

Review of: "The Eden Complex: Transgression and Transformation in the Bible, Freud and Jung"

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I very much enjoyed reading this article and its exploratory analysis concerning the role of transgression in Jung's 'Eden Complex' for the purposes of individuation and personal growth. The author engages with myth, allegory, religious texts, and psychoanalytic thought to inform their argument regarding human psychodynamics. As psychoanalysis is a limited area of knowledge to me, I wish to preface the following review with the fact that I may not be able to constructively aid the discussion relating to this field. However, I do wish to look at a few things that are closer to my fields of research and how they might contribute to this paper, particularly in its appreciation of Greek tragedy and semantics.

One of my favourite aspects of this paper is its sensitive readings of both Jung's life and works. The author's historical appreciation as well as a desire to read beyond the explicit brings out the best in the 'Eden Complex' and its allegorical potential. I understand that Dr. Drob is proposing the 'Eden Complex' in opposition to the model which the Oedipus complex presents, but the sensitivity applied to Jung's theory could also highlight the potential of Freud's famous proposal. Firstly, as a classicist, I wish to point out some areas in which the Oedipus narrative may have been simplified. Freud's selection of the Oedipus myth is described as basing human psychodynamics in 'guilt' and 'shame'. This would not do justice to the range of topics explored in the tragedy, particularly, the concepts of *hubris*, fatalism, and the inevitability of human suffering (Vellacott, 1967; Scodel 1982, Brandenburg, 2005; Mahony, 2010). To state that there is 'nothing nuanced and nothing redeemable about killing one's father and entering into a sexual or marital liaison with one's mother' does not quite reflect Sophocles' writings as well as ancient and modern receptions of the figure of Oedipus (Gould, 1966; Brody, 1985; Dorati, 2015). Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (*Tyrannus*), the surviving play which details his taboo actions, takes great efforts to highlight the 'honourable' values which Oedipus attempted to operate with, alongside the inescapability of his fate (Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* [OT], 31-146, 216-299, 1327-1408; Ramfos, 2005, 5: 'Oedipus embodies the ideal of the Sophistic enlightenment: he is powerful and intelligent, endowed with foresight and will, full of self-confidence, a winner, who makes things happen. His every decision, word, and gesture is marked by initiative, strength and intelligence'). Ultimately, the damage which he commits against himself should testify to how little Oedipus ever wished to achieve the death of his father and the marriage to his mother (Soph., OT, 1251-1346). Within psychoanalytic frameworks, perhaps its culmination and Oedipus' necessary agency within this points to his subconscious wishes. Yet, this would be to ignore the role of the gods and fate in fulfilling Oedipus' transgressive position (Dodds, 1966, 48: 'surely the *Oedipus Rex* is also a play about human greatness. Oedipus is great, not in virtue of a great worldly position – for his position is an illusion which will vanish like a dream – but in virtue of his inner strength: strength to pursue the truth at whatever personal cost, and strength to accept and endure it when found'; Griffith, 1996). All the efforts

taken first of all by Laius – Oedipus' father – to prevent the prophesied transgressions of his son serve as an ironic reminder that fate in the Greek tragic cosmos is inevitable (Soph., *OT*, 707-725, 1119-1185; Ramfos, 2005). Upon the truth's revelation, Oedipus and the chorus state that he was cursed and has been punished by the gods to have ended up in his situation (Soph., *OT*, 1182-1222). A lack of human agency is attested throughout the tragedy (and many of Sophocles' surviving works), adding to the sense that Oedipus' own intentions, ultimately, have no weight in the outcome of his life (Dodds, 1966; Dorati, 2015; Ramfos, 2005). In the face of such overbearing fatalism in the Oedipus myth, can guilt, shame, or any sense of individuation be taken as the greater message of the tale?

Furthermore, it is difficult to determine whether Oedipus' transgression is repressed as such. It is true that the tale of Oedipus is a useful foil for the imaginative realisation (in opposition to the *actual* happening) of these taboo desires. However, within Sophocles' tragedies, Oedipus' outcome throws the condemnation of Oedipus into doubt. At the end of *Oedipus Rex*, he is pitied enough to be allowed to live in spite of the decrees he himself made regarding the death of his father's killer (Soph., *OT*, 236-241→815-823, 1409-1451). Pity for Oedipus continues into the following play, *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which Sophocles' narrative centres on the exile, death and final settling place of Oedipus. When the chorus first interacts with Oedipus, instead of condemning his shameful behaviour, they too pity him for the hand that fate and the gods have dealt him (Soph., *Oedipus at Colonus* [OC], 150-169). Throughout the play, Oedipus is treated as an almost sacred figure for his exceptional and infamous transgression (Weber, 2004 – Oedipus' death is to be a 'gift' to Theseus and Athens). His destruction at the hand of deities and his inhuman, excessive past behaviours permit him a sense of closeness to the gods and the divine realm (This is especially visible in the 'mysteries' of, and later attached to, his death and resting-place, cf. Soph., *OC*, 1586-1666). Although relying on others for his safety, Oedipus is ultimately free of all social ties due to the stigma of his transgression. Banished from society for his 'pollution', his (hardly self-determined) transgression has given him a great, if lonely, sense of individuation (Ledbetter, 2018; Ramfos, 2005). Where Dr. Drob reads the 'fall' narrative as the transgression necessary for the realisation of the self, a wider appreciation of the Oedipus myth could offer a similar allegorical expression for such a realisation. This transgression may lead Oedipus to acquire a sense of self *beyond* the reach of all 'ruling discourse', however it would be difficult to argue that this individuation embodies a constructive, healthy outcome. Indeed, Dr. Bennett's review of this paper highlighted that 'transgression is not inherently valuable or growth promoting' (Bennett, 2023). In support of this, I would underline the emphasis placed upon the results of such transgressions in both the Eden story and Oedipus' myths. In the first, the pain of toil, strife, death, and childbirth are cited. In the second, the destruction of both Oedipus and his loved ones is completed through a catastrophic process of self-harm, parricide, fratricide, and suicide.

The author's call to transgression for constructive ends, likened to the paradigmatic shifts of scientific thought, is an exciting one, even if it does raise some, perhaps pedantic, semantic issues in both clinical and theoretical environments. If, for example, the therapist and patient succeed in cultivating a totally 'open economy' during therapy – an atmosphere unrestricted by any ruling discourse – it is difficult to see how any admission, testimony or behaviour would be conceived of as transgressive. Any sense of transgression (e.g., 'acting out') would be hard to recognise or label in an environment in which judgement is impossible to form by absence of any 'normal' to compare it with (See the discussion in Westen, 1985). This would also contradict the necessary establishment of boundaries in the therapist-patient setting which the

author highlights in the paper. Similarly, genuine transgression in the academic world is hard to conceptualise. Indeed, there are dominant schools of thought as well as academies who direct prevailing views and approaches, yet academic thought has always encouraged its fair share of independent thought. Being a sideline figure in any field, particularly the academic realm, brings with it a sense of the romanticised hero ideology – we look for figures to label as excessive and successful against the odds (Hughes, 2014). Furthermore, the label of transgressive tends to be applied retrospectively, often with some sense of admiration, whereas unwelcome or possibly failed efforts to cross over the lines of established behaviour or thoughts will run the risk of being ignored, forgotten, or characterised as illegal, inherently wrong, amoral etc. Moreover, conscious efforts to cultivate an academic atmosphere receptive to transgressive thinking is well-intentioned but paradoxical: for something to be truly transgressive in academia, it cannot align with current frameworks of thinking. The theme of paradox could be further taken up regarding the paper's selected references to Kabbalistic literature, with Jung's interpretation pointing to the fatalist aspects of man's transgression to become closer to God and realise their purpose in the restoration of the vessels. Thus, if God will's certain transgressions, perhaps these actions lose their transgressive status when ordained by figures of absolute power (This is also explored in the tension of an omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipotent god permitting humankind to commit sin and suffering in the first place, cf. Doyle, 2011; Sollereder, 2019).

Overall, this paper is an excellent proposal for the potential of Jung's 'Eden Complex' as a model for the individuation and personal growth incited by transgression. Perhaps the author's view of Freud's 'Oedipus Complex' does not receive the same sensitivity which is applied to the Jungian theory. There could be more to say about the other offerings of the Oedipus narrative as informing more aspects of Freud's selection. However, this paper's focus on Jung's complex is understandable in the context of the scope of the argument. An openness to transgressive ideas and theories in the academic sphere is a productive attitude, even if it is difficult to conceptualise in practice and theory, since 'successful' transgression can only be confirmed as such in hindsight. Interactions with the Kabbalistic corpus marks an enlightening engagement with the wider texts that influenced Jung's work and highlights the author's refined analytic approach. This paper presents a stimulating proposal for the re-analysis of the place of the 'Eden Complex' in psychoanalytic structures.

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