

Heracles' Bow

ESSAYS ON THE RHETORIC AND

POETICS OF THE LAW

BY JAMES BOYD WHITE

RHETORIC OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

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PERSUASION AND COMMUNITY

IN SOPHOCLES' PHILOCTETES

This essay is meant to frame the book as a whole by establishing themes and questions that will run through it to the end. In it I analyze some of the ways in which character, community, and language are constituted in the speeches that make up the *Philoctetes*, especially in those conversations in which one speaker seeks to persuade another to a particular position. In this connection the play establishes with great clarity a contrast that has been fundamental in Western ethical thought, between treating another person as an object (or an instrument) of manipulation—as a “means” to an end—and treating him (or her) as one who has claims to autonomy and respect that are equal to one’s own: that is, as an “end” in himself. This contrast has a special and disturbing significance for someone who, like the lawyer, makes an art of persuading others.

In the course of life it happens again and again—in the family, the workplace, the street, the international arena—that a crisis arises in which we are faced with the possibility of establishing or losing community. Rhetoric as I use the term in this book—the art of “persuasion” in its broadest sense—is the art by which we address these possibilities. As our desires, our senses of ourselves, are seen to work together, we come together, for the moment or for a longer time, making a common world defined by a common set of mutually intelligible roles and activities; or, as we feel ourselves to be opposed, we divide into separate, perhaps hostile, groups or units. A community may be momentary, based upon a sense of common ground that is quickly lost or disproved (or even upon deception), or it may be stable and enduring. How do we—how can we—address these possibilities? What can we say to one another, or to ourselves, about our own desires and those of others, about who we are and who we want

to be, and with what possible meanings, what possible successes? Who do we become, what do we risk becoming, when one tack or another is taken? When, for example, is a persuasive success an ethical failure, or an ethical success a persuasive failure? What is the role of truth and sincerity in what we do?

For the lawyer these are especially critical and inescapable questions. A lawyer's professional day is largely made up of conversations, oral and written, in which the object is to persuade another to a particular view. In this sense he or she is a professional rhetorician, and must be concerned with the possibilities of rhetoric as a way of life. In this essay I want to work out a way of thinking about the ethics of persuasion by looking at Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, a play that has much to teach us about how persuasion works, and can work, and what it means to give yourself to a life of persuasion of one kind or another. The play consists of a series of persuasive communities that it contrasts with one another, inviting the audience to approve some, to condemn others. But it is about another activity as well, which it in fact exemplifies: the activity of drama (or of imaginative literature more generally); and we shall have something to ask about the nature of this activity too—is it also a kind of persuasion? An art of community-making? Do the resources of the theater shed light on what happens, and what can happen, in the law?

In both respects the ultimate concern of the play, like my own, is ethical. The central question it teaches us to ask is who we become, individually and collectively—who we can become—in our conversations with one another. What kind of selves, what kind of communities, do we establish with each other in our speech, especially in our persuasive speech? It addresses these questions in the context of a mythological Greek past recreated on the stage; we must address them in the context of modern American law; but the questions themselves, and many of their ramifications, are the same.

To ask these questions is necessarily to ask another, which will be with us throughout these essays: in what terms ought we to judge the communities we see and those we make? How, that is, should we talk about "success" and "failure" in persuasion and community, about what we admire or despise in ourselves and others? In this play we shall see Odysseus succeed in persuading Neoptolemus by using tactics that we cannot ethically admire: he treats him dishonestly and manipulatively, dealing with him, in our standard categories, not as an "end in himself" but as a "means" to another end. But this end, one could argue, involving as it does the taking of Troy and the fulfillment of fate, is a good one; and does Odysseus' despicable con-

duct not advance its achievement? By contrast, as we shall see, Neoptolemus tries to persuade Philoctetes at the end by a full and frank statement that recognizes the autonomy, worth, and liberty of the other—a very model of "good" persuasion—but this effort fails, at least in the obvious sense that Philoctetes remains obdurate. How are we to evaluate these two forms of persuasion? In forcing this question on our attention the play raises basic ethical issues concerning the degree to which ends justify means; whether ethical thought properly focuses on the consequences of conduct or upon its quality as honest (or otherwise virtuous); and what methods are best for defining such questions and thinking them through to conclusion.

On the point of method, for example, consider the meaning of the standard ethical position, which I invoked above, that one ought never—or at least not without great justification—treat another person as a "means to an end" rather than as an "end in himself." This formulation derives in modern philosophy from Kant, but from another point of view it is a restatement of the basic Christian ethic, and it also has roots in Aristotle's conception of friendship. One basic question about this formula is what it means, not as a matter of conceptual explication but as a matter of moral experience. What does it actually mean, that is, to treat another person as a "means" to an end, or, by contrast, as an "end in himself"? Only when we are clear about that can we even begin to address the question whether we should regard the imperative as absolute or as subject to qualifications, or to think about the proper qualifications, or even to decide whether this is a significant rule at all. But in what terms, by what process, can we best think about the difference between treating others as "ends" and as "means"? How can we best present these activities, these different ways of treating others, to our consciousness? In what terms, what language, can we describe and analyze and judge them?

The implicit position of Sophocles' play is one that I shall also maintain in different terms throughout these essays: that these questions can best be addressed in a language of art, and that a purely conceptual and logical language, like that of modern analytic philosophy, will always be incomplete or defective. I think, that is, that Sophocles' play teaches us what it means to treat another as a means, or as an end, with a clarity and intelligibility—a lucidity—as well as a force, that logical or abstract argument about such questions will of necessity lack. This point connects with another of my themes, which in turn relates to the ethics of legal persuasion: that law is best regarded as an art too, carried on in a language of art, a fact that is in my view large with consequence.

The narrative form in which these questions are presented in the play is this. Philoctetes lives alone on an uninhabited island in the Aegean where, because of a foul-smelling and festering wound on his foot, he was cast out ten years earlier by the Achaeans on their way to Troy. His wound was inflicted by a serpent that bit him when he stepped on sacred ground; his cries of pain, we are told, prevented the others from making proper sacrifices and libations. During his years on the island he has been able to live only because he has with him the wonderful bow and arrows of Heracles, given him for a kindness done.—Philoctetes lit his funeral pyre—and these are weapons that never miss. Now the Achaeans have been told by a soothsayer that they cannot capture Troy without that bow, and have sent Odysseus and Neoptolemus, Achilles' son, to bring it back.

These two actors are presented with an archetypal question of what I will call "constitutive rhetoric": how to bring into a community an isolated individual who is now outside it. The first question the play addresses is how they are to proceed, and that question is presented both as a practical one—what will work?—and as an ethical one—what is right for them to do?

The most obvious possibility, though the least talked about in this scene, is honest persuasion. For that to succeed, a speaker would have to find a way of talking about what has happened, and what will happen, that Philoctetes and the Achaeans could both accept, and which could thus serve as the ground of a newly constituted community between them. By "way of talking" I mean a whole language: a shared set of terms for telling the story of what has happened and what will happen, for the expression of motive and value, and for the enactment of those movements of the mind leading to a common end that we call reason. Whoever speaks to Philoctetes in this way must find a way to tell the story—the whole story—that leads naturally to his return. Such a common language, such a common story, is in fact what we mean by a community. The art of sincere statement by which this kind of genuine community is established can for our purposes be called, and in a restriction of the range of meaning of the Greek term is called by Sophocles, "persuasion" (*peithō*).

In the play Odysseus says that this kind of persuasion will simply not work against Philoctetes' intransigence—we can see, indeed, that an attempt might only put him on his guard—and that they must therefore practice persuasion of a different kind, a sort of trick or

deceitful stratagem (*dolos*). He tells Neoptolemus to win the confidence of Philoctetes by pretending to be sailing back to Greece after a humiliation at the hands of the Achaeans. (He is to say that they awarded his father's armor to Odysseus.) Neoptolemus should offer Philoctetes passage home, and this will enable them to get close enough to get his bow.

Neoptolemus objects that this kind of trickery is inconsistent with his most fundamental conceptions of honor, and urges the use of force (*bia*) or persuasion (*peithō*). But Odysseus explains that they have no alternative: force can never prevail against the weapons of Heracles, and persuasion too is bound to fail. Philoctetes would kill them if he knew who they were, and he could certainly not be talked into coming with them.

Neoptolemus is himself "persuaded" by Odysseus—in which sense of the word we shall soon discover—and goes along with the plan. The rest of the play is about his (and our) discovery of what that decision really means, both in practical and in ethical terms. As things work out Neoptolemus in fact obtains the bow, but he becomes so disgusted with himself that he returns it (over Odysseus' violent objection) and does what he wished to do in the first place: he seeks to persuade Philoctetes to come with them voluntarily, on the grounds that this will be best for him as well as for them. (His wound will be cured by the sons of Asclepius, and he will fulfill his fate and achieve great renown.) But Philoctetes remains obdurate and insists that Neoptolemus keep his promise to take him home. Neoptolemus is about to comply when Heracles miraculously appears and tells Philoctetes that he should indeed go to Troy, where he will be cured and win great glory. Philoctetes complies, and the play ends with his farewell to his island.

Even from this outline it can be seen that the play presents its audience with a real puzzle. We are led to despise Odysseus and to admire Neoptolemus' change of heart; yet Odysseus' way is shown to have "worked"—it got the bow—and Neoptolemus' way to have failed. The play itself seems to require the intrusion of a *deus ex machina* to save it from a chaotic and impossible ending. All this suggests two sets of questions. First, how are we to make sense of the play itself, as a work of art? What is Sophocles asking us to think and feel about the two modes of persuasion—the two kinds of character and community—opposed here, and how does he seek to evoke this response? (What kind of "persuasion" does the play itself engage in?) Second, what ought we to think about the substance of the questions that this play defines, both in general—as a matter of philosophical

ethics—and in the context of modern law? To focus on one example of particular significance to us: what kind of persuasion (*peithō* or *dolos*) does the lawyer practice, and what does it mean—what can the lawyer make it mean—that he or she does so?

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It is worth examining the initial conversation between Odysseus and Neoptolemus in some detail, for their argument about the proper way to approach Philoctetes is itself a performance of one kind of persuasion, one kind of community, and it sets forth the major polarity from which the play will proceed. This polarity, which is still alive for us both in the law and out of it, opposes two kinds of mind: the kind of mind, on the one hand, that naturally thinks in terms of ends and means (how can I get what I want?) and for which justification, if any, lies in results and probabilities (the greater good, or the right likelihood of it, justifies the lesser evil), and the kind of mind, on the other hand, that thinks of right and wrong in terms of general principles (cheating is wrong) or in terms of appropriateness to character (cheating is beneath me).

The circumstance that brings this opposition between Odysseus and Neoptolemus to the surface is another archetypal occasion for constitutive rhetoric. But instead of asking an outsider to join a community, as in their own approach to Philoctetes, this time two members of a community are faced with the task of establishing the terms upon which their own common activity will proceed. The questions are: what form that activity shall take; how, by what process of persuasion, that form shall be determined; what it—and their community—shall be said to mean; whether the enterprise will hold together to its end; and, what will provide part of the answer to all of the other questions, how its "end" should be imagined and defined.

For Odysseus it is all very simple: they are sent to obtain the bow, the only issue is how they may most certainly obtain it. His is a basic form of ends-means rationality, which naturally focuses on the possible and the impossible, on the probable and the improbable, and regards everything in the world, including itself, as an instrument to obtain the ends it is given. The only question is success. Odysseus does not in fact even argue that the end justifies the means, for justification is not an issue for him. (In the language of modern sports, winning is not the most important thing; it is the only

thing.)¹ This is his view not only of the way they should approach Philoctetes, but, as we shall see, of the way he should treat Neoptolemus as well.

Neoptolemus' position, by contrast, is based upon his sense of his own character or identity. His reason for balking at the use of stratagem is self-centered, almost aesthetic: deceit is beneath his dignity. He rests on his nature and paternity: he is a certain kind of person, in part by reason of his birth, and it is his sense of who he is that will be his ethical guide.² His initial response to Odysseus' suggestion is a kind of instinctive reaction, learned but not wholly understood: for him force and persuasion are both acceptable, but deceit is not. His objection to deceit has nothing to do with recognizing Philoctetes' autonomy or value as a person (for force is by nature coercive) but rests rather upon his sense of what is appropriate for him, Neoptolemus, to do. His central conception of ethics is, naturally enough, an integrated response to circumstance: "when I am pained by hearing advice I hate to do it," he says (line 86). Later, as he contemplates performing the deceitful plan, he asks Odysseus how he could possibly carry himself—*pōs blepōn* (line 110)—while speaking such words; in this he reveals his sense that, like his conduct, his speech must be authentic to him, as indeed it is in his conversation with Odysseus. In this sense dishonesty is not only wrong but simply impossible for him.

He expresses his substantive position in a language of traditional moralism: he would rather fail (*hamartanō*) in a manner appropriate to his class and ideal (the Greek word is *kalōs*) than prevail in a shabby way (*kakōs*) (lines 94–95). At this point these terms simply express his

1. Odysseus does say that if they obtain the bow there will be a gain (*kerdōs*) (line 111), and that the Achaeans will suffer if Neoptolemus refuses (line 67). But for him those are both *appeals*, not justifications. Later the Chorus weakly defends him on the ground that he pursues the collective good (line 1145), but not much is made of it; and in any event this justification would work only if Odysseus' plan in fact advanced the greater good, which, as we shall see below, it does not.

If Odysseus were to justify himself, how would he do it? As a utilitarian, says Martha Nussbaum (in her interesting article, "Consequences and Character in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Philosophy and Literature* [1976]: 25–51), and it is true that utilitarianism entails ends-means rationality of Odysseus' kind. But that mode of thought can serve other ends as well, and there is in Odysseus no commitment to the conception of the greatest happiness or to the importance of others. Rather, the overriding stated value is that of the group enterprise, whatever it may be, and without any judgment as to its value. Odysseus is more fascist than Benthamite.

2. The audience of the play would all know his father's remark to Odysseus in the *Iliad*: "As I hate the gates of Hades I hate that man who hides one thing in his heart and says another" (book 9, lines 312–13).

culturally acquired sense of what is appropriate and do not yet have the kind of moral weight they will come to have at the end of the play. While for Neoptolemus the proper ground of ethical judgment is character rather than ends-means rationality, his conception of character is not yet mature. A very young man indeed, he has been properly raised to a set of ideals but has never been forced to think about them and make them his own. Part of the movement of the play is in fact the process by which his acquired instinctive views become truly his own, in the double sense that he is both able to defend them and willing to pay the price they exact. Naturally enough, in the course of this process both the views themselves, and the man who holds them, are transformed.

The method by which Odysseus persuades Neoptolemus to abandon the sense of character upon which he relies, to "give himself" to Odysseus for "a single day" (lines 83-84), is a performance in practice of the doctrine Odysseus espouses. It is a skillful seduction of a standard kind: not *peithō* but *dolos*. Odysseus waits to present Neoptolemus with the issue until the very moment of action, thus depriving him of the possibility of thought and reflection; and he springs upon him now, for the first time, the news that he will not be able to achieve his own great destiny as the destroyer of Troy unless they obtain the bow. This is an end that Neoptolemus cannot deny, and he acquiesces in the means necessary to attain it, shameful to him though they are. Odysseus thus disintegrates Neoptolemus' sense of self, his only ethical guide, by establishing an unforeseen conflict within it. The way this kind of persuasion works here, as elsewhere in the world, is that the successful persuader gets what he wants now and leaves the other to try to put his life and character together again afterwards on his own. This is one performance of what it may mean to regard another as an instrument.

But why is Neoptolemus led so readily to accept a position inconsistent with his character, or what he calls his "nature"? One might say his ambition or selfishness is appealed to against his virtue, but that is not quite right. Rather, Odysseus appeals to his sense of himself as the "one who will overthrow Troy" to meet the force of a resistance that is itself rooted in another instinctive sense of self. He appeals to him against himself. He thus takes advantage of a difficulty that is built into Neoptolemus' mode of thought, which provides no way in which conflicts in his sense of character can be addressed. For one who thinks as Neoptolemus does this difficulty will arise repeatedly, especially where a part of one's self-conception is as "one who succeeds," because it will always be an issue whether the

steps that seem necessary to succeed are consistent with the rest of one's character. To avoid being destabilized over and over again, Neoptolemus must rest on something different from instinct and an acquired sense of rightness. His position must be reflected upon, its limits and costs must be acknowledged and made part of the self, before it can become the ground of life.

Disintegration is also enacted in the language that Odysseus brings Neoptolemus to accept. For example, Odysseus accepts Neoptolemus' claim that what he asks is beneath him, and urges him to do it anyway: "since victory is sweet, do what I ask"; "we shall show that we are just another time"; "for one shameless (*anaides*) part of a day give me yourself, and for the rest of life be called the most righteous of men" (lines 80-85)—as though those terms could co-exist in that way! Odysseus' sense of character is so defective as to allow him to think consistency irrelevant. He restates Neoptolemus' willingness to use force but not deceit as a willingness to use force but not words, saying that he himself has found both to be useful instruments. In this he obliterates Neoptolemus' distinction between them, which is not between words and action, but between shameful and honorable action, and thus obliterates the distinction between shame and honor—the central ethical distinction of this world. Odysseus implicitly expresses contempt for Neoptolemus' concern with virtue: he conjoins the verb for being clever in the way that he recommends (*sophisthēnāi*) with a word for thief (*klopetus*) (line 77), with which it is utterly impossible to associate Neoptolemus' central values—*agathos*, *kalos*, and so on. At the end of the interchange, Odysseus claims that by virtue of his conduct Neoptolemus will earn a reputation as one who is wise (*sophos*) and good (*agathos*: here used in the sense of successful person); and Neoptolemus agrees, saying he will throw off all sense of shame (*aischunē*) (lines 119-20). This combination of terms is simply impossible in the Greek of the day, a paradox like the Socratic paradoxes, but unlike those purely destructive, not constructive. The deliberate effect of Odysseus' persuasion (*dolos*) has been the disintegration both of Neoptolemus' language and of his sense of himself.

What will it mean for Neoptolemus to do what he has agreed to do? Odysseus has given a simple version—it will mean "success"—but in terms that are impossible to accept, even for a mo-

ment. The play now shows us what this deception will mean in other terms.

Philoctetes' appearance is preceded by a choral ode that tells his story of abandonment and endurance, and as this happens the audience suddenly begins to see things from Philoctetes' point of view, and they look very different indeed. When Philoctetes himself appears on stage, as the soul of frankness, warmth, and generosity, we see before us the person who is to be injured. The man who has been spoken of as an instrument in the language of Odysseus now becomes a person: a center of meaning, experience, and autonomy. Our developing sense of who Philoctetes is makes Neoptolemus' deception of him increasingly terrible.

In the opening scene we witnessed the development of a single relationship, that between Odysseus and Neoptolemus. Now we see the simultaneous growth of two relations, both of them between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes: the relation of generous friendship that Philoctetes offers (and Neoptolemus pretends to accept), and the relation of destruction implicit in Neoptolemus' plan of deceit. Neoptolemus' story of injury at the hands of Odysseus and his offer of passage home, indeed his very standing as a Greek and his heroic connections, stimulate in Philoctetes a capacity for generous friendship and trust. We respond to his expressions with warm admiration of our own, and so does Neoptolemus, who is eventually so overcome by his response that he abandons his original plan. The pretended friendship that Neoptolemus originally creates as a matter of stratagem or device becomes in this way real. The intended manipulator is persuaded by an unintended appeal that he cannot deny.

What is the nature of this appeal? Philoctetes greets Neoptolemus as a Greek, with a sense of love for his language and culture; he greets him as the son of Achilles, with admiration for his father; he greets him as a member of the Achaean host, with a sense of shared heroic values; he greets his news of Achilles' death, and that of others of his friends, with an authentic grief that Neoptolemus himself must share. As the two men talk they share their stories, and these seem to have a shared meaning: as Philoctetes has been abandoned by Odysseus and the sons of Atreus, Neoptolemus says that he has been deprived of his arms—his inheritance, his manhood—by the same people. The two men thus create a common space based upon a sense of common injury at the hands of the same actors.

But on one side this is all duplicitous. How can it then have the effect on us, or on Neoptolemus, that it seems to? How indeed can it

be that Neoptolemus, the open-hearted, authentic young man, incapable of duplicity, is able to carry out this program of cynical deceit? (Remember his question to Odysseus—"how can I carry myself while speaking such things [*prós blepōn*]?"')

The answer is that, despite his conscious intentions, Neoptolemus is at the most basic level in fact not dishonest: both his own story and his responses to Philoctetes' story are in a deep sense true. The false surface version of his story, that Odysseus has deprived him of the arms of his father, has its deeper true version (to which we have just been witness) in the scene in which Odysseus does deprive Neoptolemus of himself—"give me yourself for just a shameless part of a single day." In thus disintegrating him Odysseus has deprived Neoptolemus of his capacity as a man, of his nature and inheritance as a coherent and virtuous self speaking a coherent language—of his "arms" indeed. What Neoptolemus pretends is in fact true: he and Philoctetes are bound together by similar injuries at the same hands.

As Neoptolemus is not yet a man, Philoctetes has been deprived of his manhood; in this scene, they share that plight, and the rest of the play restores both of them to maturity and autonomy. By the end Neoptolemus has his "arms" back, for he acquires control of his own actions and his own moral life. (He has his arms back in a more literal sense as well, for, as we shall see, at one point he successfully stands up to Odysseus' physical threats.) He has also got his language back: the stratagems he has employed are now seen as shameful. "I have taken this bow dishonorably (*aischirōs*) and against justice" (line 1234). At the end of the play Philoctetes has likewise recovered the proper use of his arms, in heroic action, and has accepted both his cure and his role in the world. All this means that Neoptolemus' false story is in a deep sense true; that his response to Philoctetes is not false but true; that the relation of friendship that he starts out to create deceitfully is in fact sincere; and that this relation becomes the center of the play and of Neoptolemus' future growth and health, his ground of action and life.

This explains the dramatic appropriateness of a feature of this play that some readers have found puzzling, namely the scene in which the false trader—the Emporos—appears to warn Philoctetes and Neoptolemus that Odysseus and the Achaeans are after them. This scene renders explicit and vivid—almost in the manner of Aeschylus—the psychological truth that Odysseus is indeed a common enemy in mortal pursuit of both of them, seeking to reduce them to instruments of his plan.

But this is to get ahead of ourselves. The stages by which Neoptolemus and Philoctetes move to their final positions are of considerable importance. In presenting this development Sophocles shows us a different kind of persuasive community from the one we saw Odysseus create, a community in which people treat each other as "ends," not as "means"—a community of friendship. When Neoptolemus agrees to take Philoctetes with him, after the report by the Emporos, and they begin to collect Philoctetes' possessions, he asks whether he will be permitted to touch and handle the bow (line 661). Philoctetes says of course: in return for his extraordinary virtue (*areté*) this will be granted him alone among men. Neoptolemus marks the moment by saying how glad he is to have formed this friendship with Philoctetes, using terms that define the ideal community as reciprocal: "one who knows how to give and receive benefits is a friend beyond price" (lines 672-73). Philoctetes is suddenly overcome by his disease and, terrified that he will lose control of his bow, he gives it to Neoptolemus, not as a favor this time but as a trust, which Neoptolemus accepts. As Philoctetes falls into a coma, Neoptolemus pledges that he will not forsake him (line 812).

The Chorus urges Neoptolemus to take advantage of the moment and leave with the bow, but Neoptolemus refuses. He has come to see that the bow is worth nothing without the man: "his is the crown, it is he the god told us to bring" (line 841). And when Philoctetes awakes to the light and discovers that he has not been abandoned in his sickness, but watched over, he is full of praise and gratitude.

Neoptolemus is full of disgust at himself but nonetheless tells Philoctetes that he must go to Troy, weakly promising that this will lead to Philoctetes' cure. Philoctetes instantly demands the return of his bow; Neoptolemus refuses, justifying himself by reference to necessity, justice, and self-interest, all of which, he says, require him to "obey those in power" (line 925)—that is, to continue to perform the function that has been assigned him. Philoctetes, discovering that he has been betrayed once more, now expresses with an almost operatic grandeur his pain and rage and anguish. This erodes Neoptolemus' resolve further, but just at the moment when he expresses real indecision—he asks the Chorus, "What shall we do?" (line 974)—Odysseus appears on the scene and takes over. He threatens to force Philoctetes to come. For Philoctetes the thought of this is simply torture; in response Odysseus says, in effect, "Very well, we shall give you

what you want: we shall leave you, but without the bow by which alone you can live" (lines 1054-62).

Neoptolemus and Odysseus then depart; the Chorus sanctimoniously tells Philoctetes that this is really all his own fault, that Odysseus is really acting for the greater good, and so on. But from this intolerable degradation Neoptolemus rescues Philoctetes and the audience: he returns to give back the bow. His language is now clear: he will undo his prior wrong (*hamartia*: now defined as a moral "missing of the mark," not, as it was earlier in the play, as a merely material failure) by giving back the bow he dishonorably (*aischirōs*) obtained (lines 1224, 1228, 1234); he sees that what is just (*dikaíos*) is superior to the merely clever (*sophos*), which Odysseus has been representing and by which both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes have been deprived of their arms, their manhood, and their standing as persons (line 1246). Equally important, from his new position Neoptolemus can now see and understand with clarity the meaning of the soothsayer's statement, for he now understands the circumstance to which it was addressed. What is actually required is of course not the bow—a mere instrument—but the voluntary return of Philoctetes himself; for only this can heal the moral breach in the Achaean community that was caused by the abandonment of Philoctetes.

When Odysseus now threatens him—"see my hand on my sword?" (line 1254-55)—Neoptolemus faces him down, and before this display of resolve Odysseus simply wilts away. Neoptolemus likewise stands up to Philoctetes when he, with bow restored, suddenly takes aim at the reappeared Odysseus. Neoptolemus grabs his arm and restrains him from shooting, saying, "This is honorable (*kalos*) for neither you nor me" (line 1304).

The community established by Philoctetes and Neoptolemus thus includes a wealth of constitutive social practices: expressions of pleasure at a shared language and culture; affirmation of a shared history; participation in shared grief; supplication; expressions of gratitude; pledges and promises (Neoptolemus promises not to leave without Philoctetes, Philoctetes promises to let Neoptolemus touch the bow); the granting of a favor requested (touching the bow); the offer and acceptance of a trust (when the bow is actually given); the movement into a relation between substitute father and substitute son (Neoptolemus never saw Achilles and until the end of the play is in need of a father; Philoctetes constantly addresses him as "child" or "son"); and—a practice for which we have no name but which is essential to

healthy life—the solicitous attendance at the side of one incapacitated by illness. The protective concern, maternal in character, that Neoptolemus here grants Philoctetes is just what the Achaeans denied him. And in one wonderful moment Philoctetes shows what it is to pay attention to another person and his story: when Neoptolemus tells his false tale about being deprived of his father's arms, Philoctetes says, "But how could Ajax have allowed that to happen?" (line 410-11). For him the story is real, and he responds to it fully; in so doing he both recognizes the experience of another and, in his admiration for Ajax, activates his own heroic values (which are now overridden most of the time by his sense of injury). Contrast with all this the social practices established in the conversation between Neoptolemus and Odysseus: a kind of competitive and deceptive argument between them and a shared participation, on unequal terms, in a manipulative plot (*dolos*). One can easily see how Neoptolemus was persuaded to abandon his original aim and to commit himself to a different kind of life.

One consequence of the fullness and beauty of Neoptolemus' developing friendship with Philoctetes is that his abuse of it is a wrong even worse than Odysseus' abuse of his relation with Neoptolemus. Odysseus destabilized for a moment the character of one who trusted him by suddenly activating an unsuspected conflict that the other could not handle, in this way persuading him to engage in conduct of which he would later repent. But Neoptolemus' self-disgust, his ultimate repudiation of his own conduct was almost certain; in some sense the seduction was thus likely to prove, as it did prove, educational, teaching Neoptolemus his own true values and something of his own—and others'—susceptibilities to shameful action. But Neoptolemus' planned deception of Philoctetes works in a different way. It stimulates trust, hope, and generosity in a damaged man only to trample on them; it calls forth a person's central capacities for social and personal life, and then deliberately injures them. The natural consequence is the destruction of Philoctetes' capacity for community and all that depends upon community. This deception threatens a real destruction of the self; it is perhaps a form of what a Christian would call the sin against the Holy Ghost.

When Neoptolemus restores the bow he gives himself the opportunity to do what he thought should have been done in the first place, that is, to achieve his mission of bringing Philoctetes back to the Achaean community not by deceit (*dolos*) nor, as he now sees, by force (*bia*), but by persuasion (*peithō*). And what he means by persuasion is not the art of manipulating others to adopt one's position, but the art of stating fully and sincerely the grounds upon which one thinks common action can and should rest.

I am very pleased to hear you praise my father and me, but now hear what I want from you. It is necessary for men to bear the fortunes that the gods give. But if someone willingly clings to his injuries, as you do, it is not right to have either forgiveness or pity for him. You have become wild, and reject all advice, even from one who counsels you in good will, whom you hate as if he were a hostile enemy.

All the same I will speak, and I call upon Zeus who supports the Oath; you mark what I say and write it in your mind.

You suffer this disease by the fortune of the gods, for you came too near the guardian of Chryse, the snake that secretly protected the roofless sacred ground, watching over it. Now know this: from this terrible disease there shall be no relief, so long as the sun rises in one place and sets in another, until you of your own free will go to the plains of Troy and meet the sons of Asclepius among us. By them you will be calmed from your disease, and you will then emerge, with this bow and with me, as the destroyer of the city.

I shall tell you how I know these things. We captured a Trojan, Helenus their best seer, who said plainly that these things should happen; and he added that Troy must fall this very summer, or he should give himself up to be killed for speaking falsely.

Now that you know these things, yield willingly. Great is the increase of your honor: to be chosen as the best of the Greeks and by taking Troy, the source of sorrow, to win the highest fame. (Lines 1314-46)

What are the characteristics of this speech? Neoptolemus begins by calling upon the kind of willingness to engage in sincere conversation that has been defined by him, by Philoctetes, and by the play itself as a central feature of proper community, proper character, and

proper persuasion. He seeks to constitute his audience as one who will attend, and do so in his own interest. He claims that Philoctetes is harboring his sense of injury, and he justifies this view, to Philoctetes and to us, by locating his present request in a transformed narrative of Philoctetes' life. This story defines Philoctetes not as one who simply "suffers terribly" nor as one who "suffers at the hands of the hated Achaeans," as Philoctetes wants to do, but as one who suffers for a reason that can be understood and stated. He suffers because he stepped on the sacred ground. It is not an issue whether he was at fault in doing so, for the point of Neoptolemus' statement is neither to blame nor to excuse Philoctetes for taking that step. Similarly, it is not an issue whether the Achaeans were right or wrong to abandon him: there is no discussion of the necessity of the abandonment—for example, whether their sacrifices really were disturbed, as Odysseus claimed (lines 8-9)—or of available alternatives to it. The question is seen as one of causation, not blame, and this implicitly suggests that cure, rather than revenge, can be the aim. To stop the obsessive (if understandable) process of blaming and excusing frees the mind to think about how the wound can be healed: by the "arts of Asclepius" as Neoptolemus puts it, or, more significantly for us, by Philoctetes' reintegration into the community of which he was once a part. On Philoctetes' side, he must give up his love for his own illness. What is required of him, before he can be cured, is forgiveness—forgiveness of others and forgiveness of himself, for it was his own misstep that brought about the injury and the subsequent abandonment.

Neoptolemus' speech thus operates at once as a recognition of Philoctetes' experience; as a reinterpretation of it in light of what else is known; and as a conversion, by narrative, of the intolerable into the tolerable. It has obvious parallels with psychoanalysis, and in both cases the ruling values are truthfulness, recognition, and integration.

But this persuasive statement in fact fails, and fails for reasons that Neoptolemus should be able to understand. As he asked of Odysseus, "How can I carry myself in making this deception (*pōs blepōn*)?" Philoctetes now in essence asks, "How can I come before the others, how can I possibly join with them, after what has happened?" (lines 1352-57). He insists that Neoptolemus keep his promise to take him home. Neoptolemus is about to comply when Heracles appears and restates to Philoctetes the story of his life and the necessity and propriety of his return. This time Philoctetes accepts and is persuaded.

6

How are we to read and understand this sequence of events, especially Neoptolemus' ultimate failure and the need for Heracles' intervention at the end? And what of the fact that Odysseus' method of persuasion succeeded? What do these events mean as part of what Sophocles is saying in the play, and what do we, independently of the play, think of the issues it presents? We can start by returning to the initial polarity between Odysseus and Neoptolemus, out of which the play moves.

In reading the opening scene one quickly sees that Odysseus habitually regards everything and everybody as an instrument, as a means to an end, but the consequences of this habit of thought emerge only gradually in the course of the play. Consider, for example, his mistake as to the meaning of the soothsayer's prophecy, which provides an assumption essential to his argument in the opening scene. Odysseus reads the prophecy as requiring the two men simply to "get the bow" as though the weapon had a kind of magic that would automatically win the war for them. This kind of reading is natural for a mind given to his instrumental way of thinking. But as the play proceeds we learn that the soothsayer's command is to obtain not just the bow but Philoctetes and that Philoctetes' return to the community must be voluntary. And we learn this fact in an interesting way: partly by a kind of accident, as one speaker or another states the authoritative command differently and with varying degrees of reliability—the first time we learn that the Achaeans must persuade Philoctetes himself is from the Emporos, whom we know to be in some respects dishonest—but much more importantly in another way, which has great relevance to the interpretation of all authoritative texts, legal among the rest. For the true meaning of the command is most reliably discovered by Neoptolemus gradually, as he matures, not by learning more about the actual words the soothsayer uttered but by learning more about the situation to which he spoke.

To one who learns to see things and to think about them as Neoptolemus does, and as we do too, it is not only immoral but unrealistic to think that all that is required here is the physical acquisition of an instrument, an inert bow and its arrows. What is required, as anyone with eyes can see—and this is after all what the soothsayer saw—is that the breach in the community created by Philoctetes' abandonment must be healed, and it can only be healed by his free and voluntary return. He must become a member of the community once

more. This means that deceit cannot get the Achaeans what they want (nor indeed can Neoptolemus' original alternative, force): only persuasion, and persuasion of the sincere and authentic kind by which community is established (*peititō*), can work.

To conceive of what goes wrong as a matter of reading: Odysseus shows that he is incapable of reading a perfectly sensible directive in an intelligent way.³ In the law, we call such readers literalists: they are given to reading authoritative texts as "literal" commands without regard to their evident purpose and nature and without regard to the reverse of understandings and commitments that render them comprehensible. Such a reader, then as now, is in fact likely to miss not only the true meaning of a text but its very words, as Odysseus does: to fail even at the task of literalism itself. The modern lawyer can perhaps thus take some heart from what Sophocles shows him: Odysseus is not a model of the crafty lawyer after all, unscrupulous but effective, rational but base, but an example of a lawyer who is bad in both senses of the term. At just the level where his claims for himself are most seriously made, that he is a pragmatic success, he is in fact a total failure.

What Odysseus misses is the reality of the social world, and its power. His cast of mind, which itemizes the world into a chain of *desiderata* and mechanisms, is incapable of understanding the reality and force of shared understandings and confidences. This error appears today in the common idea that our "wealth" is material—the bringing of resources under individual control for purposes of exchange or consumption—while in fact our most important wealth is social and cultural: confidence in the reliability and good sense and generosity of our neighbors; trust in the reciprocal practices by which community is established; pleasure in finding, and making, shared meanings, and in elaborating them cooperatively; or, in terms of this play, confidence and pleasure in those activities by which Neoptolemus and Philoctetes create a world of action and significance. Think of our own desire for physical safety: whether one speaks of international relations, city streets, the workplace, or the family, the healthy and just community achieves a kind of security that mere force can never attain.

The ultimate fact about Odysseus is his disappearance into nothingness at the end. Once Neoptolemus faces him down, he evaporates.

3. This is made especially plain in the Emporos' account, in which Helenus says that Philoctetes must be persuaded to come, whereupon Odysseus instantly undertakes to go get him, by force if necessary (lines 610–18).

rates off the stage, to reappear only as a possible target for Philoctetes. The man whose great claim is to be a source of competent energy ends up literally nothing at all. The power of evil is only apparent, for in the realm of character and community it has no force, no actuality, against an integrated mind.

This beautifully dramatized evaporation is implicit in Odysseus' mode of thinking, for one thing ends-means rationality cannot do its choose its ends. They must be taken as givens. Compare the most systematic modern version of this kind of thought, market economics, in which ends are explicitly taken as external to the system: preferences are whatever any person happens to prefer, and all preferences are equal until given different values through the prices paid or obtained for them. Because Odysseus cannot think about the proper choice of ends, his whole being is spent in the service of ends that he cannot examine. At one point he claims to be one who aims to "conquer always" (line 1052), but this is not inconsistent with what I have said. It is the statement of the purely competitive mind, who has no values except as those are defined by what other people want, like the little boy who wants nothing in the world but what his brother happens to have. As for the choice of means, Odysseus' attention to probability and improbability, cost and benefit, locates the authority for that choice outside the self, in the world, for the only question is what will work best. Such a mind cannot constitute a self.

Odysseus in fact makes this consequence of his thought explicit when he tells Neoptolemus to give himself for just one shameful day, then to be the most honorable of men, and when he says that he himself is capable of virtue when that is the game, but not when it is not: he says that he is whatever the situation calls for (line 1049). From one point of view this is familiar cynical advice not to be a goody-goody. From another, however, it is a horrifying statement of a person without a self, without a soul, for Odysseus seems wholly unaware that who he is today has, or can have, any relation to who he will be tomorrow, or was yesterday. For him the self has no continuity but is a series of discrete and unconnected actions and moments of consciousness, a set of fragments. This means that rational thought about, and action in, the social and cultural realm is impossible. Think of the social practices that Neoptolemus and Philoctetes share: could Odysseus pledge, or promise, or give or receive a trust?

The central value of this play is integration: the putting together of parts of the self, parts of experience, parts of language, into meaningful wholes—like Heracles' version of Philoctetes' story and Neoptolemus' final version of his own language of value—and putting

together people into communities. But Odysseus stands for disintegration, not only in his methods of persuasion, by which he momentarily disintegrates Neoptolemus for the moment and by which Neoptolemus threatens Philoctetes with disintegration, but in himself: he ends as a disintegrated nonentity.

If Odysseus is the pure "consequentialist" who fails to understand consequences of the most important kind, Neoptolemus is an exemplar of what can be called "character ethics" who at first fails to maintain his character. But as Odysseus becomes an increasingly destructive and empty version of himself, Neoptolemus is shown to develop, largely through the friendship of Philoctetes, into a mature and autonomous person who knows and can defend his own values. When Philoctetes' intractability presents him with a conflict between two different futures for himself, as one who is successful in destroying Troy and as one who is true to his pledge to and friendship with Philoctetes, Neoptolemus knows which to choose. This time he does not disintegrate.

As for Philoctetes, he is carefully placed with respect to each of the others. As Neoptolemus is too readily persuaded, Philoctetes is too intransigent: he should, as Heracles says, be willing to be persuaded in the way Neoptolemus ultimately seeks to do. And as Odysseus too narrowly focuses his attention on "the bow," and in doing so fails to see the reality of social life and of shared meaning, when Philoctetes focuses obsessively on his injury and gives it a priority over all other facts he misses much of the same reality. At the end Neoptolemus acquires some of Philoctetes' resolve, Philoctetes some of his amenability to persuasion: they both achieve maturity and health.

As we saw above, what ultimately persuades Philoctetes is a new narrative, a version of his life that recognizes what is at the moment most real to him about his experience—his injury—but also places it in a context consisting of what else is real to him, and about him: his heroic valor, his love of his comrades, his fated role as the destroyer of Troy. The past, the present, and the future are put together in a new order, the central force and achievement of which is its combination of recognition and integration.

What are we then to make of the fact that Neoptolemus' noble form of persuasion fails and Odysseus' ignoble form succeeds? Does this not upset the whole structure of value I have just outlined and undermine what seems to be the most important meaning of the play?

This is the central difficulty to which the play is written, and under-

standing it requires two initial clarifications. Despite what I have just suggested, the play makes clear that Neoptolemus' ultimate attempt to persuade Philoctetes in fact fails not because it is weaker than some alternative, but either because nothing would ever have succeeded against such intransigence or because the prior deception has alienated Philoctetes irreparably. We simply do not know what the result would have been had Neoptolemus come to Philoctetes at the beginning, explaining that Helenus had prophesied his cure, and so forth, and urging his return. As it is, Philoctetes has just suffered a terrible abuse of trust at the hands of Odysseus and Neoptolemus, and it may be this that makes him so intractable. The proper kind of persuasion might have led to successful reconciliation and a proper reading of the play will keep that possibility in mind, at least as part of the background. (The failure may be the consequence, that is, not of the use of Neoptolemus' methods but those of Odysseus.) And in any event, as I suggested above, Odysseus' methods proved not to be successful. The play in fact shows that they will fail every time that true cooperation is required, for all that can possibly be obtained this way is an instrument or object, a "bow," and not the creation of a functioning community. The failure of Neoptolemus' persuasion, if failure there be, is thus not to be taken as an argument for the methods of Odysseus, which will fail even more certainly, at least on occasions like this one.

Where this leaves us is with the enforced recognition of certain central ethical and practical truths: that there is no sure-fire method of attaining your ends when those ends require the cooperation of others and that to recognize the freedom and autonomy of another, which is the only real possibility if one is to succeed at all, is necessarily to leave room for the exercise of that freedom and autonomy in ways you do not wish.

But there is more to it than that, for the play is at its heart about the conditions under which ethical and practical thought take place, about their ontology and epistemology if you will. Here its major point is that the only circumstances under which ends-means rationality might be rational never exist, for our thought must always take place on conditions of uncertainty that render that kind of "rationality" worse than useless. These conditions require us to think in other, more difficult, ways and to attend first and last to questions of character and community. The only rational "ends"—the only ends we can confidently use as guides to conduct—are conceptions of ourselves and of our relations with others, not materially describable states of affairs.

How does Sophocles establish these conditions of uncertainty and make them vivid? In this connection consider our initial mistake about the meaning of the prophecy, and the dominance of Odysseus' interpretation of it over us and Neoptolemus alike in the opening scene. As readers (or as an audience), we at first share Odysseus' mistake, for how could we do otherwise? We accept his statement of the premises of the expedition and only gradually come to perceive the conditions of life that render those premises impossible. We are led to misread so that our reading can be corrected.

When we learn that the meaning of the prophecy is uncertain, we at first want to know "what it says," that is, what its words are. This, we think, will enable us to judge what the characters should do. But in the real world we live always in uncertainty, without such clear prophecies or other directives; our hunger for clarity will not be satisfied; and we must accept the fact that our ethical and moral imperatives must in part be constructed by us—as the meaning of the prophecy in this play ultimately is—out of the materials of the world with which we are presented, out of the evident meanings and demands of the situation. In not giving us a reliable version of the prophecy until the very end—and even then giving it to us in a different form—and in showing us that we can nonetheless judge what is right, the play teaches us to accept the responsibilities of maturity and the conditions of uncertainty on which human life is led.

This suggests an answer to one who responds to the play by saying: "But don't we sometimes need only the bow and not the man? And then what Odysseus does would be justified, wouldn't it?" The answer is this: we do not know—we can never know—that we need the bow and not the man. To think that we do, or might, need only the bow, and to contrive on that basis is to commit ourselves to a course that is irrational as well as unethical.

Our thought about ethics and justice, about our practical social and political lives, must acknowledge that the facts, the imperatives, and the motives of ourselves and others are not fixed but uncertain, in a sense always made by us in conversation with each other. The conditions for pure ends—means rationality never exist. The habit of mind that yearns for these methods and their certainties is bound to be delusive, and ultimately—despite its claims to superior rationality—to be irrational, because it will not be in accordance with the nature of our world and our experience. The only way to function rationally in these domains is to recognize the radical uncertainty in which we live; to proceed by trial and error; to operate with a constant pressure towards openness; to acknowledge the necessity of community and

cooperation both to the definition and to the attainment of any of our "ends"; to realize that one aim of life is the transformation of our own perceptions, wishes, and selves; and to regard the central intellectual imperative as the integration of all we can perceive, of all that we are, into meaningful wholes.

A second reality made vivid by the play is its insistence that all social action requires community and that community can never be compelled. Slaves will revolt, spouses will divorce, workmen will unite, partners will resign, allies will default, and often they will do so in the face of death itself. Our practical and moral lives are radically communal—unless perhaps we live alone on an island—and this means that our thought about what we want and who we are must reflect the freedom and power of others, without whose free cooperation we can have nothing of value, be nothing of value. This in turn means that hardheaded practical thought and sound ethical thought alike require us to recognize the existence of others and our dependence upon them. Our most practical end is never definable in terms of material results but always and only in terms of a certain kind of community: a way of facing the uncertainties of life together. These are the conditions of our existence; rhetoric is the art by which they are addressed.

But the play does more even than this, for in its demonstration of what it means to treat another as an "end" or as a "means" it establishes standards by which we can judge particular conduct and speech, particular relations and communities. This literary demonstration in the text, as read or performed, has a clarity and force—a persuasiveness—that theoretical argument could never have, for it works by constituting the audience in a new way. The play addresses the whole reader, not just one capacity or faculty, and evokes an integrated response, in which pleasure, excitement, enjoyment, commitment, as well as learning, are engaged. It integrates the experience and the self, locating them in the conditions of uncertainty in which we must actually live. The audience is newly constituted by the play in a new position, from which the only imaginable attitude to take towards persuasion and community is that of recognition and integration, the only imaginable rhetoric is sincere and authentic (*peithō*, not *dolos*). It achieves this by creating a community with the audience that directly parallels the community created between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes: as we hear Philoctetes speak, we respond to him as Neoptolemus does; we respond to Neoptolemus as Philoctetes does; and so on.

The community the play creates with us in fact has an actuality the

others lack: it exists in space and time, in our minds and responses, as on a hot morning in the theater we become something, collectively and individually, for which we earlier had only the potentiality. The true meaning of the play is our response to it, who we become in response to it. This is what is most real about it, and the experience teaches us how to live in the uncertain world it represents: what to value and cling to, what to disregard, where to direct our attention and our energy.

For the rest of us, lawyers especially, this means that we must ask what worlds, what communities, our expressions and writings and conversations create. In our hands, what kind of theater can the law be, or become? When we practice law we represent others, whose needs to some degree determine our "ends," and our task is to "succeed": does that mean that, despite this play, we must act like Odysseus or be false to our profession? Must we see the "bow of Heracles" simply as an object, or can we see it as having a meaning that is essentially social and rhetorical: as standing for the autonomy and maturity of persons whose voluntary cooperation, upon equal terms, is always to be sought; a symbol of the attainment of full personality, for which community is always necessary?

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

The reader interested in exploring further the meaning of this play may find useful the following works: A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); R. G. A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy: A Study of Peitho* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), chap. 4; P. E. Easterling, "Philoctetes and Modern Criticism," *Illinois Classical Studies* 3 (1978): 27-39; Bernard Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), chap. 5; Martha Nussbaum, "Consequences and Character in Sophocles' Philoctetes," *Philosophy and Literature* 1 (1976): 25-51; Ruth Scodel, *Sophocles* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), chap. 7; Edmund Wilson, "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow," in *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941), pp. 272-95.

In particular, Adkins is helpful on the ways in which the Greek language of value is disassembled by Odysseus (though I would disagree on some of the details); Nussbaum on Odysseus as a utilitarian, Neoptolemus as an exemplar of character ethics; Wilson on Philoctetes' love of his own injury.

There is a school that reads Odysseus' willingness to leave without Philoctetes not as a misreading of the prophecy but as a bluff. See A. E. Hinds, "The Prophecy of Helenus in Sophocles' Philoctetes," *Classical Quarterly* (new

series) 17 (1967): 169-80, persuasively responded to by D. B. Robinson, "Topics in Sophocles' Philoctetes," *Classical Quarterly* (new series) 19 (1969): 45-56. See also Scodel, *Sophocles*, pp. 100-02.

It is true that at several points Odysseus speaks either to command Philoctetes to come or to explain the wish or expectation that he will come, and it would be possible to read these remarks as expressing a recognition that Philoctetes *must* come if his own mission is to succeed. (At lines 982-83 he says to Philoctetes, "You must go with them or they will take you by force"; at 993 he says, "You must go this road"; and at 1000-1004 he prevents Philoctetes from committing suicide—all this while Neoptolemus has the bow itself. And at the beginning, when Neoptolemus speaks of bringing the man to Troy [lines 90, 102, 112], Odysseus does not contradict him.) But this would, I think, be a misreading in light of the way Odysseus is said to respond when the prophecy is issued; his proposed plan to abandon Philoctetes; and the general focus of his expressed concern throughout, which is on the bow itself. It would be safer to bring Philoctetes than the bow alone, but he plainly thinks the bow alone is better than nothing; and in any event he completely misses the point that Philoctetes' cooperation must be wholly voluntary to have the meaning he wants for it.

Robinson also takes the view that the real ending of the play is the departure of Neoptolemus with Philoctetes; for him Heracles' intervention is simply forced upon Sophocles by tradition. Most readers would, I think, disagree with this point, but see A. J. Podlecki, "The Power of the Word in Sophocles' Philoctetes," *Greek, Roman, Byzantine Studies* 7 (1966): 233-50.