

Regeneration Made Real

REGENERATION MADE REAL

✖ By Jonathon Porritt

There's so much rubbish talked about 'regeneration' these days. Regenerative Agriculture. Regenerative Tourism. Regenerative Business (whatever that might be). Regenerative Justice. I've even heard people talking about 'Regenerative Capitalism' as if to prove that the reach of a good oxymoron knows no bounds.

If you want to cut through the crap and understand the real power of the idea of regeneration, do yourself a favour and order yourself a copy of Paul Hawken's 'Regeneration: Ending the Climate Crisis in One Generation'.

I read a lot of stuff about today's 'solutions agenda' – I even write quite a lot about that agenda myself! But this book (first published last year) blew me away. Here's why:

1. Instead of relegating Nature-Based Solutions to a rather apologetic footnote, those solutions are the beating heart of 'Regeneration', in terms of providing two-thirds of the content, with the remaining third covering off all the tech stuff, energy, cities, industry etc.

If 'biological degeneration has brought us to the brink of an unimaginable crisis', it is only biological regeneration that can pull us back from the brink. Not just the mechanical, tech-led stuff.

2. It's a robustly practical book – experiential rather than conceptual. What do we need to do rather than theorise about – even if it is still a bit of a problem

‘that our minds just don’t work the right way’!

The answer to that, by the way, is not to try and sort out people’s mindsets by power of reason and impeccably robust intellectual advocacy, but by doing and showing, sharing practice and stories.

3. With that in mind, the role of women is foregrounded at every point in ‘Regeneration’. Out of all the brilliant case studies, only three are about men – albeit very impressive men!
4. Social justice permeates the entire narrative here: no false separation.
5. The role of indigenous people is also right up there. Not as some kind of belated, guilt-stricken recognition on the part of mainstream conservation groups, as exemplified most hypocritically by WWF. But by demonstrating so powerfully that indigenous people are not just on the front line of holding back today’s remorseless destruction of the natural world, but remain the best and wisest teachers we have.
6. Paul Hawken’s challenge to our conventional ways of thinking is subtle, but hugely effective. It’s one thing to be invited to engage with politics ‘as a self-perpetuating industry’ – we are, after all, increasingly aware of the lethal power of today’s incumbencies in corrupting and undermining our democracy, with fossil fuels at the heart of that incumbency. But it’s even more challenging to be invited to think of ‘poverty as a self-perpetuating industry’ – and how we in the West allow ourselves all too often to be conscripted into the insidious business of hoping to address poverty by charity – rather than by justice.

I’ve been meaning to write this blog ever since I read ‘Regeneration’ at the end of last year, but I got diverted into other writing projects. Three months on, the world feels very different. Over and above the scourge of Covid – still

killing thousands every day – we're just beginning to feel the impact of the worst cost of living crisis in decades, engulfing more and more vulnerable people. We've also seen the most chilling report yet from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, revealing 'an atlas of human suffering', in the words of António Guterres, but landing with little more than a passing nod from politicians and the media – not least because of the brutal war in Ukraine.

The fallout from that war represents the closest thing to 'history in the making' that I've lived through for a long time. Here in the UK, for instance, the polarised political responses couldn't be starker. The right wing (and their many media cheerleaders) have seized on the war to parade their hateful, life-crushing prejudices – calling for more fossil fuels, fewer refugees, growth at all costs, and screw the poor, all the time making out that everything they do is in the interests of those poor.

At the same time, the voices of reason and compassion are now fighting harder and harder to be heard, advocating for a genuinely 'just transition' out of our dependence on fossil fuels and on the tyrants in Russia, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere who use those fossil fuels to hold Western societies to ransom.

And not just to be heard. But to be embraced – and acted on as a crucial element in whatever it is that still allows us to retain authentic hope in such troubled times.

And in that regard, there is no voice more important than Paul Hawken's.

['Regeneration: Ending the Climate Crisis in One Generation'](#) by Paul Hawken, published by Penguin, 2021.

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