

# On the Nature and Necessity of Odysseus' Deception in *Philoctetes*

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Sophocles' problematic portrayal of Odysseus' moral character in *Philoctetes* has garnered much attention from interpreters of the play. Odysseus advocates, on the one hand, theft, baseness, and shamelessness (77, 80, 83) while suggesting to Neoptolemus, τὴν Φιλοκτήτου σε δεῖ ψυχήν ὅπως δόλοισιν ἐκκλέψεις λέγων: It is necessary that you steal away Philoctetes' soul with words when you are speaking to him (54-55). Yet, Odysseus later says to Philoctetes, Ζεύς ἐσθ', ἵν' εἰδῆς, Ζεύς, ὁ τῆσδε γῆς κρατῶν, Ζεύς, ωδέδοκται ταῦθ': ὑπῆρετῶ δ' ἔγώ: So that you know, it is Zeus, Zeus, he who rules over this land, Zeus, by whom these things have been decided; and I serve him (989-990). Philoctetes responds to this claim, saying, ὁ μῖσος, οίσα καξανευούσκεις λέγειν: Θεοὺς προτείνων τοὺς θεοὺς ψευδεῖς τίθης: O hateful man, what things you invent to say; holding forth the gods you make them false (991-92). The problem for the interpreter, therefore, is to discern whether Odysseus reveals and properly serves the divine plans (993), invoking false gods in defence of his conduct, or if he in fact reveals the necessity of Zeus's will but does not serve it by the best means.<sup>1</sup> In my view, Blundell, Nussbaum, and Rose are three interpreters whose contributions to the discussion of this problem can be brought together after critical analysis to reveal an Odysseus who indeed serves Zeus's will intentionally, but whose means are ultimately deficient and are in need of adjustment in comparison with Neoptolemus'.

Among these three interpreters, however, Blundell does not believe that Odysseus is concerned with righteousness or Zeus's

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1. In *Philoctetes and the Imperishable Piety*, (Hermes, 105. Bd., H. 2. 133-158, 1977), 414, Charles Segal articulates the problem of Odysseus' moral character in a similar way, but which hints already at a resolution different from the one I will seek. He says, "In the askew world of this play Odysseus is, despite himself, in agreement with the ends of the gods . . . Yet the means which he employs still reveal the gap between human and divine purposes . . . Odysseus uses the gods' authority for a harsh, inhuman act," against Philoctetes. Segal seems to articulate the problem while intoning that Odysseus' use of divine authority to justify his means is meritless to begin with, whereas I believe Sophocles leaves the answer to that question somewhat more ambiguous.

will at all. In *The Moral Character of Odysseus in Philoctetes*, she says that Odysseus only aids the Greeks out of a private interest that coincidentally aligns with the good of their expedition and, by extension, with Zeus's will for Troy to fall.<sup>2</sup> The private interest that Blundell claims is Odysseus' first priority is neither salvation nor profit (*κέρδος*) nor loyalty nor justice but victory (*νίκη*) which his nature craves everywhere (*πανταχοῦ*).<sup>3</sup> Blundell would thus resolve the problem of Odysseus' portrayal in this play with the explanation that Odysseus is an amoral sophistic opportunist who will obey the law and appear just, only to the extent that doing so will further his personal ends.<sup>4</sup> Insofar as this interpretation of Odysseus is accurate, there would be nothing problematic for the plot about Sophocles' portrayal of Odysseus as a man who would use criminal means, as it were, to further Zeus's purpose. After all Odysseus would have tried to further his own priority quite apart from that of Zeus known through the oracle.

However, Blundell's resolution becomes questionable in light of what Nussbaum and Rose argue, that Odysseus intentionally seeks to bring about salvation (109), gain (111), and victory (81) for the Achaeans. Insofar as Odysseus intentionally seeks the welfare of the Achaean expedition and its success according to the prophecy, and insofar as Herakles affirms his vision, Blundell's position, on its own, will begin to seem difficult to maintain. Her argument that Odysseus is not a consequentialist aiming for the expedition's welfare hinges on two claims. First, Blundell says: "Sophocles could easily have provided Odysseus with arguments that would place his conduct in a more favorable light. Odysseus might have claimed that helping (the majority of) one's friends is the right thing to do and therefore justifies dishonest behavior towards one isolated ally."<sup>5</sup> Secondly, Odysseus "never plainly declares that the end, which supposedly justifies the means, it itself admirable as well as desirable. [For Odysseus the] fall of Troy is

2. Blundell, Mary W., *The Moral Character of Odysseus in Philoctetes*, (University of Washington, 1987), 313.

3. Ibid, 314. Segal provides a very similar position to that of Blundell on this point. In Segal's view justice and the gods "are simply the appendage of [Odysseus'] own purposes" (138), and Odysseus' piety "consists more in the extension of his own will than in the recognition of an autonomous divine order" (139). Thus, "His gods are, in a sense, "victory", "deceit", and "safety" (139).

4. Ibid, 328.

5. Blundell, 309.

just a form of ‘sweet victory’.”<sup>6</sup>

In *Consequences and Character in Sophocles’ Philoctetes*, Nussbaum contradicts Blundell on this point, arguing that Odysseus aims precisely to help the majority of his peers through what he thinks are methods appropriate to the circumstances. She says,

[Odysseus] position is not simply that a good end justifies the use of questionable means, but that actions are to be assessed only with reference to those states of affairs to which they contribute. If the result is overall success, what is required to produce the result cannot be morally condemned.<sup>7</sup>

Nussbaum argues that Odysseus aims for a result beneficial to the expedition based on the chorus’ own affirmation that his conduct towards Philoctetes, ranging from the abandonment to his plan for Neoptolemus to acquire the bow, was that of a man κεῖνος δ’ εἰς ἀπὸ πολλῶν ταχθεὶς τῶνδ’ ἐφημοσύνᾳ κοινὰν ἤνυσεν ἐς φίλους ἀρωγάν: appointed by command for this as one from many to bring about a common relief to his friends (1143-45). Moreover, according to Nussbaum, the army’s interests are in fact even more vivid to Odysseus than his own self-interest.<sup>8</sup> She makes this latter assertion based on Odysseus’ claim to Neoptolemus, that if it should prove expedient to defame him before Philoctetes, τούτῳ γὰρ οὐδέν μ’ ἀλγυνεῖς: εἰ δ’ ἐργάσει μὴ ταῦτα, λύπην πᾶσιν Ἀργείοις βαλεῖς: “None of that will give me pain. But if you don’t accomplish these plans, you will strike distress into all the Argives” (66-67).

Blundell, for her part, criticizes Nussbaum’s inferences here, arguing that although it is not inappropriate for the hero of the *Odyssey* to show “a commendable indifference to personal glory and subordination of self-interest to the needs of the majority (so e.g. Nussbaum, 31),” in *Philoctetes* Odysseus will, on the contrary, benefit from his plans if they succeed.<sup>9</sup> In Blundell’s view, since Odysseus stands to benefit himself at lines 66-67, it remains unclear whether Odysseus’ apparent selflessness is a commendable calculus for the good of the majority or rather for

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6. Ibid, 321. One may suspect, here, that since Odysseus considers victory sweet as an end, he plainly declares that his personal ends, at any rate, are desirable and justifying.

7. Nussbaum, Martha, “Consequence and Character in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*,” in *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol 1, 1 (John Hopkins University Press, Fall 1976), 33.

8. Nussbaum, 31.

9. Blundell, 310.

his own private good.

One might reasonably ask at this point why Odysseus should not rightly expect personal esteem from the subordination of his self-interest to the needs of the majority. After all, a community of free citizens would seem to rest in large part on the fact that the citizens are esteemed for their contributions to the welfare of the citizenship – no free citizens could be expected to utterly subordinate their interests to the needs of a majority without at least some self-regard. Blundell must therefore argue that upon closer inspection of Odysseus' language of motivation, we learn that victory is indeed Odysseus' first priority and that it would override anything δίκαιον, ἀγαθόν, or εὐσεβές, should any of these put his first priority in jeopardy.<sup>10</sup> In the event that Odysseus would pursue personal victory either as opposed to the right, good, or pious thing, or against the general welfare, Odysseus would not be able to pursue both his own ends and that of Zeus's will for the expedition; Odysseus could only attempt self-justification under false gods.

When we thus analyse Odysseus' language, Blundell says we find two revealing details about his moral character aside from what has been mentioned above. The first is that Odysseus never mentions φιλία or the common good as motivational.<sup>11</sup> The second is that incongruities in his moral language threaten to sabotage any attempt to ascribe to him a coherent ethical position, including that of a consequentialist.<sup>12</sup> Blundell points out, for instance, that Odysseus "claims to be serving Zeus (989f), but also implies that the deception is not εὐσεβής (85, 1051)." <sup>13</sup> In another case, Odysseus tells Neoptolemus that lying is not αἰσχρός, if it brings salvation (108f).<sup>14</sup> According to Blundell, if lying is not disgraceful, it is perhaps positively καλός. And if so, she says, salvation might be a goal that fully justifies disgraceful or impious means to deceive and disarm Philoctetes. Blundell concludes, however, that it is difficult to see how Odysseus' plans for Philoctetes, "described implicitly as καλός and ἀναδής and neither δίκαιος nor εὐσεβής (79-85), could be characterized by the same person

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10. Blundell, 314.

11. Ibid, 314.

12. Ibid, 318-319.

13. Ibid, 319.

14. Ibid, 318.

as οὐκ αἰσχρός.”<sup>15</sup>

The problem for Blundell’s argument is that for the consequentialist the admirable result justifies a shameful method, if no better method is available. Blundell says that if lying is not disgraceful to Odysseus, perhaps he thinks it is positively good. In which case, she says, salvation might justify Odysseus’ disgraceful means. It is entirely unclear to me why, in Blundell’s account, Odysseus would perhaps think that lying is positively good and how that possibility would have anything to do with Odysseus’ ends justifying his means – Odysseus would not need to appeal to overriding end results if he thought the means were good and likely successful from the beginning. Therefore, if we now look closely at Odysseus’ response to Neoptolemus at lines 108-109, we learn that for Odysseus what is disgraceful is not perhaps good; what is disgraceful, for example, lying, ceases to be disgraceful only on the condition that τὸ σωθῆναι γε τὸ ψεῦδος φέρει: the falsehood brings one to salvation (109). Odysseus’ reasoning here is strikingly similar to that of Athena throughout *The Odyssey*. As we know, Athena urges Odysseus to disguise himself in Ithaca and to lie even to his family, so that they don’t collapse his plan for a safe homecoming before the timing is opportune for him to reveal himself. In no way does lying or deception under compulsion of circumstance for the sake of some good vindicate lying or deception without a reason. What is conventionally shameful remains shameful, what is impious remains impious, and yet a goddess has urged falsehoods upon Odysseus for the sake of his family’s common salvation and victory.

Blundell believes that Odysseus’ vacillations between calling things just and then unjust, shameful and then not, and so on, are symptomatic of an underlying sophistic opportunism. Based on Odysseus’ declaration, οὐ γὰρ τοιούτων δεῖ, τοιοῦτός εἰμι ἐγώ : χῶπον δικαίων κἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν κρίσις, οὐκ ἀν λάβοις μου μᾶλλον οὐδέν’ εύσεβη: wherever there is need of such men, I am such a man; and when there is a distinguishing of just and good men, you could not find someone more pious than myself (1049-52), Blundell says that Odysseus admits to a cynical manipulation of morality.<sup>16</sup> In her view, Odysseus’ vacillations are not temporary lapses aimed at higher, more salvific ends for himself and his allies; instead they are the vacillations of a true πανοῦργος who

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15. Ibid, 318.

16. Blundell, 321.

has no hesitation to abandon conventional morality whenever it suits him.<sup>17</sup>

The difficulty that Blundell faces with this last claim is to find an example of Odysseus intentionally abandoning conventional morality in the play, with no appeal to the greater good that will result from what he strives towards. I believe Blundell would be hard pressed to find such an example from *Philoctetes*. Even when Odysseus can be interpreted to “sneeringly suggest to Philoctetes that with the help of the bow he may personally reap the honour,”<sup>18</sup> which was necessary for Philoctetes to possess (1061), we still find that Odysseus makes the suggestion in this manner with an underlying appeal to the public good. To begin with, Odysseus says that either he or Teucer’s son could use the bow against Troy, not himself alone. Second, the context of this speech is just after Odysseus has said Τοοίαν σ’ ἔλειν δεῖ καὶ κατασκάψαι βία: it is necessary that you seize Troy and raze it by force (998). The speech also takes place after Odysseus has ordered his men to restrain Philoctetes from suicide (1003). These preceding passages indicate that Odysseus is bluffing when he suggests, however sneeringly, that he might personally reap the honour due to Philoctetes. Furthermore, these passages also suggest that Odysseus is not using the oracle to further his own interest in opposition to Zeus’s will for the expedition.

For the reasons elaborated upon above, it appears more likely that Odysseus is intentionally trying to act on behalf of the expedition according to the stipulations of the oracle. Moreover, not only is Odysseus acting as a consequentialist on behalf of the expedition, but his initial methods also bear resemblance to the methods Athena suggests for him to use to approach uncertain terrain in *The Odyssey*. For upon the arrival at Lemnos in *Philoctetes* the chorus says, τί χρή τί χρή με, δέσποτ’, ἐν ξένᾳ ξένον στέγειν ή τί λέγειν πρός ἄνδρας ὑπόπταν; O master, tell me, what is it necessary for me, a stranger in a strange land, to hide or to say to a suspicious man? (135-136). It is in this condition that Odysseus and his crew arrive, only with Odysseus’ additional awareness that Philoctetes might even attack them on sight if they appear associated with the expedition. Odysseus accordingly tells Neoptolemus to interact with Philoctetes deceptively under a narrative of disguise, revealing what need not be concealed

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17. Blundell, 321.

18. Blundell, 310.

and concealing what must not be revealed (57f). Neoptolemus of course objects to using deception since it is shameful and instead advocates the use of open force. Odysseus responds to this, however, by explaining that Herakles' bow is too powerful for them to succeed using strength (105). As a consequence of these factors, Odysseus and Neoptolemus appear constrained at the outset – neither shameful nor villainous (*πανοῦργος*) – to approach Philoctetes under deception until such a time as he is either probed as amenable to the cause or disarmed.

One of the problems with Odysseus' character that persists, at any rate, is what Nussbaum calls his "devaluing of personal natures and of persuasion. Himself a man without a fixed nature, he treats other men as less than human."<sup>19</sup> This devaluing, as Nussbaum calls it, seems closely related to Blundell's earlier claim that Odysseus is deficient in the language of friendship. Nussbaum highlights for us passages in which Odysseus and Neoptolemus, under the former's influence, use the language of hunting Philoctetes as opposed to that of a civil dialogue.<sup>20</sup> In my view, the passage highlighted at lines 11-14 is particularly noteworthy. Here Odysseus speaks of catching Philoctetes by strategy. His language of "catching" (*αἱρήσειν*) suggests that Odysseus seeks to disarm Philoctetes through deception rather than probe whether he might become amenable to the cause. When Neoptolemus asks why it would be necessary to lead Philoctetes to Troy by guile rather than persuasion, Odysseus answers that through deception Philoctetes could not fail to be persuaded (103). We now begin to see, however, that Odysseus' methods are centered on "catching" the much-needed man, which may prove to be both deficient and corrosive for his cause. For a community of free citizens depends upon mutual regard – if Odysseus' methods prove corrosive to this foundation, the methods would stand in need of correction; if his methods are deficient, they stand in need of fulfillment.

One clear indicator that Odysseus' treatment of Philoctetes is deficient is his silence towards him about the persuasive mutual benefits of coming to Troy. In contrast to Odysseus, Herakles will tell Philoctetes that his labours will be famous; he will gain relief from his sickness; he will kill Paris, the source of his wretchedness; he will sack Troy and gain over-flowing spoils, etc. (1422-1430). Odysseus, for his part, merely tells Philoctetes that he must come

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19. Nussbaum, 35.

20. Nussbaum, 35-36.

willingly or by force (981-985), since Zeus has ordained it. There is hardly any attempt at meaningful persuasion and the situation escalates so that Philoctetes, having lost his bow, soon cries, οἴμοι τάλας. ήμᾶς μὲν ώς δούλους σαφῶς πατήση ἀρέψει φύσεν οὐδ' ἐλευθέρους: Ah wretched me! My father clearly begot me as a slave and not free (995-996).

On account of this, Nussbaum therefore describes Odysseus rightly, in my view, when she says that Odysseus' readiness to deceive commits him to guileful speeches when candour and persuasion might be most efficacious.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, once Odysseus' plot is revealed and Philoctetes must still be persuaded by words, Odysseus cannot vindicate his approach as he could earlier by saying that open discourse might fail at some time when the most effective course of action is of the utmost importance.<sup>22</sup> One alternative way in which Odysseus might justify his treatment of Philoctetes within the context of the oracle is through the appeal of the chorus to Neoptolemus. As Philoctetes sleeps, the chorus argues that Neoptolemus should flee with the bow, and in this way he would take advantage of the opportunity to "gain something great in a moment of strength" (838). Neoptolemus, of course, corrects them by clarifying that in the oracle Philoctetes must come to Troy himself, since the crown is his (841). But to this correction the chorus says, ἀλλά, τέκνον, τάδε μὲν θεός ὄψεται: But, child, a god may see to these things (843). This response may appear desperate at first. However, we should bear in mind that if the prophecy could be expected to come true, and Philoctetes is alive in that prophecy, and if the Greeks have the bow which Philoctetes would die without, it appears reasonable for the chorus, or for Odysseus, to expect that the theft of the bow and the threat of leaving would be conducive towards the fulfillment of the oracle.

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21. Nussbaum, 34.

22. I owe this point to Kevin Hawthorne when he argues in *Political Discourses at the End of Sophocles' Philoktetes* that Odysseus is a paternalistic representative of the greater good (246). In his article, Hawthorne associates Odysseus both with the 400 Oligarchs, among whom Sophocles was counted, as well as with the sophistic demagogues. Hawthorne, much like Nussbaum, argues that Odysseus' position has an initial attractiveness but that he later reveals himself to be flawed in character – for Hawthorne, as egotistic and vicious (247). An interesting addition that Hawthorne makes to show Odysseus' initial attractiveness is the parallel between him and what Aristotle reports about Sophocles: asked if it seemed good to him to establish the Four Hundred, Sophocles said that it did: "Why? Did this not seem to you to be evil?" "Yes," he said, "for there was nothing better to be done." Arist. *Rh.* 3.18.6. 246.

A significant obstacle for this latter justification is that Philoctetes would rather face death than join the expedition. Indeed, without a god's intervention, Philoctetes has all the power; Odysseus and the crew cannot leave him behind. Neoptolemus seems to perceive the nature of this problem when he says, κομπεῖν δ' ἔστ' ἀτελῆ σὺν ψεύδεσιν αἰσχῷον ὄνειδος: it is a pointless, shameful matter of reproach to ring loud with falsities (842). In Sophocles' *Philoctetes and the Teachings of the Sophists*, Rose provides a helpful analysis of Neoptolemus' approach to Philoctetes compared to that of Odysseus. According to Rose, Neoptolemus' approach is ultimately the best, yet Rose uniquely preserves at the same time an ambiguity about whether Neoptolemus' plans could naturally succeed. Insofar as Neoptolemus' approach would not naturally succeed, Odysseus' methods seem more excusable, even if still reprehensible.

The delicate ambiguity about Neoptolemus' approach, however, is threatened by interpretations of the play in which friendship or pity is the *sine qua non* of civil society.<sup>23</sup> In *Ethical Tragedy and Sophocles' "Philoctetes"*, Hawkins, for her part, has argued that Sophocles illustrates the ethical character of tragedy in this play; *Philoctetes* specifically concerns the moral development of Neoptolemus.<sup>24</sup> The moral development that the play illustrates for us, Hawkins says, is Neoptolemus' recovery of his native goodness after he has been misled by Odysseus' teaching.<sup>25</sup> Drawing on Blundell, Hawkins argues that Neoptolemus' native goodness is at odds with Odysseus' *σοφία*. For Blundell and for Hawkins, Odysseus sophistically blurs the distinction between the two different meanings of *σοφός* when he urges Neoptolemus to use the strategy of deception in order to appear "wise" and "good" later on (119). This blurring of meaning is sophistic, Hawkins says, because wisdom or prudence without goodness becomes

23. Blundell, for instance, says, "φιλία was so fundamental that an ancient audience might take it as self-evident that Odysseus is acting on its precepts [ . . . ] [and] according to this very code of friendship, he has shamefully maltreated Philoctetes" upon abandoning him (308).

24. Hawkins, Anne Hunsaker, "Ethical Tragedy and Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," in *The Classical World*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 338.

25. Ibid, 338-339, 341. The parallel here between Hawkins' position and Hawthorne's is notable: Hawthorne says, "In the final scene Neoptolemos reclaims his ethical "self" . . . Whatever the conclusion of the *agon* may be, the act itself of open, persuasive deliberation appears as a culminating good"(247).

unscrupulous cunning, a cleverness that is morally suspect.<sup>26</sup>

The alternative to Odysseus' sophistic brand of wisdom, Hawkins says, is Neoptolemus' innate disposition to act nobly. Although Odysseus is able to sophistically exploit Neoptolemus' noble nature – for instance, when he appeals to Neoptolemus' Achillean hunger for glory and renown and the promise of wisdom and virtue in the eyes of the community – Hawkins argues that Neoptolemus is rehabilitated by his empathic understanding of Philoctetes' plight. In addition, as a consequence of his empathic understanding, Neoptolemus is able to feel shame and to acknowledge that he has done wrong. Finally, when Neoptolemus feels shame, Hawkins argues that, "it is φιλία – love, affection, or friendship – that both forces and enables him to act on this knowledge,"<sup>27</sup> to make sound moral decisions, to become true to himself by becoming true to another.<sup>28</sup>

In Hawkins' account we therefore detect certain strains of argument that align with Blundell, Nussbaum, and Hawthorne. Like Blundell, for instance, Hawkins argues that Odysseus' sophism is corrosive for society to the extent that Odysseus' unscrupulous "capturing" counteracts the vital development of φιλία. In a manner similar to Nussbaum<sup>29</sup> and Hawthorne,<sup>30</sup> Hawkins draws our attention to the paradox of Odysseus urging Neoptolemus to depart from his birth – feeling compassion, shame, loyalty, and so on – while also depending on his fixed nature and trustworthiness for the plan to work.

The line of argumentation that Rose tempers in the accounts of Hawkin and Blundell is the position that friendship or compassion is what binds and underlies the social compact. Rose would not devalue the role of friendship in any way. Instead, Rose refers us to the striking juxtaposition of a society based on friendly concern for the best interests of one's friends, with a society based on an actual alignment of these best interests.<sup>31</sup> For instance, Philoctetes' permission for Neoptolemus to hold the bow is a symbol of their friendship – at this point, Philoctetes' also believes that their

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26. Ibid, 343.

27. Ibid, 345.

28. Hawkins, 341.

29. Nussbaum, 34.

30. Hawthorne, 248.

31. Rose, Peter, "Sophocles' Philoctetes and the Teachings of the Sophists," in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 80 (1976), 70.

interests align and has told Neoptolemus that there is no need for oaths (811). Yet when Neoptolemus later returns the bow in order to demonstrate that he is well disposed towards Philoctetes and to persuade him from a position of equality<sup>32</sup> – and Philoctetes says, “ah me, what shall I do? How will I distrust this man’s words?”(1350) – we find that each character’s perceived best interest diverges. The friendship between the two men does not determine the course of action; Philoctetes must invoke the pledge that Neoptolemus offered to take him homeward.<sup>33</sup>

Rose’s argument that Philoctetes displays a certain naiveté in his earlier belief concerning the lack of need for oaths or binding pledges in society<sup>34</sup> is persuasive, in my view, based on the above example. On the other hand, Rose is still able to retain part of Hawkins’ and Blundell’s position on the value of friendship and the dangers of sophism, while including Nussbaum’s interpretation that Odysseus is intending to act for the general welfare at the same time that he devalues the individual. According to Rose, Odysseus is presented as a spokesman of state authority imbued with sophistic educational doctrines.<sup>35</sup> This Odysseus “brings into sharp focus the sense of potential conflict between the ‘natural’ needs of the individual and the impositions of the community.”<sup>36</sup> Neoptolemus himself feels this tragic tension when he is torn between his desire to sack Troy and his eventual oath-sworn association with Philoctetes.

When Neoptolemus begins to realize the impasse between acting on behalf of the best interest as stated by Philoctetes, or on behalf of his own and the Greeks, Neoptolemus cries, ὦ Ζεῦ, τί δοάσω; δεύτερον ληφθῶ κακός, κρύπτων θ' ἀ μὴ δεῖ καὶ λέγων αἰσχιστ' ἐπῶν; O Zeus, what shall I do? Should I be taken twice as evil, concealing what it is not necessary to conceal while speaking

32. Hawthorne provides a very helpful discussion in his article on the way in which discourse stops when Neoptolemus tries to use persuasion from a position of strength (249). We see the risk of discourse from a position of strength, for example, when Philoctetes nobly says he would rather die than come before the Argives like a slave in binds (1016f, 1081f).

33. This detail provides an interesting and stark contrast with Blundell when she argues that Odysseus’ loyalty as a friend to the rest of the Greeks is impugned by the unflattering detail that he helped the expedition only under compulsion and to keep his oath (308).

34. Rose, 69.

35. Ibid, 81.

36. Ibid, 81-82.

most shameful things? (908-909). Philoctetes, on the one hand, who at this point is oblivious to the deception, cannot imagine why Neoptolemus is distressed and so believes that he would be acting true to his birth by aiding him. But to this Neoptolemus responds that if in fact he takes Philoctetes home, he shall appear shameful (904-906).

Rose's interpretation of this scene is compelling, for Neoptolemus passes beyond this aporia through his departure from Odysseus' sophistic plan and through his internalization of the shame ethic.<sup>37</sup> Unlike a sophist, who would do anything to appear just, the good natured individual feels appropriate shame before himself, and will not do something unjust only to appear just before others. The break with Odysseus, however, or rather the improvement upon his means, seems to revolve around more than this internalization of the standard of justice. For after Neoptolemus has reached his impasse about which society to act on behalf of – namely, Philoctetes or the expedition – Neoptolemus demonstrates that righteous action (*tό ἔνδικόν*) and what is helpful (*tό συμφέρον*) ought to be the motives of one's obedience to a society (926).

Whereas Odysseus uses sophistic deception for the "catch," and whereas Odysseus never relates subordination to long-term advantage for Philoctetes,<sup>38</sup> Neoptolemus instead offers him bonds of stouthearted friendship. Indeed, he reveals what it was not necessary to conceal. Like Herakles, Neoptolemus would divert responsibility for Philoctetes' evils from the expedition to god-sent happenings.<sup>39</sup> He also tells Philoctetes that he will sack Troy with his bow and acquire fresh gain, be called best among the Hellenes and be healed through Asclepius' art (1325-1346). Moreover, the harmonization between Neoptolemus' speech and that of Herakles seems clearly foreshadowed by the chorus at lines 137-140. They declare to Neoptolemus, who will eventually hold the bow of the gods, "O master, what is it necessary that we say or conceal from a suspicious man," *τέχνα γὰρ τέχνας ἐτέρας προύχει καὶ γνώμα παρ᾽ ὅτῳ τὸ θεῖον Διὸς σκῆπτρον ἀνάστεται:* For in the presence of the man who is made lord over the God's divine sceptre, art surpasses the other arts as does judgement.

Thus, it is by Neoptolemus' virtue that the prophecy is fulfilled and a surpassing craft and judgement found. To this

37. Rose, 74.

38. Ibid, 94.

39. As we noted earlier, Herakles calls Paris the source of Philoctetes' evils.

society, Odysseus' means appear inferior and corrosive. The ambiguity that remains appears to be simply this: although Herakles echoes Neoptolemus, Neoptolemus' judgement does not persuade Philoctetes in the end. Were it not for Herakles, Philoctetes would force Neoptolemus to take him home under pledge and to abandon his apparent best interest and Zeus' plan for Troy. On the human level of action, it appears that both Neoptolemus and Odysseus would fail by their chosen means. With this in mind, I believe that Odysseus is culpable, perhaps most of all, for ringing loud with pointless, shameful self-defeating deceits; in comparison, Neoptolemus is praiseworthy for acting justly, even if his mark is in the power only of Herakles.

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