



BOOK REVIEW

***The SIMPOL Solution: Solving Global Problems Could Be Easier than We Think*, by John Bunzl and Nick Duffell, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York, 2018, 253 pp, ISBN-10: 1633883930 / ISBN-13: 978-1633883932, price (paperback) £11.95**

Reviewed by Geoff Lamb

This timely book by Jon Bunzl and Nick Duffell begins with a familiar tale. The world is in trouble. It's in trouble politically, in trouble financially, meteorologically, and perhaps, although they don't make a feature of it, sexually.

So far, so familiar; and we can read stories of how we're all going to hell in a handcart in the *Guardian* and other publications every day. However, there are some key differences in Duffell and Bunzl's approach. The one that most attracted me to read (and review) *The Simpol Solution* is that they're looking at the global crisis, and its potential solution, in terms of humanity's individual and collective psychological process. As a psychotherapist working hard to maintain my integrity in the post-modern era and a life-long follower of Wilhelm Reich's psycho-political work, this really appeals to me.

There are two other major departures from the familiar story. The first is that *The Simpol Solution* names Destructive Global Competition as the underpinning cause of the myriad of ways in which our planet is in the kind of trouble I mentioned earlier. The second difference is that

they propose a 'simple' solution to the whole thing.

The essential premise is that national sovereignty has been undermined, not just by multinational corporations, as has been proposed frequently in the past, but by the ease of movement of global capital. In other words, if one country makes things 'uncomfortable' for international investors, by insisting on fair working conditions for employees or fair taxes etc., investors will move their capital to another country which doesn't. The solution, according to Bunzl and Duffell, is for a significant majority of countries to make a simultaneous political decision to adopt fair taxation, for example (hence the contraction Simpol), which would effectively cut off this 'escape route' for global corporate investors.

This part of the book is quite easy to understand, as is the proposed action that all voters can take to increase the possibility of the Simpol Solution being implemented, which is revealed towards the end of the book. Applying collective and individual psychology to the situation becomes more complex. Bringing in Kubler-Ross's grief stages makes a lot of sense, and the authors apply these to Destructive

Global Competition sensitively and creatively. When they venture into defence mechanisms, the territory becomes more difficult, especially for a psychotherapist. I'm not sure, for instance, whether I would agree with the authors' version of splitting/dissociation: they seem, on pp. 98–9, to be describing what I would call 'projection' when they write about our tendency of protest movements, such as Occupy, to see themselves as good, and capitalists/global corporations as bad (see Freud, 1968). That said, I really appreciated their critique of post-modernism in which, as they write:

all global problems are seen as myriad and equal, so no single issue is permitted to claim more importance than any other, for that would be hierarchical. Likewise solutions must be myriad and equal too, as witnessed by the oft-repeated phrase 'There are no single solutions'.

In my profession, this belief (that clients' myriad and equal problems demand myriad and equal approaches) has led to therapists becoming 'Jacks of all trades' rather than practising the skills in which they've been trained to a standard of excellence. But I digress!

Ultimately, according to the authors, the well-meaning efforts of NGOs, such as the Global Justice Movement, are equivalent to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's 'bargaining' phase of the grief process, which needs to move on to the final phase of 'acceptance' in order to complete the process. As far as Destructive Global Competition is concerned, the 'acceptance' phase requires a change in our thinking and our attitude – an evolution of consciousness. Drawing on the writing of proponents of consciousness evolution such as Clare Graves and Ken Wilber, they outline how the former's model of evolving consciousness would create conditions for the world co-operation needed to counter the hegemony of Destructive Global Competition. This may sound idealistic, given the observed level of consciousness we daily experience in the rise of populism, but according to Wilber, if just 10 per cent of the population arrives at a new worldview then a tipping-point is reached, after which the new way of thinking proliferates throughout the entire society.

I would really like to believe this. I tried, as the White Queen said encouragingly to Alice, 'with both hands' – but my faith in such a possibility remains a glimmer rather than the burning torch the authors would like me to have. However, even they suggest, at the end of this chapter, that 'New thinking is critical, but even that is not enough. To change the world, a new system of governance needs to be brought in.'

This is where the 'Simpol Solution' finally emerges. The antidote to Destructive Global Competition is for a significant number of nation states to stop participating in this process *at the same time*. As a means of achieving this, the reader is encouraged to use his/her 'second vote'. The concept of a second vote, as Bunzl and Duffell explain, is that we – or to be more precise, the Simpol organisation when we join it – will circulate an agreement to all the candidates in our constituency and state that members of Simpol will give preference to those who sign it. The agreement commits candidates to implementing the Simpol Solution *when* there are enough national governments who are willing to implement it simultaneously. As the authors comment, the manifestos of the various competing parties are actually impotent in the face of Destructive Global Competition, so if we vote for the candidate whose policies we believe to be fair *and who also has signed the Simpol Solution agreement*, the value of our vote will have increased exponentially.

Again, I really want to believe this. I've signed up for the campaign, and I believe an agreement may well have been sent to my Member of Parliament along with the other candidates in my constituency. Like most of the emails I've sent to her predecessor Sir Nicholas Soames, I suspected that it would end up in Mims Davies' trash bin. It didn't, but one of her minions informed me that, as a minister, she was not allowed to enter into this sort of contract before an election. I could, of course, have chosen to vote for a candidate – Green, Labour or Lib Dem – who did sign the agreement (funnily enough, the only one of these who didn't sign was the Green!), but the sheer mathematics tells me that, even if every non-Tory voter had decided to vote for the same candidate, Ms Davies would still have been elected.

Clearly, I don't live in a marginal constituency and I can see that, in those constituencies, the Simpol campaign might have had a measurable effect. I'm assuming not, as I think I would have heard something from the campaign organisers.

All in all, I think this book is inspiring and timely. I would recommend it to anyone interested in world politics, and specifically to therapists who are interested in placing their work within a global social context.

Reference

Freud, A. (1968). *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Geoff Lamb has been practising as a psychotherapist for 35 years. He currently works as a psychosexual therapist, a couple therapist and Sexual Grounding© trainer. His book, *Sexual Grounding*, which is based on the work of Willem Poppeliers, will be published by Routledge later this year.