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# Self & SOCIETY LETTERS

*Letters for the next issue of S&S should be with the editor by September 21st. Ed.*

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Dear S&S

I've been reading with great interest Guy Gladstone's article in *Self & Society*. I am aware that I feel very passionate about this subject.

I'm an AHPP-accredited Group Facilitator with a background in Gestalt and although not a psychotherapist I'm married to one and have been following the story for some time. I recently attended a re-accreditation meeting with AHPP and listened to and contributed to the debate amongst the practitioners there. It took up almost the whole time! Clearly the members there were very unhappy with the prospect of state regulation of their professions.

To me, as a humanistic practitioner regulation and self-regulation are a contradiction in terms. Period. It seems to me to pose serious issues. My work is all about helping people to become creative masters of their destinies, all about discovering their enormous, unrealised potential. To see fellow humanistic practitioners going through this process fills me with great concern. It feels like a very contracted place.

I've felt for ages that the psychotherapy profession were, to adjust a phrase from the Information Commissioner, "sleep-walking into regulation". I agree that it seems that it is the trainers that have driven this and that the case has in practice gone by default. People belong to economic interest groups for self-protection reasons, not the most positive, and typically are passive participants. Thus the direction of these groups is in the hands of small, often in practice self-electing groups, who drive the agenda. They are inherently undemocratic, usually by default. However, to borrow a slogan from the Iraq War Crisis, now is the time for people to wake up to the possibility that things are happening that are "not in our name".

I also fundamentally dislike the idea of the state regulating in matters to do with the mind. We ought to be challenging this, if nothing else. To me it is outrageous and smacks of incipient totalitarianism, along with surveillance cameras and 42 day detention. This seems to me to be a Department of Health agenda, coming from a body that has as its client group the medical profession and NHS practitioners who, in psychological disciplines, include psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. Their major private sector lobby group is the pharmaceutical industry, with very big cheque books. These groups drive a health agenda. These are people who make decisions for people, not with them. It is a mind-set where it is assumed that people need protection and that we, in this case government, will decide what is good for them. Historically they have been paternalistic and largely masculine. Do humanistic practitioners want to be part of, to use their diagnostic terminology, that pathology?

We seem to be living in a political consensus that if there's a perceived problem, then it needs to be regulated. I would argue that government is neither the

most appropriate nor the most competent to regulate in this field and that it should be left to self-regulation by professional bodies. Government has historically not been effective in intervening in areas where there are complex differences between people of good intent and where they work in areas of subtle human experiencing. In the past government would have stayed out of it. They are not competent because so far they have not shown themselves to understand the area they are seeking to regulate, witness the relatively few sub-disciplines they have initially proposed to accept as legitimate. Because of the health bias, they seem to be favouring CBT and making arguments in its favour that are hotly disputed, eg CBT's alleged scientific validity, whereas humanistic practices have historically not been the subject of major research, with the exception of Person-Centred Therapy and Positive Psychology. Humanistic practitioners should be scrutinising carefully the behaviour they are witnessing here, because government appears not to understand what they do. I have also heard that the psychologists are now in a complete mess as a result of government intervention. A colleague of mine who is a university lecturer in child psychology with four degrees cannot now call himself a Child Psychologist. I read today that Freudian analysts, according to the President of the College of Psychoanalysts, believe that they will no longer be able to practice their open-ended analysis. Pardon the pun, but this is a world gone mad.

What is so special in my mind about the big range of psychological practices is the rich diversity of understandings and insights about the human condition, an area of immense creativity. Let government intervene and you risk damaging that creativity and diversity.

I care very much about humanistic psychology. It has seemed the best home for my psychologically-oriented groupwork with its humanistic/transpersonal slant. I now wonder whether I will be able to practice it longer term. I also wonder if my own 1-to-1 activity, coaching, which for me also has a psychological slant, will also go down the same route. Coaches are currently organising into large professional groups, trainers are bringing out courses to raise standards to a higher level and Masters courses are appearing. In itself that's fine, but I wonder if a similar institutional neurosis will appear: 'to be safe, we must do this', 'if people are to be safe, they'd better be regulated', 'there are all these incompetent practitioners out there', etc. It looks like the spiritual healers have now got it in another form: you have as a practitioner to prove that you weren't misleading your client!! What happened to personal responsibility? Standing back, I wonder how much we are in danger of being caught in a fear-based paradigm.

In all this, I am also aware that change happens and that a characteristic of us humans is to resist it. I've found that it is effective to respond by re-inventing myself, and maybe this is what we as humanistic practitioners need to do: respond to the challenge by creating something even more powerful. So like Guy, I think it is perhaps time for humanistic practitioners to think of moving to another level of being in their work and in how they organise.-

Best regards,

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*We have had permission to publish this letter to Julian, which arrived after Ellis had resigned from AHPB.*

Hello Julian

A miracle has occurred. I received my final copy of *Self & Society*, and it was clearly printed in simple black type that I could see. What I read was a selection of interesting and valuable articles. The ones on regulation in particular have inspired me to take various kinds of political action.

Miracles change things. I would like to come back. Would you please cancel my termination and keep me on the membership list.

This issue arriving at the same time as IAPT in its full Stalinist horror reminds me that AHP is my community of reference. I was beginning to feel bereft without it anyway. Sometimes one has to take a step to find out it is the wrong direction.

I have to admit that I am an Ageing Hippy after all. I may not go to festivals — my practice is to be an available hermit — but I hope I can be accepted as a quiet solitary member whose living of community is valuable in its own way and may need to be represented for us all to be complete.

Best wishes

Ellis Roberts.

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Dear Editor

I regret that since reading the latest *Self & Society* I have cancelled my plans to come to the AHP conference where Guy Gladstone is featured as someone who 'knows what he's talking about'.

The stance that Guy represents has nothing in my view to do with what humanistic psychology stands for, and I would urge AHP to work to preserve humanistic values, rather than to allow a bitter vocal minority to dominate and denigrate at a time when it is vital that we represent ourselves wholly and substantially and pull together.

Guy's view seems to demonstrate 'humanistic psychology' as a complete absence of a dialogic position — or even a Rogerian one, where others' views are considered and respected. In the last edition of *Transformations* — the newsletter for pcsr (psychotherapists and counsellors for social responsibility) we were interested in exploring 'all sides' of the regulation debate, and opening up a dialogue, and to this end, as editor, I asked Guy Gladstone to write his views. He was and is entitled to them and he provided readers with an important perspective. Since reading S&S I am sorry that I gave him the opportunity to launch attacks on my colleagues in HIPS who also wrote for the issue, from different perspectives. As the regulation

enquiry develops we discover the real enemy - the competitive undermining and in fighting within the profession; envious attacks upon the emergence of creative independent thought and relationship. Guy's article is an example of this - a very poor advert for IPN. Who would want to join IPN when their work is being openly attacked and undermined? There is as little understanding shown by Guy as there is by the civil servants (with the one difference that one is a therapist and supposedly equipped with relational skills).

I am sorry that S&S published such a one sided view on the complex issue of regulation. It seems to me that the process of regulation is exactly that - a process, an attempt to dialogue with Government bodies and other modalities, but more importantly *amongst ourselves* regarding current context and future possibilities. Many people within the HIPS section of UKCP are working hard to maintain this dialogic and open approach, developing an appropriate methodology for researching effectiveness from a relational perspective. This is a useful project for our development as a profession regardless of what happens with the government's regulatory system. No psychotherapist is going to operate according to a 'manual' in their relationship to a client, if they want to have a therapeutic effect or support creative change, and as far as I can see the point of keeping talking with the various bodies is to educate and confirm what it is we do. If it remains clear that the regulators wish to make us into something we are not then we cannot agree. But it is important to me to keep clarifying what we do, to keep talking about it and publicising it, and to carve out a shape that we *are*, not just defend what we are *not*. To establish our position and set in motion our own standards and methodologies - something UKCP has already done masses of work on - is taking action for ourselves in terms of looking at what we can improve and where we have previously lacked rigour.

As with all processes, it is bound to change all parties involved, and is thus a worthy project. UKCP has already provided a forum over the last fifteen years for differences to be elaborated and modalities to be defined and it has shown that working alliances can be forged based on commonality whilst accepting difference. Every one I have spoken with who has remained involved with UKCP has found that through the process of listening and enquiring, what has at first seemed like a totally different approach from their own has turned out to have far more in common than they at first imagined.

I think a rigorous debate throughout the field is essential at this time, and this must entail a polarizing of opinion. However the real growth will happen when we can allow movement of positions along the spectrum, rather than inhabiting them rigidly. If we can embody something of our core values and monitor our projections, there is less likelihood that we can be co-opted, and more possibility of preserving our work in a form that we can all live with, and even developing it.

Best wishes, Tree Staunton

Tree Staunton (MA Hip) is a UKCP registered Integrative Body Psychotherapist and Course Director for Psychotherapy at Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling. She is the editor of *Transformations*, the journal of Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility.