9. Governance and the analytic institution

Helen Morgan

Introduction

This is a long moment of uncertainty in the profession of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. The mills that move us towards state registration are grinding exceedingly slowly and churning up the hard grist of how we define ourselves, what we do, what we don’t do, which lines are to be drawn and where, who will be on which side and what we will all end up being called. Current struggles include concerns of status, economics, authority and identity, but also a heartfelt urge to protect a certain way of thinking and working that is much under attack at the moment.

The complex politics of what I shall be referring to as the profession of psychoanalytic psychotherapy may seem tiny against the backdrop of those struggling in the public sector and some may question whether this private, privileged and parochial world has any relevance for those working ‘out there’ at the coal face.

I suggest it has. Put most simply, at the centre of the psychoanalytic endeavour is a relationship between two people, the analytic couple. It is the very privilege of being able to explore that relationship in a relatively uncluttered, protected, boundaried place and time that allows it to be of use beyond the therapeutic work with an individual as it offers insight into what sort of structure a therapeutic relationship is best contained within. Whatever the helping profession we are considering, we need a system that fosters authentic,
trustworthy and autonomous professionals able to bear anxiety, hopelessness, powerlessness, to not-know and yet to keep on thinking. In many ways, what is happening to psychoanalytic psychotherapy is a particularly heightened or extreme version of what is happening to other professions. The dilemmas and choices are not radically different, only starker.

**Alone in the presence of . . .**

Analysis takes place within a container. The free associating of the analysand, the reverie of the analyst and the play between them can happen only in a space where confidentiality and privacy are secure and trusted. The analytic couple must be alone in order for analysis to take place. However, in this aloneness each becomes vulnerable to the other and there is the real risk that privacy slips into dangerous secrecy. Boundaries may crumble and the unconscious vengeful or erotic forces may overwhelm leading to the loss of the analyst’s agapaic, ethical and analytical attitude resulting in retaliation and acting out. It is, therefore, also imperative that this analytic couple are not alone.

Winnicott proposes that the capacity to be alone is a crucial aspect of healthy development and that this happens through the infant being able to be alone in the presence of the mother. As he states:

> Here is implied a rather special type of relationship, that between the infant or small child who is alone, and the mother or mother-substitute who is in fact reliably present even if represented for the moment by a cot or a pram or the general atmosphere of the immediate environment.¹

Winnicott is, of course, speaking of the individual infant alone with its mother. When he writes, albeit sparingly, about the paternal role he also hints at a notion of this ‘nursing couple’ itself being alone in the presence of a third. This ‘third’ is the ‘other’ in whose presence the mother/infant couple are alone. This ‘other’ has the dual role of protecting the couple from external impingements, but also to
intervene at times of stress between them. Applying this to the analytic couple, the image I’m presenting is that of their being alone together in the presence of an ‘other’, and that this ‘other’ is the analytic institution.

If we now return to Winnicott but substitute the analytic couple for the infant:

*It is only when alone (that is to say in the presence of someone) that the infant can discover his own personal life. The pathological alternative is a false life built on reactions to external stimuli. When alone in the sense that I am using the term, and only when alone, the infant is able to do the equivalent of what in an adult would be called relaxing.*

In a sense, of course, this notion of ‘alone in the presence of . . . ’ is merely a reformulation of the concept of the analyst’s internalised good objects gained hopefully through their own analysis, supervision and general training. But changing the image slightly shifts attention from the particular practitioner to that of the profession as a whole. For then the question becomes how the profession should best be organised so that it can be the facilitative, concerned and benign ‘other’ in whose presence the analytic couple can be alone. The intention is an ‘aloneness’ that allows them to ‘rediscover the personal impulse’ rather than the ‘pathological alternative’ of ‘a false life built on reactions to external stimuli’.

**The traditional profession**

As with all professions, that of psychoanalysis has its own internal system of professional authority and responsibility held by people who are assumed to know their craft. They are the ‘elders’ who hold authority in the realms of gate-keeping, assessment, teaching, ethics and so on because of their experience and expertise.

However, unlike other professions, psychoanalysis has as yet no established system of external reference; there are few links to academia and the research base is developing but still weak. Even
within a fairly narrow definition of psychoanalysis, there are a number of theoretical approaches, a variety of ‘truths’, each avowed by different groupings with historical and current conflicts between them. While other professionals operate in a more open forum so their work is publicly available to be judged, the very privacy of this one makes assessment a more intricate affair. The analytic profession has existed in relative isolation, arranged in a hierarchy as a hermetically sealed system unaccountable to any external body. The profession has, I suggest, itself been left too much alone for too long.

It has, of course, its critics both from within and from without. In his book entitled *Unfree Associations*, Kirsner, who conducted a major piece of research into analytic institutions in America, refers to the ‘clubbishness, internal focus, anointment and fratricidal behaviour in psychoanalytic cultures’.3

Kirsner is especially critical of the system of training analysts, which elevates certain elders within the hierarchy and gives them control of assessment, training, the ‘rules’ of the institution and the process he refers to as ‘anointment’ of the favoured few. The argument is that the system of training analysts establishes and reinforces an ideal, a sort of ‘super-analyst’ who is the only one trusted to analyse candidates and have overall control within the institution. Only some will make it to this idealised state yet the skills, qualities and competencies necessary for selection to these and other ranks are rarely made explicit.

In his paper ‘The analytic super-ego’, Colman refers to the similarity between analytic training and initiation rites and the tendency this creates for candidates to ‘remodel’ themselves in the image of their community’s ideal. The candidate’s ego-ideal is thus transformed into an analytic ego-ideal to be monitored by an analytic super-ego identified with the analytic community at large.4

It is inevitable that there is a degree of idealisation of those who, after all, we spend a great deal of time and money training to become like. However, the greater the gap between the ideal and the reality, the greater the threat of shame and the harsher the super-ego response. Denigration of the so-called elders while appearing to
refute their power is merely the other side of the same emotional coin. Both idealisation and denigration are exacerbated by distance and by the desired qualities and abilities being kept undefined and opaque. If the qualities of these elders, the training analysts, the supervisors, the teachers, are assumed but not defined, and the criteria for assessing the various stages of career development not explicit, then qualification and later progress becomes a haphazard business of unknown factors and/or the benign regard of those with power.

**Eldership and governance**

A shift towards greater transparency *is* happening but, I suggest, *only* because of the external demands of governance on the analytic institutions. Thus far I see these demands as having a positive, opening effect on the profession. Indeed, like a series of ‘Russian dolls’ it might be seen to be an external ‘other’, in whose presence it can be alone.

Instead of thinking of actual ‘elders’ with all the implications of an idealised aristocracy or elite, I want to put forward the idea of ‘eldership’ as a functional attribute or quality essential to any profession. This includes the particulars of the craft, the theoretical framework, its moral code, its wisdom. While represented by certain individuals at any one time, its ownership and development need to be accepted as the responsibility of all members – including candidates in training. In the wider profession, in any analytic institution, and also in any individual practitioner, both functions of eldership and of governance need to operate in relationship to each other. It’s that relationship I wish to explore briefly here. To do so I need to change language for a moment.

The British Association of Psychotherapists, like similar organisations, is managed by a council elected from and by the membership. The tasks of the organisation relating to its objectives are delegated to the various committees and they carry out the day-to-day business in dialogue with the council through the various representatives. In the set of papers each council member is given on
joining, governance is defined as ‘the systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction, effectiveness, supervision and accountability of an organisation’.

Currently corporate governance requirements from external bodies apply on account of the fact that we are a charity and a company limited by guarantee, making council members both trustees and directors with specific legal responsibilities for compliance with:

- charity law and the requirements of the Charity Commission
- company law and the requirements of Company House
- employment law
- health and safety legislation
- data protection legislation
- legislation against discrimination on grounds of race, disability, gender and other factors.

As with any profession, the tasks of the analytic institution need to be undertaken in a way that ensures that the aspects of governance and those of eldership are in a respectful relationship with each other. However, I see this as an asymmetrical relationship with the function of governance acting as the container for that of eldership. Good governance acts as the ‘other’, which protects eldership from external impingement but may also need to intervene at times and require it to make itself known and understandable. Again the metaphor of ‘alone’ in the presence of the other seems apposite here. Indeed good governance – as opposed to government – refers in part to that balancing act between intruding and enabling.

Mostly, of course, the work of the organisation goes on without serious conflict between the two functions. The more profound disputes tend to be those which concern difference relating to matters of eldership. Here there is usually a subtext regarding professional recognition, authority, power and status. Then each side, in pursuit of what they believe to be right, may challenge those aspects of governance which are seen not to suit, and ultimately, therefore,
council’s function. However, it is the requirement to hold to agreed constitutional policies and procedures and to be accountable to democracy within the membership as well as external demands that can and should act as the container for the internal debate.

**Governance and state regulation**

So far I have been referring to a benign definition of governance as a helpful, opening effect on the analytic institution. However, the starting point of the metaphor is the aloneness of the infant. The infant needs the mother’s presence so he or she can forget it and get on with the developmental work of relaxing. His play or his reverie should not be intruded on by an over-anxious mother who is constantly poking him to check he is OK. Similarly, the analytic couple must be alone to get on with their own particular form of relaxing. They must be protected from the intrusion of a judgemental, shame-inducing analytic ego-idea, but also from the invasion by an over-anxious system of governance which has little capacity to trust this aloneness and wants to manage and control it quite directly by intruding into it. Governance now becomes not the presence the practitioner and client can be alone within, but the paranoid intruder that is driven by anxiety and fails to trust.

The government’s current plan is that the professions of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and counselling will eventually be registered within the Health Professions Council. Currently this sets standards for 12 health professions including radiographers, clinical scientists, arts therapists, dieticians and others.

It is hard to be clear at this stage what the implications for this profession are going to be. Glancing across at those sister professions that are already state regulated and seeing the tidal wave of governance requirements, which seem to be almost drowning the practitioner in anxiety-driven, risk-averse, overly rational demands, I admit to a worry that this over-controlling ethos will find it hard to leave the analytic couple alone.

Of what we know already there is much concern about the question of how complaints against practitioners on ethical grounds
are likely to be heard. As things stand currently this is by a committee made up of practitioners from a rotation within the 12 registered professions plus a number of lay members. This means that a complaint against a psychoanalytic psychotherapist may be heard by a panel that includes only one or possibly two from the profession. It is unlikely, therefore, that there will be much understanding of unconscious processes or the transference. Cases are also heard in open court which means anyone can attend – including the press. As soon as a complaint is made it is published on the internet as a case pending, including the names of both the therapist and the patient.

This is too much light on the subject. Such procedures fail to recognise the particular nature of psychoanalytic work and could actually weaken the governance of the profession since it may mean that many patients will fear making a complaint as, if they do, the work of the analysis, and therefore of themselves, will no longer be private. Some may make a complaint as an attack on their analyst as they will be publicly named even before the case is heard. Where there are grounds for complaint, the process of doing so can be a deeply painful process for a patient and needs to be managed in a safe, confidential and careful place by people who have an understanding of unconscious processes. This includes an understanding that an analyst who repeatedly extends the session, gives gifts, goes to the patient’s home and so on is not being generous and helpful, as it might appear to an external observer, but is actually transgressing boundaries and breaking an important trust between them.

As we often discover in analysis itself, what one sets out to do, our conscious intention, has this odd way of having the exact opposite effect. As Bauman says:

*You want to legislate the quality of life and you get this funny problem that the receptive, spontaneous aspects of the quality of life would be lost if you legislated it.*

Now it is the function of eldership that must come to the fore to challenge governance and insist on the need for opacity. It is what
understands the space that the other wishes to intrude into, trusts it and knows that damage will be done by careless interference.

**End thought**

Whether we like it or not state regulation is inevitable. But it’s a difficult process, raising as it does all sorts of conflicts within the profession, but also within oneself. One minute I’m the rebel shaking my fist at this self-appointed, frequency-obsessed, rigid elite, and the next I’m one of the elders tut-tutting at the poor ‘standards’ of others.

What I want to do is to retreat back into the privacy and aloneness of my consulting room. But there is no retreat, there is always the ‘other’ that has to be engaged with. If we don’t speak out for good eldership and good governance, then the psychoanalytic way of thinking may be reduced to a tiny corner of our world. And that, I do believe, would be detrimental to us all.

*Helen Morgan is Chair of the British Association of Psychotherapists.*

**Notes**

2. Ibid.
Governance comprises all of the processes of governing - whether undertaken by the government of a state, by a market, or by a network - over a social system (family, tribe, formal or informal organization, a territory or across territories) and whether through the laws, norms, power or language of an organized society. It relates to "the processes of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement, or reproduction of social The Institute is a leading international provider of postgraduate and professional development programs for overseas, Commonwealth and State jurisdictions on governance, leadership and public policy themes. We deliver four types of program: Graduate certificate programs leading to MPA for Commonwealth Government Departments (co-designed with the Australian public Service). Purpose built leadership programs for Australian public sector and overseas governments. International MPA program with international partners. PhD and Professional Doctorate. Please click here to view our PhD Brochure. Keywords: transactions costs, innovation, governance, asset specificity, opportunism. JEL: D02, D23, D71, D80, L24, O31, O38. These applications form the institutions of innovation policy which all intervene by variously: strengthening intellectual property rights; funding direct or indirect subsidies to private firms; designing systems of innovation institutions; and through direct public provision (Nelson 1993, Jones and Williams 1998, Martin and Scott 2000). Moving analytic focus of the innovation problem to the transactions costs of innovation shifts the space of solutions. Choice-theoretic solutions arise from government, while contract-theoretic opens up to governance (Williamson 1979, 2002). The Governance Institute hosts conferences and Webinars that offer current information, interactive sessions, expert speakers, and the opportunity to meet others with a similar commitment to improving governance and achieving optimal board performance. The Governance Institute 1245 Q Street Lincoln, NE 68508 1.877.712.8778.