society*, critiqued this imbalance, highlighting how public wealth was being squandered for private gain, leading to a society that was privately opulent but publicly squalid.

Moreover, the ethical dimensions of the arms race cannot be disregarded. Philosophers such as Hannah Arendt (1958), in her seminal work, *The Human Condition*, have explored the moral implications of technological innovations employed for destructive purposes. Arendt’s concept of “the banality of evil” sheds light on how ordinary individuals become complicit in extraordinary acts of violence, often facilitated by technological innovations in warfare—and perhaps also in the business world. This ethical dilemma is further complicated by the increasing automation of warfare, which raises questions about accountability and agency in the age of drone strikes and autonomous weapons.

The arms race, again both real and metaphorical, also has profound psychological implications. It perpetuates a culture of fear and insecurity, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy where the anticipation of conflict justifies the preparation for it. This is closely related to the concept of “moral disengagement,” proposed by psychologist Bandura (1999), where individuals or societies rationalise unethical actions through a range of cognitive mechanisms, including dehumanisation and displacement of responsibility.

### At the Intersection of Regeneration and Destruction

When we speak of transformation, we venture into a realm that transcends mere change or disruption. Transformation implies a foundational shift, a radical alteration of existing paradigms, systems,

and structures. In the context of our discussion, transformation serves as the crucible where the ideals of innovation for regeneration and the realities of disruptive innovation collide, interact, and, perhaps, synthesise into something entirely new.

The tension between regenerative and disruptive forces is not unique to our time; it has been a recurring theme throughout human history and in the realm of social theory. From the dialectics of Hegel to the class struggles postulated by Marx, the idea that opposing forces can lead to a new state of equilibrium—or disequilibrium—has remained a fundamental concept. In modern sociology, this tension is frequently examined through the perspectives of structural functionalism and conflict theory. Scholars such as Parsons (1951) and Dahrendorf (1959) have offered contrasting views on how social equilibrium is either maintained or transformed into a new stage.

However, what distinguishes our current era is the unparalleled scale and speed of

change. We are presently immersed in what sociologist Giddens (1990) referred to as “high modernity,” where the consequences of modernity and capitalism are more profound and pervasive than ever before. In this context, the concept of “transformation” transcends being solely a social or political concern; it evolves into an existential imperative.

From a business perspective, the concept of transformation has been extensively examined through the lens of “creative destruction,” a term popularised by economist Schumpeter. Schumpeter (1942) contended that innovation for business competition inherently involves dismantling existing structures to pave the way for the new. This perspective raises questions about the compatibility of creative destruction with regeneration. It suggests that innovation, when driven by the need to outdo existing systems, can render well-functioning, previously produced environments obsolete, resulting in waste. This apparent contradiction between the



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goals of innovation for regeneration and the concept of creative destruction in the context of business competition highlights a complex challenge. It brings into focus the issue of whether innovation, while seeking progress, might inadvertently contribute to wasteful practices. This viewpoint calls for a careful examination of how innovation aligns with the principles of sustainability and regeneration. It also underscores the importance of considering the environmental and ethical dimensions of economic progress.

In the philosophical arena, the concept of transformation challenges us to revisit age-old debates about human nature and societal structures. Are we inherently competitive beings, as Hobbes would argue, or do we possess an innate ability for cooperation, as Rousseau believed? How do these intrinsic traits influence our capacity for transformative change? Modern existentialist philosophy, as proposed by thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre, adds another layer of complexity by emphasising individual agency and the “burden of freedom.” In a world where transformative change is possible, what ethical responsibilities do we bear as free agents?

Furthermore, the idea of transformation extends into the realm of collective psychology. The classic work of Gustave Le Bon on *The Crowd* and Sigmund Freud’s explorations into mass psychology offer insights into how collective identities can both impede and facilitate transformative change. In an age characterised by populist movements and social media echo chambers, understanding the psychology of collective behaviour is crucial for navigating the path of transformation.

### A Socio-economic Lens

In the exploration of the dichotomy between innovation for regeneration and disruptive innovation that predominates in business competition, it becomes of paramount importance to adopt a socio-economic perspective. This perspective functions as an illuminating prism through which we can discern the multifaceted dynamics operating within contemporary societal structures. It is

crucial to emphasise that this section stands as an urgent call to rigorously examine the prevailing business paradigms and societal frameworks. Such an undertaking is essential in identifying their potential roles as either facilitators or impediments to the transformative prospects that have been the central focus of our discussion.

Let us begin by examining this through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) sociological framework, which offers a nuanced understanding of different forms of “capital”—economic, social, and cultural. In a regenerative society, one could argue that all three forms of capital would accumulate in a way that enhances societal well-being. Economic capital would not only be about GDP growth but also about sustainable and equitable wealth distribution. Social capital would focus on building networks of trust and cooperation, facilitating community-led initiatives for renewable energy or waste management. Cultural capital would involve a shift in societal values towards sustainability and social justice, reflecting in everything from education curricula to media narratives.

However, these idealistic accumulations of capital are not merely opposed but are often actively undermined by the capital generated through disruptive innovations of businesses. Using, again, the illustrative case of arms race, the economic capital amassed through military-industrial complexes often feeds into social and cultural capital that glorifies power dynamics and perpetuates cycles of violence and inequality. This is where Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic violence”—the subtle, often invisible ways in which social structures perpetuate inequality—becomes especially relevant.

From an economic perspective, the clash between innovation for regeneration and innovation for business performance also resonates with the theories of “rent-seeking” and “wealth creation.” Rent-seeking, as posited by economists like Hudson (2015), refers to activities that aim to gain income without creating new wealth, often by exploiting existing resources or systems. The arms race, as a

metaphor for the dominant business logic, with its focus on competitive advantage and zero-sum games, often manifests as a form of rent-seeking, where resources are diverted from productive uses to maintain or enhance power imbalances.

Contrastingly, innovation for regeneration aligns more closely with the concept of wealth creation, a term extensively discussed by classical political economists. Wealth creation in a regenerative context would involve not just financial capital but also human and natural capital. It offers a more holistic understanding of wealth, incorporating elements like human well-being, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

Moreover, if we were to consider Sen’s (1999) Capability Approach, the discussion would shift from mere resource allocation to enabling freedoms and capabilities for individuals. In a regenerative industrial society, policies would be designed not just for economic efficiency but for enhancing human capabilities, thus allowing for a more nuanced, human-centric form of development that could potentially reconcile the tensions between innovation for regeneration and business competition.

### Philosophical Implications

The collision between the utopian aspirations of regeneration and the dystopian realities of pro-business creative destruction does not merely produce socio-economic reverberations; it also opens up a Pandora’s box of philosophical inquiries and ethical dilemmas. The implications span from questions about human nature to the very essence of being and societal coexistence. It is within this philosophical expanse that we must attempt to understand not just what our choices are, but what they signify in the larger metaphysical context.

One of the most immediate questions this tension evokes is rooted in the philosophical debates about human nature. On one end of the spectrum, we have Thomas Hobbes’ view of the “state of nature,” wherein life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” According to Hobbes, the inherent nature of human beings is competitive and self-centred, thereby necessitating strong authoritative

structures and defence mechanisms, which could be seen as a philosophical foundation for innovation for dominance and supremacy. On the opposite end, we find Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the "noble savage," which posits that humans in their most natural state are peaceful and cooperative, a view more aligned with the principles of regenerative ideal.

However, to look at this tension solely through the lens of human nature would be reductive. Philosophers like Immanuel Kant argue for the potential of reason and moral law, suggesting that human actions are not solely dictated by nature but can be guided by rational thought and ethical principles. This Kantian perspective opens up the possibility of a middle path, one where societal structures and individual choices can be designed to mitigate our darker instincts and elevate our more virtuous inclinations.

Moreover, existentialist philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Albert Camus offer an additional layer of complexity by emphasising the role of individual agency and choice. In a world rife with complexities and contradictions, they argue that individuals have the freedom, and indeed the responsibility, to make ethical choices. Sartre's concept of "bad faith" could easily be applied to the inertia or moral complacency that allows destructive cycles like business rent-seeking to perpetuate. On the other hand, Camus' notion of "the absurd" offers a framework for navigating the existential dissonance created by the tension between our desires for meaning and the apparent indifference of the universe. It is within this "absurdity" that the choice between innovation for regeneration and innovation for destruction, domination and supremacy becomes a profoundly existential act.

### The Choice Ahead

As we stand on the precipice of an uncertain future, caught between the competing narratives of regeneration and destruction, the urgency of the choices before us becomes increasingly apparent. This is not merely an intellectual debate confined to academic journals or

policy briefings; it is a pivotal moment that will define the trajectory of our society, our ethics and, indeed, our very humanity.

From the onset, it is vital to acknowledge that the issues we have explored are complex and multifaceted, lacking easy answers or clear-cut solutions. The tension between innovation for regeneration and innovation for destruction is not a simple dichotomy but a complex interplay of socio-economic, ethical, and existential factors. It is a historical moment that unfolds at the intersections of technology, politics, philosophy, and human emotion.

As we have seen, regenerative thinking offers a vision that is as inspiring as it is daunting—a utopian dream that promises harmony, sustainability, and social equity. It is a vision that challenges us to transcend our limitations, to re-imagine our social contracts, and to redefine our understanding of progress. However, this vision is not without its pitfalls and paradoxes. It requires not just technological innovation but a cultural transformation, a shift in values and perspectives that is perhaps even more difficult to achieve than any scientific breakthrough.

Contrastingly, innovation for destruction serves as a cautionary tale, a narrative that exposes the darker underbelly of human progress. It is a story of innovation devoid of ethics, of advancement at the cost of equity, and of progress that leads to peril. Yet, even within this grim scenario, there are lessons to be learned and questions to be asked. Can the forces that drive innovation for destruction be redirected towards more constructive ends? Can the immense resources and intellectual capital invested in destructive technologies be repurposed for regenerative goals?

This is where the concept of transformation comes to the fore, serving as a potential bridge between these conflicting narratives. Transformation is not just change; it is a fundamental reconfiguration of systems and paradigms. It offers a pathway for reconciling the tensions between regeneration and destruction, provided we are willing to engage with the complex

socio-economic and philosophical issues involved.

The stakes are exceedingly high. The choices we make today will echo through the annals of history, influencing not just our immediate future but the world we leave for generations yet unborn. These choices cannot be made in isolation; they require a multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral approach that integrates perspectives from science, politics, economics, philosophy, and religion.

In conclusion, as we traverse this critical juncture, we must remember that we are not just passive observers but active participants in the unfolding drama of human civilisation. Our choices, individually and collectively, will determine the path we take at this existential crossroads. Will we choose a future defined by the ideal of regeneration, or will we descend into a cycle of destructive transformation? The answer to this question lies not just in our technologies, our policies, or our economic models, but in our beliefs, our values, and our willingness to confront the complexities and contradictions that define our human condition.

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