

The Simpol Solution

- Suggested excerpts for Economics interview by David Sloan Wilson.
- (Note: page numbers cited below are from the UK edition and may therefore vary in the U.S. edition.)

Destructive Global Competition [from p.31]

Neoliberalism gained hold, as we know, during the 1970s, based on an economic vision that enchanted not only politicians and elites but also the ordinary person in the street. It was put into practice through deliberate policy choices on the part of national politicians, notably US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. But the central argument of this book is that, from around the mid-1980s onwards, the implementation of neoliberal policies ceased to be the free choice of politicians and instead took on a momentum all its own. It was as if economic leaders were on autopilot.

Once international competition reached a certain level of integration and intensity, once the global market – and especially financial markets – developed to a certain critical tipping point, the global competitive pressures that this created were *themselves* sufficient to automatically drive governments towards an ever-deeper application of neoliberal policies. The vicious circle of Destructive Global Competition (DGC) had got going to such a point that it became self-sustaining. Once multinational corporations and global investors gained the ability to move capital and thousands of jobs seamlessly across national borders, the genie was out of the bottle and the vicious circle was set in train. Without realising it, governments were then caught in the endless pursuit of their ‘international competitiveness’ – caught in the game of forever outcompeting each other at cutting taxes and regulations in a bid to retain jobs and inward investment. From then on it drew politicians and governments into its destructive vortex, and it is now running beyond anyone’s control. It is this automatic functioning that not only encourages the turning of a blind eye to the destructive aspects of competition the real danger is that it places the people charged with setting the rules – governments – into a state of paralysis. They are now unable to address seriously the global problems that confront us. It’s not that they don’t *want* to act, it’s that they *can’t*.

Displacement, compensation and dissociation [from p.63]

Many of us at times are guilty of displacing our anger on to someone who isn’t the real cause of it – perhaps on our children or on a colleague – because we’ve been unable to identify the real cause. Sometimes we are ourselves to blame, but sometimes we only realize in retrospect what was gnawing at us all the time. In reality, however, compensation – the feeling of comfort we experience by displacing blame elsewhere – is never a substitute for dealing with the deeper cause of our anger; blame always leaves us feeling a victim to someone else. Unless we discover what is really going on, both these habits are only temporary solutions for feeling powerless; both end up leaving us just as frustrated as we were in the first place.

It seems to us that in the case of our attitude towards our politicians, we compensate ourselves by blaming them in order to distract ourselves from the painful truth that they no longer have adequate power over free-moving global entities – and neither do we. The upshot is an excessively polarized political scene, which is also normalized. Perhaps the example that engendered the greatest

widespread impotent outrage was the global financial meltdown of 2007–8. In Britain we allowed our deeper feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness to be compensated by channelling our anger into a relatively minor, if annoying, issue when, in 2009, widespread abuse of expenses claims by Members of Parliament hit the headlines. This took over public interest from bigger issues where they felt impotent.

Such local issues operate on us as a distraction, and we displace our feelings of powerless anger so that they land somewhere. Then we can get back to business as usual without being more than temporarily alarmed. To ensure that we keep on ignoring DGC and are not discomfited by doing so, we also allow ourselves to engage in all sorts of material compensations, which are most welcome as economic drivers. The wish to be compensated for some unacknowledged lack is meat and drink to the wheels of corporate consumerism, as the fashion, snacking and techno-gadget industry know to their benefit.

Meanwhile, at the macro level, we remain in thrall to DGC and pay the price.

Self-regulation [from p. 184]

In terms of evolution, we could be standing on the brink of species collapse or, potentially, a shift to a new and higher level of self-awareness and to a deeper fulfilment of who we are. A 'mature solution' seems the only choice with a future.

One of the concepts that frequently defines maturity in organisms, and is regularly the sticking point for an adolescent, is the *ability to self-regulate*. A prime example is the human body. Our body is a marvel of interlocking systems with discrete individual functions that relate with each other. The basic drivers of the body are self-preservation and reproduction, but the operating mode of the systemic whole is self-regulation. In this purpose, each cell and each organ cooperates and self-regulates. The heart, aided by the lungs, has a central self-regulating function especially in how it influences behaviour through its control of the autonomic nervous system.

Whilst the overall self-regulation functioning of the body is *autonomic* – that is to say does not require conscious effort – we can apply intentional self-regulation to our bodies. We can influence our heart rate and thereby our central nervous system and overall well-being by what we think, the way we behave and even how we breathe. Conscious self-regulation is increasingly becoming the most important new idea in healthcare, chiefly because it works, and it puts patients back in charge of their own lives. Self-regulation is also increasingly the goal in mental-health and being implemented through methods such as mindfulness, mentalization and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) being integrated into mainstream approaches. Self-regulation turns out to be the key to self-driven behaviour change and becoming properly autonomous and accountable.

We urgently need to complement the competition of our global market with self-regulating governance and cooperation on the same scale, and, surprisingly, the same arguments easily fit into the frame of economics. Until now we have seen ideas about regulation and models of governance (big or small government) come in and out of fashion. Both models are polarized, and both have failed; both are founded on a conception of regulation based in either *control* or *no control*, which is mirrored, respectively, in the two modes of trade, protectionism or free-trade. As the world becomes increasingly globalized, it becomes increasingly hard to deny that in many fields regulation is essential. But the model has to change. We have to choose it and allow ourselves to be voluntarily bound by it, which is where self-regulation comes in. Self-regulation is of a completely different

order to the control-no-control polarity and is inherent in biological systems from which we are drawing our evolutionary paradigm. This concurs with what is emerging in all other fields, while currently economics and politics lag a long way behind.

We need to learn to self-regulate by regulating our activity – our economies, our banks, our militaries, our profligate habits and so on – and this can now only be done together through simultaneous global cooperation.

Turning the tables: John's story [from p.147]

It's a bright spring day in Blackheath, where I live in south-east London. It's early morning, and the plentiful squirrel population is busy darting up and down the trees. All seems well with the world – and then my doorbell rings. I open the front door and, quickly focusing on the caller standing in front of me, I notice she sports a large red rosette. I'm instantly reminded that a general election is due on 7 May, just a few weeks away. By all accounts it's going to be a close-run thing, and all the party candidates are chasing every last vote.

'Good morning, Mr Bunzl,' the local Labour Party candidate cheerily greets me with a smile. She has a pile of leaflets at the ready. 'I just wanted to ask whether I can count on receiving your vote on 7 May.'

Suddenly wide awake, I'm prepared for the encounter.

'You know what,' I begin to build my response, 'I'm actually a little fed up with the inability of party politics to deal with the really big global issues. So I'm going to be voting for any politician within reason that has signed the pledge to implement the Simultaneous Policy alongside other governments. Whichever candidate signs the Simpol Pledge gets my vote.'

I have had my say, and we both retreat within a moment of silence. My campaigning visitor seems momentarily confused – taken aback even – at this reversal. Everyone takes for granted that it's us, the voters, who have to do the choosing, and our choice is supposed to be between politicians. It is not politicians who have to choose whether to support a particular policy. Whatever is going on inside her, she seems to be clocking that whatever she was about to say about Labour's manifesto won't make much difference.

'Er, what actually is the Simultaneous Policy?' she eventually enquires, hoping it may be something she can support in order to gain my vote.

I smile, hand her one of my Simpol leaflets along with a pledge form for politicians to sign and wish her a pleasant day, content that I have handed the choice back to her. As she walks back down my front-garden path, she has only one issue to consider: whether or not to sign the pledge to implement Simpol. If she does, she won't be taking any risk because of the condition of 'simultaneous implementation', which is built into the pledge and which we will explain below. On the contrary, she will gain the prospect of gaining my vote and the votes of the growing number of other Simpol supporters in her area. Should she refuse, she risks that I (and other Simpol supporters) will very likely vote for one of her rivals who chose to sign instead, in which case she could lose her seat.

The tables have been turned.

Simultaneity, conscious evolution and global cooperation [from p. 187]

Global cooperation, as we have argued, will not happen if we simply sit back and take no action because we are now in the age of conscious evolution. It requires our active, conscious participation. As we start to take proper responsibility for actively navigating the vital transition from destructive global competition to fruitful global cooperation, we may ask ourselves what better concept we could have to guide us than the idea of *simultaneity* itself.

Simultaneous action and the new context of cooperation that it both enables and invites us towards could be described as 'the great reconciler' because it successfully reconciles two timeless, universal and yet seemingly irreconcilable opposites, those of unity and diversity. Even if we act simultaneously alongside others we still retain our own individuality, our diversity or our unique national sovereignty. We don't stop being who we are; we don't have to surrender our *identity*, we just enlarge it. And yet by acting together simultaneously we also achieve unity. We maintain our unique individuality and yet stand together, stronger in our unity. We make ourselves greater than the sum of our parts. We retain our national or tribal civic identity, but we add a global one to it.

In our increasingly interdependent globalized world, then, simultaneity has the capacity to reconcile our diverse *self-interests* with our united *common* interest. Using a process such as Simpol, unity and diversity can be reconciled, self-interest and common interest become one. And there, we suggest, resides our underlying spiritual purpose, the underlying lesson globalization is trying to teach us: that *we are not separate from one another*. We are not two, but one. We are not just great competitors but great cooperators, for how else could we – how else *should* we – cross this crucial and historic evolutionary threshold, if not hand-in-hand, if not as one humanity, if not simultaneously, if not *together*?