

The Moral Character of Odysseus in *Philoctetes*

Mary Whitlock Blundell

IN SOPHOCLES' *Philoctetes* the young Neoptolemus is presented with various moral paradigms, embodied by Philoctetes, Odysseus, and the background figure of Achilles.¹ In the course of the drama Neoptolemus must decide which of these, if any, to adopt as his model or teacher.² For an adequate understanding of the play, it is essential to determine just what options are being offered for his (and our) approval or rejection. The figure of Odysseus is central to these ethical and educational concerns, yet his precise moral position remains unclear. Most modern critics, without examining his character closely, have helped to justify the false merchant's description of him as *ὁ πάντ' ἀκούων αἰσχροῦ καὶ λωβήτ' ἔπη* (607).³ In particular, he is often condemned as a sophistic moral relativist. Others have defended him as a selfless utilitarian.⁴ The main purpose of this paper is to determine Odysseus' ethical standpoint by examining his use of moral language. I shall then look at some other figures in the play who suggest further implications for his character, and end by briefly locating this kind of moral character in a broader fifth-century Athenian intellectual context.⁵

¹ The following will be cited by author's name alone: K. J. DOVER, *Greek Popular Morality* (Berkeley 1974); W. K. C. GUTHRIE, *The Sophists* (Cambridge 1971; repr. from *History of Greek Philosophy* III [Cambridge 1969]); B. M. W. KNOX, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley 1964); A. A. LONG, *Language and Thought in Sophocles* (London 1968); M. NUSSBAUM, "Consequences and Character in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Phil. & Lit.* 1 (1976–77) 25–53; P. W. ROSE, "Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the Teachings of the Sophists," *HSCP* 80 (1976) 49–105; C. P. SEGAL, "Philoctetes and the Imperishable Piety," *Hermes* 105 (1977) 133–58; W. B. STANFORD, *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford 1954). Citations from Sophocles are from A. C. Pearson's Oxford Classical Text (1924) unless otherwise indicated.

² On the educational theme see especially Rose 85–89; I plan to discuss Neoptolemus in detail elsewhere.

³ This detail makes no clear contribution to the 'merchant's' tale: it could be construed as a ploy to win Philoctetes' trust, but there is no obvious need for this in the mouth of the merchant. Note that despite 64f Neoptolemus avoids extreme abuse of Odysseus (377, 385).

⁴ The utilitarian interpretation is developed at length by Nussbaum; cf. also R. Ronnet, *Sophocle, poète tragique* (Paris 1969) 258–61.

⁵ I am concerned here with 'character' only as Aristotelian *ἦθος*, or moral and

In trying to convince the conscientious Neoptolemus that loyalty to the Greek army is paramount, Odysseus argues that if the young man does not agree to participate in the deception of Philoctetes he will bring pain to all the Argives (66f). He implies here that by refusing to comply, Neoptolemus will be failing in the obligation to help friends, which was a basic tenet of traditional Greek ethics.⁶ But Odysseus himself is conspicuously deficient in the language of friendship.⁷ In attempting to win over the conscientious Neoptolemus he appeals to the feelings of the army but never claims that he himself is moved by friendship. He even alludes to the unflattering tale that he came to Troy only under compulsion to keep his oath (72–74; *cf.* 1025f). This detail impugns Odysseus' loyalty as a friend to the rest of the Greeks, for an upright and true friend should not need to be placed under oath, as Philoctetes later implies (811).⁸ When Odysseus invokes the Greek army, it is not as his φίλοι but as a threat to Neoptolemus (1243, 1250, 1257f, 1293f).

Yet φιλία was so fundamental that an ancient audience might take it as self-evident that Odysseus is acting on its precepts. As he himself argues, his scheme will bring the Greeks (including himself and Neoptolemus) salvation (109), the pleasure of victory (81), the removal of pain (67), and κέρδος, or profit (111). Other obvious benefits would include plunder and military glory.⁹ If Odysseus aims to benefit himself and his friends or allies in these conventional ways, he is pursuing a perfectly respectable, indeed an admirable goal.

But according to this very code of friendship, he has shamefully maltreated Philoctetes. For Odysseus and the Atreidae also have an obligation of friendship and loyalty to their loyal ally Philoctetes—an obligation they have violated by abandoning him. The legitimacy of Philoctetes' grievance is indicated not only by his assertion that the Atreidae and Odysseus each blame the other for the abandonment (1026–28), but also by Odysseus' own defensive claim that he was acting under orders (6), and by his evasive refusal to discuss the matter

intellectual character. With Aristotle I shall assume that we may expect a character's ἦθος to be broadly consistent, or at least 'consistently inconsistent' (*Poet.* 1454a26–28). While this traditional assumption remains controversial, it is one that I believe is supported by the ancient evidence and accords with Sophoclean practice.

⁶ See my *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming) ch. 2.

⁷ For his lack of φίλ- words see Nussbaum 36, Rose 89f.

⁸ Note the repetition of ἔνορκος, used earlier of Odysseus (72). For the sentiment *cf.* OC 650, Isoc. 1.22, Diog. Laert. 1.54, 60.

⁹ Plunder may be suggested by κέρδος (111), which covers any kind of profit, but especially material gain. Military glory is emphasized by Neoptolemus (1344–47) but not Odysseus (though *cf.* 310 *infra*).

further (11f). He does produce the argument that Philoctetes' cries interfered with sacrifice (8–11), but Philoctetes will dismiss this as a pretext, pointing out that no such consideration has prevented his enemies from seeking him out now that they need him (1031–35). Nor do religious difficulties play any part in Neoptolemus' dilemma over helping Philoctetes: the emphasis is strictly on the discomfort caused by the sick man's foul odor and terrible cries (*e.g.* 519–21, 890f).¹⁰

The Atreidae and Odysseus are thus guilty of treating a friend as an enemy and causing his hostility towards them (*cf.* 1216f). Popular ethics sanctioned maltreatment of enemies, and Odysseus is well aware of Philoctetes' hatred (46f, 75f). But he cannot use this to justify the deception, for that would mean acknowledging his own culpability in initiating enmity through a violation of friendship. He therefore skates over this embarrassing issue without giving a relevant reason for his own reluctance to approach Philoctetes (70–74):¹¹ he cannot defend his conduct by appealing to the traditional code of friendship and enmity without admitting that he has personally violated the code in the past.

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, who will in any case be helped by it himself in the long run.¹² It is along these lines that Martha Nussbaum ascribes to him "a form of utilitarianism—a consequentialism aimed at promoting the general welfare" (39):

Odysseus does not admit that an action can be judged shameful or noble in itself—for he might have said, "Shameful, yes, but in a good cause." His position is not simply that a good end justifies the use of questionable means, but that actions are to be assessed only

¹⁰ These points are overlooked by Nussbaum in her utilitarian defense of the abandonment: "To have given him any human companion at all would have resulted in there being two people unable to pray to the gods, one in awful pain, the other in inescapable discomfort. . . . There is little doubt that such callousness on the part of the leaders was right from the utilitarian viewpoint" (31). But the text offers no evidence of such a calculus, which is in any case highly dubious. As H. D. F. Kitto points out, the Greeks could simply have sent Philoctetes home, "as an honourable ally who had become incapacitated" (*Form and Meaning in Drama*² [London 1964] 104).

¹¹ *Cf.* I. M. Linforth, "Philoctetes, the Play and the Man," *CPCP* 15 (1956) 99f.

¹² The idea that one may use force or deception on friends for their own good is generally regarded with deep suspicion but receives serious consideration in philosophical contexts (*e.g.* *Diss. Log.* 3.2–4, *Xen. Mem.* 4.2.15–18; *cf.* *Pl. Resp.* 331c, 382c).

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 (33).

A merit of this account is that it harmonizes with Odysseus' apparent indifference to justice, for justice and utilitarianism are notoriously ill at ease together.¹³ There are also two passages that seem to support it by suggesting that Odysseus' primary goal is indeed the good of the majority—that is, of the Greek army at Troy. (a) Before Odysseus warns Neoptolemus against paining the rest of the Greeks, he declares that he himself will feel no pain at being abused in the worst possible manner as part of the deception (64–66). These words have been interpreted as a hedonistic calculus showing a commendable indifference to personal glory and subordination of self-interest to the needs of the majority (so *e.g.* Nussbaum 31). They are not inappropriate to the hero of the *Odyssey*, who is willing to endure humiliating abuse in the guise of a beggar before revealing himself and exacting his revenge (*Od.* 17.212–53, 374–480). But in *Philoctetes*, as in epic, Odysseus will obviously benefit from his own plan if it succeeds; his own interests will scarcely be harmed by some fictitious abuse in the course of it.¹⁴ As for personal glory, he will sneeringly suggest to Philoctetes that with the help of the bow he may personally reap the honor due its proper owner (1061).¹⁵ (b) Later in the play the chorus use the language of friendship in justifying Odysseus as the one acting for the many (1143–45):¹⁶

κείνος δ' εἰς ἀπὸ πολλῶν
ταχθεὶς τοῦτ' ἐφημοσύνα
κοινὰν ἤνυσεν ἐς φίλους ἀρωγάν.

These lines are sometimes cited out of context (*e.g.* by Nussbaum 31) as evidence for Odysseus' public-spirited motivation. But the chorus (who are not, after all, disinterested) say nothing about Odysseus'

¹³ “However unhappy about it he may be, the utilitarian must admit . . . that he might find himself in circumstances where he ought to be unjust” (J. J. C. Smart, “An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics,” in Smart and B. Williams, ed., *Utilitarianism, For and Against* [Cambridge 1973] 71). On Odysseus and justice see 313f *infra*.

¹⁴ Cf. the remarks of Orestes (himself an Odyssean figure) at Soph. *El.* 59–66.

¹⁵ Contrast the more convincing utilitarianism in a passage from Euripides' *Erechtheus* cited by Lycurgus to illustrate *μεγαλοψυχίαν καὶ γενναιότητα* (*Leocr.* 100): here Praxithea justifies letting her daughter die for the πόλις, the one for the many (fr.50.16–21 Austin). Unlike Odysseus, the speaker wins admiration for the real personal sacrifice she is contemplating.

¹⁶ The text here has been emended and interpreted variously, but the general sense remains the same (unless with Kamerbeek we take κείνος to refer to Neoptolemus, which is highly implausible in the context).

motives. Moreover, this scene falls just after Odysseus' cruel treatment of Philoctetes has undermined any possible claim on our approval (1047–69) and just before the spectacle of his total discomfiture (1222–60). The dramatic purpose of this lyric dialogue is to demonstrate Philoctetes' stubborn resistance to the pragmatic common sense of the chorus.¹⁷ It is too late to rehabilitate Odysseus.

With their words *ταχθείς* . . . *ἐφημοσύνα* (1144) the chorus raise the possibility of a different kind of defense for Odysseus, one that he could have adopted for himself. For although he never speaks of *φιλία*, he does sometimes suggest that obedience to orders relieves an agent of personal responsibility.¹⁸ In the prologue he hints at such an ethical escape-hatch for Neoptolemus (50–53):¹⁹

Ἀχιλλέως παῖ, δεῖ σ' ἐφ' οἷς ἐλήλυθας
γενναῖον εἶναι, μὴ μόνον τῷ σώματι,
ἀλλ' ἦν τι καινόν, ὧν πρὶν οὐκ ἀκήκοας,
κλύης, ὑπουργεῖν, ὡς ὑπηρέτης πάρει.

Achilles' son will display his 'nobility' through the obedience that, as Odysseus' language implies, he owes him.²⁰ And in his notorious exhortation to "give me yourself" (84) Odysseus again suggests the abrogation of personal responsibility.²¹

If Odysseus himself is serving anyone, it is the Atreidae, as Philoctetes declares (1024). Odysseus hints at this excuse for his part in the original abandonment of Philoctetes, using the same expression (*ταχθείς*) that the chorus will adopt in excusing his present conduct (6; *cf.* 1144). But the excuse of acting under orders will ultimately be discredited by Neoptolemus' rebellion against authority.²² Odysseus himself, moreover, never uses the Atreidae to evade responsibility for his actions within the play.²³ On the contrary, he emphatically accepts

¹⁷ On the dramatic function of the scene see especially Kitto (*supra* n.10) 124–26; on the chorus see 323f *infra*.

¹⁸ *Lys.* 12.28f suggests that this kind of justification might sometimes be effective in court; but sympathy for such a plea was likely to depend on who had given the order (for further examples see Dover 147f, 155).

¹⁹ Retaining *ὡς* in 53 with Campbell, Dain, Jebb, Kamerbeek, and Webster, against Musgrave's *οἷς* (adopted by Pearson and Dawe).

²⁰ Both *ὑπηρέτης* and *ὑπουργεῖν* (53) indicate subordination. *Cf.* also 15: "Your task is to serve (*ὑπηρετεῖν*)." Note that Neoptolemus does not portray his own rôle in this way but calls himself a "fellow worker" (*ξυνεργάτης*, 93). He does, however, address Odysseus respectfully as *ἄναξ* (*e.g.* 26), even when disagreeing with him (94).

²¹ For parallels see Jebb *ad loc.* and Diog. Laert. 2.34.

²² *Cf.* also 324 *infra*. Rose argues persuasively that Odysseus' rôle as the representative of society does not justify him; on the contrary, he represents "the underlying selfish individualism, hypocrisy, and brutality of that society" (92).

²³ In the false merchant's story (for what it is worth) Odysseus is the instigator of the expedition (614–19). Rose 94 suggests that any claim Odysseus may have to be

Philoctetes' accusation of responsibility for the theft of the bow, disregarding the rôle of Neoptolemus (978–80). He does adopt this excuse when he declares that he is merely the servant of Zeus (989f),²⁴ referring no doubt to the oracle of Helenus; but there was no obligation to try to fulfill such an oracle.²⁵ It will, moreover, become clear that although Odysseus' goal does coincide with the will of Zeus (*cf.* 1415), the means he has chosen do not have divine approval. His appeal to Zeus has sophistic overtones and is rightly seen by Philoctetes as an evasion (992).²⁶

We have seen that Odysseus does not stress the ties of *φιλία*, which oblige one to consider the interests of others. But neither does he emphasize his own pleasure or advantage. The pleasure of victory with which he tempts Neoptolemus is impersonally expressed (81). He refers to his own pleasure or pain only at 66f. In general he avoids such affective language, unlike Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, who use it liberally. We may assume that success in his mission will bring him personal power, prestige, and material rewards; but we also know that his self-interest coincides with the public good. A direct statement of personal ambition is excluded, at least in the prologue, by the hampering presence of Neoptolemus, who must not be alienated. On the other hand, had the poet wished to give his Odysseus a more sympathetic face, the same context provides a perfect opportunity to expatiate on the ties of friendship or the good of the many. Yet in the absence of any such explicit statement, it remains unclear whether he should be construed as acting from loyalty, self-interest, or some combination of the two.²⁷

obeying orders is undermined by the fact that he had to be forced to join the expedition to Troy (72–74, 1025f).

²⁴ *ὑπηρετέιν* (99, 1024) and *ἀνασσόντων* (6) suggest an analogy between Odysseus' relationship to Zeus and the Atreidae and that of Neoptolemus to Odysseus (*cf. supra* n.20).

²⁵ *Cf.* the case of Oedipus; see further D. B. Robinson, "Topics in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *CQ* n.s. 19 (1969) 45–51. For an exhaustive recent discussion of this issue of the precise terms of the oracle see A. Machin, *Cohérence et continuité dans le théâtre de Sophocle* (Haute-Ville 1981) 61–74.

²⁶ For the sophistry element *cf.* Gorg. *Hel.* 6. Odysseus' claim to piety is also discredited by the contrast between his own admissions that his behavior is not *εὐσεβής* (313f *infra*) and Heracles' insistence on the primacy of *εὐσέβεια* in the eyes of Zeus (1440–44).

²⁷ For the last view see Stanford 110. Contrast the explicitness of Odysseus in Euripides' *Philoctetes*, who speaks (in Dio Chrysostom's paraphrase) of laboring *ὑπὲρ τῆς κοινῆς σωτηρίας καὶ νίκης* and of enduring danger out of *φιλοτιμία* and to maintain his *εὐκλεία* (Dio 59.1f). Evidently this speech was, for practical purposes, a soliloquy (though Dio 52.14 tells us that Odysseus was accompanied by Diomedes).

A closer look at Odysseus' language suggests, however, that his overriding aim is in fact the fulfillment of his own goals, which just happen to coincide with the public good.²⁸ He sets up *κέρδος* as a criterion for action: *ὅταν τι δρᾶς ἐς κέρδος, οὐκ ὀκνεῖν πρέπει* (111). This word often has unsavory implications, suggesting prosperity gained at the expense of others, frequently by treacherous means.²⁹ Odysseus also calls his goal *τὸ σωθῆναι* (109), a more attractive expression.³⁰ But *νίκη* is the key word. In normal usage it can refer to 'winning' any kind of goal, but is generally positive, connoting enviable achievement and success on a personal or public level. At its first appearance in this play it apparently refers to the pleasant consequences of victory over Troy (81), which will follow from 'victory' over Philoctetes. Odysseus is trying to pre-empt Neoptolemus' moral objections to his plan (79–85):

ἔξοιδα, παῖ, φύσει σε μὴ πεφυκότα
 τοιαῦτα φωνεῖν μηδὲ τεχνᾶσθαι κακά·
 ἀλλ' ἦδὸν γάρ τι κτήμα τῆς νίκης λαβεῖν,
 τόλμα· δίκαιοι δ' αὖθις ἐκφανόμεθα.
 νῦν δ' εἰς ἀναιδῆς ἡμέρας μέρος βραχὺ
 δός μοι σεαυτόν, κᾶτα τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον
 κέκλησο πάντων εὐσεβέστατος βροτῶν.

Odysseus, who was a party to abandoning Philoctetes out of physical revulsion, here offers the pleasure of *νίκη* as a reason for overcoming moral squeamishness.³¹ He implies that the plan is *ἀναιδής* and neither *δίκαιος* nor *εὐσεβής*. But if it succeeds, they will subsequently be revealed as *δίκαιοι*, and Neoptolemus will be called *εὐσεβέστατος*.³²

In two other passages *νίκη* is closely associated with Odysseus. As he leaves the stage after winning over Neoptolemus he invokes his patron goddess as Athena Nike, describing her pragmatically as she "who always keeps me safe" (*ἡ σῶζει μ' αἰεί*, 134).³³ This establishes the

²⁸ It is possible to represent society without having the well-being of its members at heart, as Plato's Thrasymachus knows well (*Resp.* 343B).

²⁹ For this pejorative sense in Sophocles cf. *Ant.* 221f; *OT* 380–89; fr.38, 807, 883 Radt.

³⁰ For its connotations see 322 *infra*.

³¹ Neoptolemus' willingness to endure physical rather than moral discomfort will constitute a direct rejection of Odysseus' seductive appeal. Cf. 473–75, 519, 872–76, 900–03 (all of which use the *εὐχερής/δυσχέρεια* motif).

³² *ἐκφαίνομαι* is always used for revealing something clearly to be the case, not for a deceptive appearance (see Jebb *ad loc.* and LSJ *s.v.*). But as 85 makes clear, Odysseus' emphasis is on how the deed will appear to others, not on the deed itself, which he admits is shameful. Cf. Nussbaum 51 n.29.

³³ Odysseus' pragmatism is underlined by Philoctetes' echo at 297, where it is fire that *σῶζει μ' αἰεί*. Contrast the reverence and devotion of Odysseus in *Ajax*, who calls

importance of *νίκη* for his character. When he reappears towards the end of the play, he tells us in an explicit statement of his own motivation that *νίκη* is his first priority (1049–52):

οὐ γὰρ τοιούτων δεῖ, τοιοῦτός εἰμ' ἐγώ·
 χ' ὄπου δικάϊων κ' ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν κρίσις,
 οὐκ ἂν λάβοις μου μᾶλλον οὐδέν' εὐσεβῆ.
 νικᾶν γε μέντοι πανταχοῦ χρήζων ἔφυν. . . .

Here is the famous Odyssean adaptability in a most unattractive guise.³⁴ There is no mention of *φιλία* or the common good. When men are being judged as *δίκαιος* or *ἀγαθός*, none will be found more *εὐσεβής* than Odysseus; but his nature is to crave victory *πανταχοῦ*, 'everywhere' or 'in everything'. His wording suggests that what is just and excellent may be expected to coincide with what is reverent, but may at times conflict with 'victory' when the contest is not one of justice, excellence, and piety.³⁵ The implication is that this is such a case, and hence (as in the prologue) that his present conduct is neither *δίκαιος*, *ἀγαθός*, nor *εὐσεβής*. *νίκη*, however, overrides such considerations.

For this kind of 'victory' there is a close parallel in *Oedipus at Colonus*. When Odysseus rejects Creon's invitation to return to Thebes, Creon replies (849–55):

ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ νικᾶν θέλεις
 πατρίδα τε τὴν σὴν καὶ φίλους, ὑφ' ὧν ἐγὼ
 ταχθεὶς τὰδ' ἔρδω, καὶ τύραννος ὧν ὄμωσ,
 νικά. χρόνω γάρ, οἶδ' ἐγώ, γνώση τάδε,
 ὀθούνεκ' αὐτὸς αὐτὸν οὔτε νῦν καλὰ
 δρᾶς οὔτε πρόσθεν εἰργάσω, βία φίλων
 ὀργῇ χάριν δούς, ἢ σ' αἰὲ λυμáινεται.

Here *νικᾶν* is used for getting one's way in defiance of the wishes of others, despite any claims of *φιλία* or authority that the latter may

Athena *φιλάτης* ἐμοὶ θεῶν (14). On the goddess Nike and her identification with Athena see Jebb *ad loc.*; cf. Segal 138f.

³⁴ The closest parallel I know is Theog. 313f:

ἐν μὲν μαινομένοις μάλα μάϊνομαι, ἐν δὲ δικάϊοις
 πάντων ἀνθρώπων εἰμί δικαιοτάτος.

Cf. also Theog. 213–18, with its "glorification of the Odysseus character" (T. Hudson-Williams, *The Elegies of Theognis* [London 1910] *ad loc.*) and the variant at 1071–74.

³⁵ Cf. Dover 60–66 on the value of implicit definition, synonymy, and antithesis for understanding the relationship of moral terms. The contest with Ajax for the arms of Achilles was arguably a case of Odyssean victory gained at the cost of justice (*Aj.* 1135–37; Pind. *Nem.* 7.25–27, 8.23–26; Pl. *Ap.* 41A–B). Mark Griffith has pointed out to me that when Odysseus encounters Ajax in the underworld he uses *νίκη/νικᾶν* three times in five lines with reference to the contest (*Od.* 11.544, 545, 548).

have. Creon equates Oedipus' desire for *νίκη* over friends and country with the indulgence of his own passionate feelings. Later, when Theseus and Antigone succeed in persuading Oedipus to receive his estranged son Polynices, he describes their success as a victory (*νικᾶτέ με*, 1204). Here again, *νικᾶν* refers to getting one's way despite the desires of another, in this case a real friend.³⁶ So too in *Philoctetes*, when Odysseus declares that he will let Philoctetes have his way and stay on Lemnos, he characterizes his about-face as an unusual concession of 'victory' (1052f).³⁷

A 'victor' in this sense, then, is one who gets what he or she desires, despite the contrary wishes of friends or foes. Such desires may be innocuous or even creditable (Oedipus is fully justified in rejecting the advances of Creon). But they may also be reprehensible (it is only by conceding 'victory' to Antigone and Theseus that Oedipus is kept from the impiety of spurning a suppliant). An Odysseus, one who "always craves victory," is *always* determined to get his own way, regardless of the wishes or claims of others. It is this kind of victory that Neoptolemus initially rejects (94f):

*βούλομαι δ', ἄναξ, καλῶς
δρῶν ἐξαμαρτεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ νικᾶν κακῶς.*

νικᾶν κακῶς is just what is demanded by Odysseus, for whom the pleasure of *νίκη* outweighs the necessity of contriving *κακά* to accomplish it (79–82).

Odysseus' outlook threatens to make nonsense of morality in the broadest sense: including those values that provide a guide for conduct in situations affecting the well-being of others, imposing constraints on what one may do in pursuit of personal gain.³⁸ That this harmonizes with Greek conceptions is indicated by the pejorative sense of *πανούργος* and its cognates. *πανούργος*, literally 'one who does all', acquires its common sense of 'villainous' through its applicability to one who disregards moral constraints to do anything at all in pursuit of his or her own goals. This etymology is nicely illuminated by a passage in Plato's *Apology* (38D–39A). Socrates explains that he could

³⁶ Cf. the use of *νικᾶν* and *νίκη* at *El.* 253, *Aj.* 330, 1353; *Aesch. Ag.* 941f; *Eur. Alc.* 1108.

³⁷ The question whether Odysseus is to be construed as bluffing has been much discussed. Since there is no indication to the contrary, I take it that the threat to abandon Philoctetes without his bow is serious. See esp. Knox 134 and Robinson (*supra* n.25). For a different view see e.g. A. E. Hinds, "The Prophecy of Helenus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *CQ* N.S. 17 (1967) 177f.

³⁸ Cf. the definitions of Dover (1) and G. Vlastos, "Socrates' Contribution to the Greek Sense of Justice," *Archaiognosia* 1 (1980) 1.

have escaped conviction if he had chosen ἅπαντα ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν ὥστε ἀποφυγεῖν τὴν δίκην. But he did not have the “boldness and shamelessness” to do this: οὔτε γὰρ ἐν δίκῃ οὔτ’ ἐν πολέμῳ οὔτ’ ἐμὲ οὔτ’ ἄλλον οὐδένα δεῖ τοῦτο μηχανᾶσθαι, ὅπως ἀποφεύξεται πᾶν ποιῶν θάνατον. For in any dangerous situation there are many ways to escape death, ἐάν τις τολμᾷ πᾶν ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν.³⁹

In *Philoctetes* the noun πανουργία is used of Odysseus in a way that shows the poet’s awareness of its etymology (407f):⁴⁰

ἔξοιδα γάρ νιν παντὸς ἄν λόγον κακοῦ
γλώσση θιγόντα καὶ πανουργίας. . . .

A later passage echoes the same idea (633f):

ἀλλ’ ἔστ’ ἐκείνῳ πάντα λεκτά, πάντα δὲ
τολμητά.

Note how often ‘doing all’ is accompanied by ‘saying all’, giving πανουργία connotations of lies and deception that are especially suited to Odysseus.⁴¹ Philoctetes also uses it of Neoptolemus when he is under Odysseus’ influence, in a phrase suggesting the ironic truth that this Neoptolemus is a product of Odyssean πανουργία (927f): πανουργίας δεινῆς τέχνημ’ ἔχθιστον.⁴² Thus when Odysseus announces that he desires νικᾶν . . . πανταχοῦ (1052) he is discarding morality in a fundamental sense.

In the course of explaining his motivation, Odysseus uses the word δεῖ (1049). Throughout the play he repeatedly retreats behind this and other impersonal expressions that tend to blur the distinction between different kinds of ‘necessity’.⁴³ The precise meaning of his δεῖ is not always clear, but it certainly embraces duress and perhaps also divine destiny.⁴⁴ Most often, however, he uses it to indicate practical expedi-

³⁹ For this idiom with πᾶν cf. *Lys.* 9.16, 12.14.

⁴⁰ For the etymological point cf. *Ant.* 300f and Long 154f; also *OC* 761f, fr.189 Radt. Similar language is used of Odysseus at *Aj.* 379f, 445; fr.567 Radt.

⁴¹ Cf. Knox 93, 182 n.7. In the *Apology* the legal context naturally makes ‘saying’ especially germane, but note also the Odyssean verb μηχανᾶσθαι (39A; cf. *Phil.* 1135).

⁴² Since Philoctetes does not yet know of Odysseus’ rôle, editors have avoided taking πανουργίας in 927 as a subjective genitive (Webster mistakenly attributes this view to Jebb, who rejects it). Yet this interpretation best brings out the irony of a phrase that inevitably recalls the tricks of Odysseus (cf. 80, 88) and his rôle in the prologue as Neoptolemus’ corruptor. Philoctetes need have no specific subject in mind. Jebb’s translation, “thou hateful masterpiece of subtle villainy,” captures the ambiguity between this interpretation and the defining genitive, which he (with most editors) prefers. See also Long 116f.

⁴³ Neoptolemus uses similar expressions when under Odysseus’ influence (116, 915, 921f, 925). Cf. S. Benardete, “XPH and ΔΕΙ in Plato and Others,” *Glotta* 43 (1965) 297.

⁴⁴ Duress is the clear implication of δεῖ reinforced by βία at 982f (cf. also the impersonal verbal adjectives at 993f). Destiny may be implied by δεῖ at 998 (cf. Ne-

ency. Impersonal language provides a convenient way of expressing this kind of ‘necessity’ without having to spell out or take responsibility for any awkward implications. As the play opens, Odysseus uses $\delta\epsilon\hat{\iota}$ in cutting short the embarrassing subject of the abandonment of Philoctetes (11). It is no accident that he goes on to use it three times in his crucial lines of persuasion (50, 54, 77).⁴⁵ When Neoptolemus uses $\delta\epsilon\hat{\iota}$ in asking why deception is necessary, it is in terms of expediency that Odysseus replies (102f). He will also use this $\delta\epsilon\hat{\iota}$, ironically, in revealing his failure to understand the need for Philoctetes’ presence at Troy (1060). It is therefore not surprising that, in explaining his general motivation, he uses the $\delta\epsilon\hat{\iota}$ of expediency to denote whatever is needed for ‘victory’ (1049).

It may be objected that my emphasis on a particular passage (1049–52) as indicative of Odysseus’ moral position is unjustified or arbitrary. For as Nussbaum observes:

[Odysseus] will have no use for stating [his view] straightforwardly and asking for approval—unless this just happens also to be the course most advantageous for getting to his desired result. . . . So, ironically, if Odysseus’ view is what he says it is, there is no reason for us to believe his account of his view. There need be no reliable connection between his beliefs and speeches.⁴⁶

In defense of using this one passage as a reliable guide to Odysseus’ position, it can be said that although we know that the *character* Odysseus cannot be trusted to say what he believes, when lying will better serve his ends, the *dramatist* must give some indication of when his characters are lying, bluffing, or manipulating each other. I take these lines to indicate the manipulative nature of some of Odysseus’ language elsewhere (see 320–22 *infra*). If this is right, then in dramatic terms we would need some further indication that he is not here speaking the ‘truth’.

The sincerity of the speech is also supported by its position in the drama, at a juncture where deception is no longer useful to Odysseus. The plot has been uncovered, and he has already resorted to threats and violence. If he is meant to be sincere in his abandonment of Philoctetes here (*supra* n.37), then his preceding remarks can have no persuasive function. There is nothing to be gained by concealing his real nature at this stage. If he is bluffing, such a lie about himself

optolemus’ $\delta\epsilon\hat{\iota}$ at 1339, Odysseus’ $\chi\rho\eta\nu$ at 1062). Yet another kind of necessity is expressed by Philoctetes with his use of $\epsilon\delta\epsilon\iota$ for his own desperate predicament (286, 292).

⁴⁵ Cf. also the impersonal $\kappa\lambda\epsilon\pi\tau\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\nu$ (57) and $\pi\rho\acute{\epsilon}\pi\epsilon\iota$ (111).

⁴⁶ Nussbaum 34; but she proceeds to “resist” the implications she has spelled out.

makes no contribution to the bluff as a means of coercing Philoctetes into submission or convincing him to go to Troy.⁴⁷ Finally, this is Odysseus' only reply to Philoctetes' bitter reproaches (1004–44). After the choral comment at the end of Philoctetes' long speech we might expect an answering speech of self-defense. Yet Odysseus explicitly eschews such a course, providing only these few lines of explanation. It is a brief moment of brutal frankness, for which no ulterior motive is required.

The only way for an Odysseus to make his attitudes count as an alternative moral system would be to enlist ethical terminology on his own side. Although he never does this explicitly, several passages do hint at just this. In the prologue, for example, Odysseus tells Neoptolemus that he does not consider lying to be *αἰσχρός*, so long as it brings *τὸ σωθῆναι* (108f). If lying is not *αἰσχρός*, perhaps it is positively *καλός*. If so, *τὸ σωθῆναι* might be a goal that fully justifies such means, making even deception praiseworthy and right. In normal usage, however, it is hard to see how anything described implicitly as *κακός* and *ἀναιδής*, and neither *δίκαιος* nor *εὐσεβής* (79–85), could be characterized by the same person as *οὐκ αἰσχρός*.

This conflict is one of a series of apparent incongruities in Odysseus' moral language that emerges in the course of the play, producing a cumulative impression of inconsistency.⁴⁸ Most of these disparities lie between the prologue and Odysseus' later appearances. The first positive term appears in his appeal to Neoptolemus to be *γενναῖος* (51), which sits uneasily with the admission that deceit goes against the young man's *φύσις* (79f). Later there is a direct contradiction, when Odysseus tells Neoptolemus, *γενναῖος* though he be, not to look back at Philoctetes for fear that his inborn nobility may spoil their chance (1068f). In the prologue he also exhorts Neoptolemus with the vague but morally suggestive *πρέπει* (111), but he later asks *ἔπραξας ἔργον ποῖον ὧν οὐ σοι πρέπον;* (1227). He claims that Neoptolemus will be called *ἀγαθός* if he carries out the deception (119), but later implies that his own present conduct is not that of a man who is *ἀγαθός* (1049–52). He implies that the scheme is *κακός* (80), but later calls Neoptolemus *κάκιστος* for giving back the bow (974). He implies that his own conduct is not *δίκαιος* (82, 1050f) but later cannot understand

⁴⁷ Although, as J.-U. Schmidt argues, Odysseus' very honesty may reinforce the bluff (*Sophokles-Philoctet: eine Strukturanalyse* [Heidelberg 1973] 188).

⁴⁸ Inconsistency could arouse disapproval as irrational or shameful, and appeals to consistency were common in oratory. For examples see Dover 219f; cf. Gorg. *Pal.* 25; Pl. *Crit.* 46B–C, *Gorg.* 482B–C.

why it is δίκαιος to return the bow (1247).⁴⁹ Finally, he claims to be serving Zeus (989f), but also implies that the deception is not εὖσεβής (85, 1051).⁵⁰

These inconsistencies threaten to sabotage any attempt to ascribe to Odysseus a coherent ethical position. A utilitarian, for example, should argue that the deception, however regrettable, is the right thing to do under the circumstances. But Odysseus, while hinting at this, continues to acknowledge that the means he advocates are morally wrong. If he is trying to garner moral approval for his plan, this use of pejorative language is fatal to the attempt.⁵¹

How then are we to account for his vacillations? It is often suggested that he is a representative of fifth-century sophistic relativism.⁵² The inconsistent use of moral language is not in itself relativistic, but a moral relativist might well claim that the same action can be just or unjust depending on the circumstances.⁵³ Protagoras, the most notorious sophistic relativist, asserted (on the most commonly accepted interpretation of his doctrine) that both perceptual and moral judgments are true for the person who holds them.⁵⁴ A consequence of this is spelled out by Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1062b15–17): “It follows that the same thing both is and is not, and is both bad and good, and whatever else is asserted in contrary statements” (tr. Guthrie 171). So a Protagorean Odysseus might happily maintain that the deception of Philoctetes both is and is not δίκαιος, ἀγαθός, εὖσεβής, γενναῖος, and so on.

Such an ethical relativist might seem to use moral language inconsistently, by calling the same action both δίκαιος and ἄδικος (for brevity

⁴⁹ Cf. also 372f, where the Odysseus of Neoptolemus' lying tale claims on pragmatic grounds (note ἔσῳσα, 373) that Achilles' arms are justly his (ἐνδίκως, 372). He bears a certain resemblance to the Odysseus of the play but appears in a rather more favorable light. Cf. Nussbaum 43 and K. Alt, “Schicksal und *phusis* im *Philoktet* des Sophokles,” *Hermes* 89 (1961) 151.

⁵⁰ On this last conflict see Segal 139.

⁵¹ The same mistake is made by Polus in Plato's *Gorgias* (474c), who falls into Socrates' trap by admitting that although τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι is κάκιον than τὸ ἀδικεῖν, the latter is αἰσχίον.

⁵² Among others, Rose 90 (who notes several of his inconsistencies) regards 82 as evidence of a sophistic relativism amplified at 1049–51; Knox 125 calls 1049 “the quintessence of moral relativism.” On the sophists and moral relativism, see especially Guthrie 164–75.

⁵³ Guthrie 166f cites Heraclitus B61 D.-K. and Pl. *Prt.* 334A–C. Both contrast what is good for people with what is good for various animals or plants. But if the varying circumstances are included in the description of the act, such a position is no longer relativistic.

⁵⁴ See Guthrie 171, 181–92; G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge 1981) 83–110. Cf. also the cultural relativism that appears first in Xenophanes (B15f), the ethical implications of which are developed by Herodotus (3.38).

I shall use these words for the groups of positive and negative terms respectively). But these contrary judgments would not be arbitrary: they would assume that the scheme was *δίκαιος* in one person's opinion, *ἄδικος* in that of another. The relativist must remain consistent within his or her own terms if superficial inconsistencies are to accord with the relevant factors. Odysseus could have suggested systematically that his scheme is both *δίκαιος* and *ἄδικος*—for example *δίκαιος* from his own point of view and *ἄδικος* from Philoctetes'. But as it is, his inconsistencies follow no such coherent pattern. Rather than suggesting that this particular action, under these conditions, with respect to himself or in his opinion, *is in fact* *δίκαιος* (even though relative to other people or circumstances it might be *ἄδικος*), he sometimes suggests that the very act he commends *is in fact* *ἄδικος*.

The lines most commonly cited in support of Odysseus the relativist are those that I have already argued reveal his true moral position (1049–52). Here he implies that he will be *δίκαιος*, *ἀγαθός*, and *εὐσεβής* or otherwise, depending on whether or not justice is in the circumstances 'necessary' for the achievement of his goal. But this says nothing about the *nature* of justice. It is immaterial for Odysseus' purposes here whether justice is relative or absolute; what matters is whether it is useful.

There are two other, more plausible explanations for Odysseus' inconsistencies. First, he could be using moral language on two levels.⁵⁵ That is, he might be tacitly admitting that by conventional standards his own behavior is *ἄδικος* but implying that according to his own superior ethic it is in fact *δίκαιος*, because of the value of the end it serves. The admirable and desirable goal of sacking Troy would thus justify the conventionally reprehensible means he chooses to employ. On this view, Odysseus does have a coherent ethical position, and the implications that he regards his own conduct as *ἄδικος*, *etc.*, must be discounted as temporary lapses in conventional moral language that do not represent his innovative moral stance.⁵⁶ For this interpretation to have any plausibility, further clues would be required from the text; these are not forthcoming.

The second possibility is that Odysseus acknowledges the authenticity of conventional moral rules but is willing to violate them for his own ends. He admits that his behavior is really *ἄδικος*, but does not

⁵⁵ This is the strategy of Callicles in the *Gorgias* (482c–84c), who avoids Polus' difficulties by exploiting conventional moral language with the help of the *νόμος/φύσις* distinction.

⁵⁶ This is the only possible defense for Nussbaum's interpretation, but she does not address the problem of Odysseus' language.

trouble him.⁵⁷ Other things being equal, he will be just and pious, but he has no scruples in abandoning such norms in pursuit of his own goals. Such an end does not *justify* shameful means but is sufficient reason for disregarding their reprehensible character. He is the true πανούργος, who will say or do anything to achieve his goals, regardless of the desires of others or of the claims of morality. He manipulates moral language in support of his aims, but has no hesitation in abandoning the corresponding norms when it suits him.⁵⁸ He is neither utilitarian nor relativist. The only ‘-ism’ that suits him is an amoral opportunism.

The text provides various hints in favor of this interpretation. Odysseus’ suggestions that right is on his side are never categorical, as one would expect from the prophet of a revolutionary or even alternative moral system.⁵⁹ His claims to moral propriety tend to be impersonal, negative, evasive, vague, or couched in terms of reputation. Moreover he never plainly declares that the end, which supposedly justifies the means, is itself admirable as well as desirable. The fall of Troy is just a form of “sweet victory” (81). Unlike Neoptolemus (1344), he never characterizes it as καλός.⁶⁰ Above all, however, Odysseus’ own statement about his nature points strongly to this interpretation. When he tells us that when ‘necessary’ he can ‘be’ δίκαιος, ἀγαθός, and εὐσεβής (1049–52) he is admitting to a cynical manipulation of morality. This gives us an explanation from his own mouth for those passages that suggest that his behavior is morally acceptable. He is simply putting his own declaration into practice.

The degree of manipulation varies from case to case. Both ἀγαθός and κακός are sufficiently vague that they can be used for success or failure without any specific ethical implications, but such associations may still be useful for persuasive purposes.⁶¹ The same is true of the impersonal δέι and πρέπει. In other cases Odysseus is simply exploiting the virtues in question. Neoptolemus has a real obligation of loyalty that carries weight from the start (93f) and continues to in-

⁵⁷ Contrast the repeated expressions of distress with which Neoptolemus reacts to Odysseus’ suggestion and its consequences (86f, 902f, 906, 913, 970; cf. also 1011f and the irony of 671, 806). For Odysseus’ lack of affective language see *supra* 312.

⁵⁸ This view is eloquently expressed by F. J. H. Letters, *The Life and Works of Sophocles* (London 1953) 279f.

⁵⁹ Contrast the emphatic affirmations of Callicles (*supra* n.55).

⁶⁰ Odysseus is one of the messengers who ‘persuade’ Neoptolemus to go to Troy, and at 352 the latter mentions ὁ λόγος καλός as a reason for going. But the phrase tells us more about Neoptolemus than Odysseus. It is used in the context of persuasion, as reported in a deception, and the impersonal phrasing avoids attribution to either messenger.

⁶¹ For the range and flexibility of these words see especially Dover 51–53.

fluence him (925f). This enables Odysseus to win him over not just by appealing to self-interest, but by assurances of virtue and imputations of disloyalty. *γενναῖος* (51) is carefully chosen to appeal to an aristocratic nature.⁶² Odysseus' goal is to convince Neoptolemus to violate the dictates of that nature, yet it is not inappropriate to expect loyalty of the *γενναῖος*.⁶³ The suggestion that the deception is *οὐκ αἰσχρόν* is supported by *τὸ σωθῆναι* (108f), which suggests the most basic and urgent of human needs, and thus reinforces Odysseus' reminder that refusal by Neoptolemus would distress all the Greeks (66f).⁶⁴ *σοφός* and *ἀγαθός* (119) appeal to Achilles' son by suggesting the virtues of the complete Homeric man, the "speaker of words and doer of deeds."⁶⁵ *δίκαιος* (1247) is used by Odysseus to underline Neoptolemus' complicity in his plan and thus lay weight on his quasi-contractual obligation to himself and the rest of the Greeks. The appeal to divine authority (989f), addressed not to Neoptolemus but to Philoctetes, may be construed as a heavy-handed attempt to get the latter to come *έκῶν* to Troy. As for Odysseus' use of negative terms, in the prologue this is a rhetorical ploy to pre-empt Neoptolemus' objections. At the same time it allows the dramatist to portray Odysseus in a morally dubious light and prepare us for his later inconsistencies and admissions of wrongdoing.

Within the play various characters are linked with Odysseus and help to shed further light on his moral outlook. The first is Thersites, whose name is introduced in a way that quite strikingly confuses him with Odysseus (439–44):

Φι. ἀναξίου μὲν φωτὸς ἐξερήσομαι,
 γλώσση δὲ δεινοῦ καὶ σοφοῦ, τί νῦν κυρεῖ.
 Νε. ποίου δὲ τούτου πλήν γ' Ὀδυσσέως ἐρεῖς;
 Φι. οὐ τοῦτον εἶπον, ἀλλὰ Θερσίτης τις ἦν,

⁶² It is a key word in the play: cf. 475, 799, 801, 1402. On its use at 51 see esp. Knox 125.

⁶³ Nussbaum 32 suggests that Odysseus is here offering a "persuasive definition." This is somewhat misleading, since he is not defining the word but exploiting its aristocratic connotations for his immediate persuasive purposes (cf. Dover 51) and need not himself be committed to this 'definition'. Nevertheless, this kind of persuasive use of moral terms has much in common with C. L. Stevenson's conception of a persuasive definition (*Mind* 47 [1938] 331–50; *Ethics and Language* [New Haven 1944] 206–26).

⁶⁴ Compare Philoctetes' need for *σωτηρία* in the most literal sense. On this theme see Rose 64–67, 84f; H. C. Avery, "Heracles, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus," *Hermes* 93 (1965) 296f.

⁶⁵ *Il.* 9.443. On Odysseus' "elastic words" see Stanford 109.

ὄς οὐκ ἂν εἴλετ' εἰσάπαξ εἰπεῖν, ὅπου
μηδεὶς ἐώη.

Thersites is mentioned by Philoctetes explicitly as one of those villainous people who survive in war, while the best are killed.⁶⁶ This group, which includes Odysseus (428–30), is described like him as πανοῦργος (448).⁶⁷ And like Odysseus, Thersites is characterized by the words γλώσσα and σοφός (440).⁶⁸ δεινός (440) has been used in connection with Odyssean πανουργία (927f); if the manuscript reading is retained at 457, this epithet too describes the worthless who are still alive.⁶⁹

There can be no doubt that we are meant to recall Thersites' memorable debut in the *Iliad* (cf. Jebb on 443f). He is portrayed there as base and ugly, an object of ridicule and a caricature of nobility.⁷⁰ His speech anticipates much that Achilles will say in Book 9, but he is ἐχθιστος to both Achilles and Odysseus (*Il.* 2.220). He is above all loquacious and outspoken (212–14): ἀμετροεπῆς . . . ὄς ἔπεα φρεσὶ ἦσιν ἄκοσμά τε πολλά τε ἦδη, μάψ, ἀτὰρ οὐ κατὰ κόσμον. It is Odysseus who rebukes him and humiliates him with a painful beating (244–69). Odysseus calls him an “indiscriminate” (ἀκριτόμυθε) though “clear-voiced” (λιγύς) orator (246). λιγύς is usually complimentary when used of a speaker. It is the content of Thersites' speech that is disparaged, not his rhetorical skill. The speech is in fact a polished piece of rhetoric.⁷¹ Thersites in Homer is thus both Odysseus' opponent and a precursor of the negative figure of Odysseus yet to come: the man of many words who makes unscrupulous use of his talents. It is with this

⁶⁶ 436–39; cf. 447–50. In order to include him Sophocles has departed from the usual legend of his death (see Σ *ad* 445 and Jebb on 442).

⁶⁷ It is also characterized as κακός (446) and as παλιωτριβής (448), another epithet appropriate to a hostile view of Odysseus (for the sense see Kamerbeek *ad loc.*).

⁶⁸ For these attributes of Odysseus see 326–29 *infra*. For the pejorative phrase γλώσση δεινός cf. OC 806 and n.92 *infra*.

⁶⁹ On 927f see *supra* 316. δεινός in 457 is retained by Kamerbeek and defended by Campbell and Webster *ad loc.* and Rose 99 n.99. Others adopt Brunck's δειλός. For a convincing defense of δεινός, rightly linking it with Odyssean cleverness and πανουργία, see E. M. Craik, “A Note on Sophocles' *Philoktetes* 456–458 and *Antigone* 323–326,” *Mnemosyne* SER. IV 31 (1978) 196–98.

⁷⁰ Thersites' social status is unclear. The Homeric scholiast tells us that the absence of a patronymic brands him as a commoner. This seems to be supported by his ugliness and the rough discipline he receives. Plato calls him a πονηρός . . . ιδιώτης (*Grg.* 535E) and represents him as a buffoon who chooses the life of an ape (*Resp.* 620C). Most modern critics have continued to consider him the *vox populi*. In later myths, however, he is well-born (see Roscher, *Lex. s.v.*). There is nothing to contradict this in Homer, and it is supported by the fact that he addresses the assembly and is a personal enemy of Odysseus and Achilles. See now G. S. Kirk, ed., *The Iliad: A Commentary I* (Cambridge 1985) *ad* 2.212.

⁷¹ See Kirk (*supra* n.70) *ad* 2.225–52.

caricature of his own heroic persona that Odysseus in *Philoctetes* is confused.

The second figure who sheds some light on Odysseus' moral character is the false merchant. He enters the play as Odysseus' creation and puppet,⁷² the product of his scheming (*δολώσας*), whose function is to direct Neoptolemus craftily (*ποικίλως*) in Odysseus' absence, providing him with expedient verbal hints (*συμφέροντα*, 126–31).⁷³ He emphasizes his humble status (584) and represents himself as motivated by greed, including the fear of getting into trouble with those in power and thus losing his profitable relationship with them (552, 582–84).⁷⁴ He is moved not by loyalty but by fear of loss, and shifts responsibility for his actions onto Neoptolemus (590). Despite its deceptive function, his speech is presumably intended to give a plausible picture of a common man. We may compare the homely and amoral pragmatism of other humble figures in tragedy, such as the watchman in *Antigone* and the nurse in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. The latter, though her devotion to Phaedra makes her a sympathetic character, uses arguments with a sophistic ring, showing the kinship between sophistry and an earthy pragmatism.⁷⁵

Like Odysseus, the 'merchant' is motivated by profit.⁷⁶ For him, as for Odysseus, *ἂ μὴ δεῖ* (583) refers to what he considers will interfere with the pursuit of profit. And like Odysseus, he evades responsibility for his actions. What does this tell us about Odysseus? It is natural and perhaps excusable for a lowly and dependent merchant to be concerned primarily with self-interest. But by the aristocratic principle of noblesse oblige those with power and its privileges have a greater responsibility than the common man to live up to certain standards.⁷⁷ The 'merchant' is a reflection of his creator and as such reflects poorly on him.

A similarly subordinate rôle is played by the humble chorus, who enter expounding a justification for aristocratic rule as they offer their

⁷² Cf. Jebb on the implications of *ἐκπέμψω* (127): the preposition "marks that the person sent will come as the sender's agent." There is not a shred of evidence, however, for the notion that the 'merchant' is actually Odysseus in disguise.

⁷³ Kamerbeek notes that the 'merchant's' last words are *σφῶν δ' ὅπως ἄριστα συμφέροι θεός* (627); cf. also 926.

⁷⁴ Taking 552 (with most editors) to refer to the messenger's reward.

⁷⁵ Cf. especially *Hipp.* 474–76, which recall Gorg. *Hel.* 6 (on which compare *supra* n.26). The nurse's speech has been called "a masterpiece of sophistic rhetoric" (B. M. W. Knox, "The *Hippolytus* of Euripides," *YCS* 13 [1952] 10). Phaedra herself fears that the nurse is too *σοφή* (518).

⁷⁶ For the 'merchant' as a reflection of Odysseus' mercantile outlook cf. Rose 92.

⁷⁷ The Homeric *locus classicus* for this theme is *Il.* 12.310–21. Cf. also 4.257–64, 338–48; 8.161–63; and see M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*² (New York 1978) 95–97.

services to Neoptolemus (135–43).⁷⁸ They defer to their master's judgment in almost everything,⁷⁹ but they have more in common with Odysseus.⁸⁰ They resemble him in their lack of any moral scruples whatsoever, their unhesitating use of deceit, their exploitation of religion,⁸¹ and their pragmatic eagerness to grasp at opportunities (827–64; *cf.* 1068f). Like him they exploit the idea that obedience removes responsibility (1143–45).⁸² They are even guilty of inconsistency, in failing to act on their words:⁸³ they express at length their sympathetic pity for Philoctetes,⁸⁴ but like his earlier visitors do nothing about it (*cf.* 307f, with the irony of the chorus' response at 317f). Like the 'merchant' they represent a standard to which Odysseus lives down. As Philoctetes will declare, Odysseus' thinking is not ἐλεύθερον (1006): his outlook is unworthy of a free man, let alone a king.

Within the deception, Neoptolemus makes an attempt to exculpate Odysseus that ironically backfires. He calls him *κάκιστος κὰκ κακῶν* (384), but then declares that "those in power" are more to blame, for disorderly persons (*οἱ ἀκοσμοῦντες βροτῶν*) become *κακοί* through the words of their irresponsible "teachers" (385–88).⁸⁵ This reflects the aristocratic view that the noble bear some responsibility, through the

⁷⁸ ὑπουργεῖν (143) is the verb Odysseus uses for Neoptolemus' 'service' to him (53). ὑπηρετεῖν (*supra* nn.20, 24) is not used of the chorus but indicates etymologically precisely their relationship to Neoptolemus.

⁷⁹ In addition to the parodos see 963f, 1072f, and *cf.* 887f. The only exception is 843, where they think they are advising him in his own best interests (but of course end up obeying).

⁸⁰ The Odyssean character of the chorus has been argued in detail by S. Schein, "The Chorus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," a paper delivered at the convention of the American Philological Association in San Antonio, 30 December 1986.

⁸¹ 391–402, 843. They do not seem troubled by the idea of divine nemesis, which they themselves introduce (518). *Cf.* K. Reinhardt, *Sophocles*, tr. H. and D. Harvey (Oxford 1979) 171.

⁸² This is also the only coherent explanation for 1117f (unless it is to be construed as an outright lie). On the call for coherence see n.83 *infra*.

⁸³ This is a kind of inconsistency that undermines trust and so strikes at the heart of social co-operation. It is condemned in this play (307f, 519–23) and in Greek thought generally (*e.g.* *Ant.* 543, *El.* 357; *Theog.* 979–82; *Antiph. Soph.* 87B56 D.-K.; *Democr.* 68B82 D.-K.; *Lys.* 12.26). Odysseus displays a version of it (327f *infra*). It is sometimes argued (*e.g.* by Reinhardt [*supra* n.81] 182) that the chorus lack a coherent ἦθος, and thus cannot be blamed for inconsistency. But there is no reason not to treat the Sophoclean chorus, within broad limits, as "one of the actors" (*Arist. Poet.* 1456a25–27; *cf.* also *supra* n.5).

⁸⁴ Especially at 169–90, 676–717. I take all their expressions of pity to be sincere. The case for this has been well made recently by R. J. Tarrant, "Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 676–729: Direction and Indirection," *Greek Tragedy and Its Legacy*, ed. M. Cropp *et al.* (Calgary 1986) 121–34.

⁸⁵ Compare ἀκοσμοῦντες with the description of Thersites quoted *supra* 323.

example they set, for the conduct of their social inferiors.⁸⁶ But if Odysseus is one of those *κακοί* whose misdeeds may be so excused, then he certainly should not be wielding the power of a king. This implication is reinforced by the aspersion on his parentage, which suggests that by aristocratic standards of excellence he was not born to rule. Nor is this merely part of Neoptolemus' fiction, for Odysseus' natural father is apparently not Laertes, as in the *Odyssey*, but the villainous trickster Sisyphus.⁸⁷ His is a debased distortion of the aristocratic *φύσις*.

The most striking irony in Neoptolemus' words, however, is that Odysseus himself is the 'teacher' not only of the 'merchant' but of Neoptolemus himself. As Philoctetes declares, the young man is not *κακός*, but has learned disgraceful things from those who are (971f; *cf.* also 950, 1007–10, 1310–13). The fictitious exculpation thus turns into a damning indictment of the Odysseus we have seen in the prologue.⁸⁸ He not only lives by the same values as the 'merchant' and the chorus, thus failing to live up to his birth and position, but actively corrupts those to whom he should offer a nobler example. His *πανουργία* takes on more dangerous implications in the context of aristocratic morality.

It has often been remarked that Odysseus has sophistic features.⁸⁹ He uses the words *σόφισμα* and *σοφισθῆναι* for his stratagem (14, 77), and later offers Neoptolemus a reputation as *σοφός* (119).⁹⁰ *σοφία* is a virtue appropriate to the ambiguous cunning of the Homeric Odysseus. It and its cognates may refer to the prudence and good judgment that guide proper action, but also to sophistic cleverness of a morally suspect kind.⁹¹ It is this latter that characterizes Odysseus in *Philoctetes*. Neoptolemus, who evidently desires the promised reputation for

⁸⁶ *Cf.* *Aj.* 1093–96; *Eur. Hipp.* 407–12. For Neoptolemus' sense of noblesse oblige *cf.* also 524f and his acceptance of responsibility for the 'merchant' (590).

⁸⁷ 417, 625, 1311. See Stanford 103 and *Sophocles: Ajax* (London 1963) *ad* 189. He is also referred to as Laertes' son (87, 366, 402, 614, 628), but this is consistent with the story, alluded to by Philoctetes (417), that Laertes married Anticleia when she was already pregnant with Odysseus by Sisyphus (see the scholiast and Jebb on 417). Sisyphus as well as Laertes was of royal blood (Roscher, *Lex. s.v.*).

⁸⁸ By the same token Neoptolemus is furnishing himself with the excuse Odysseus offered him at the outset (and which Philoctetes allows him up to a point [1010]). But he, with his truly noble *φύσις*, makes no use of it.

⁸⁹ See especially Rose 81–85.

⁹⁰ W. Nestle notes that *σοφός* and cognates are more frequent in *Philoctetes* than in any other play of Sophocles ("Sophokles und die Sophistik," *CP* 5 [1910] 155).

⁹¹ For the former in Sophocles *cf.* *Aj.* 1374. For the contrast *cf.* *Eur. Bacch.* 395, with E. R. Dodds, ed., *Euripides: Bacchae*² (Oxford 1960) *ad loc.* See also Dover 116–23; M. J. O'Brien, *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind* (Chapel Hill 1967) 33–38. On the semantic shift of *σοφιστής* from 'wise man' to 'sophist' see Guthrie 27–34.

wisdom, comes to realize that it is not Odysseus' σοφία that he wants. This is first hinted at during his deception of Philoctetes (431f). It becomes explicit when Neoptolemus tells Odysseus to his face that although he is by nature σοφός (clever), his words are not σοφός (wise: 1244). He admits that his present conduct, though just, is not σοφός (clever: 1246), leaving open the possibility that it is σοφός (wise), if Odyssean σοφία is not true wisdom.

One sophistic trait in particular is suggested by the response Odysseus makes to Neoptolemus' misgivings at his plan (96–99):

ἔσθλοῦ πατρὸς παῖ, καὐτὸς ᾧν νέος ποτὲ
 γλῶσσαν μὲν ἀργόν, χεῖρα δ' εἶχον ἐργάτιν·
 νῦν δ' εἰς ἔλεγχον ἐξίῳν ὀρῶ βροτοῖς
 τὴν γλῶσσαν, οὐχὶ τάργα, πάνθ' ἡγουμένην.

This faith in γλῶσσα (a word with pejorative overtones) aligns Odysseus with those sophists who exalted the power of the word, most notable of whom was Gorgias.⁹² Gorgias extolled the benefits of persuasion, but remained aware that it is a drug that can kill as well as cure (*Hel.* 14). Odysseus, however, rules out the idea of honest persuasion (103) and uses his tongue initially for insidious persuasion in the cause of deceit. Once his stratagem has been uncovered he makes no further attempt to persuade, but turns to threats of βία,⁹³ and even to its use (1003).⁹⁴ In the earlier part of the play the Homeric periphrasis Ὀδυσσεύως βία is used three times, always conspicuously at line end.⁹⁵ The repetition of this phrase has an ironic ring after Odysseus' profession of allegiance to the tongue, foreshadowing his later threats. We should therefore be cautious in labelling him as a man of λόγοι. Not only are his words dishonest, but in the event he abandons them altogether. This shift away from γλῶσσα may no doubt be explained by the same faith in flexibility that justifies any behavior leading to victory (1049). Once again consistency is abandoned in the interests of expediency.⁹⁶

⁹² For a link between Odysseus and Gorgias cf. *supra* n.26. On γλῶσσα as a comic label for intellectuals see J. D. Denniston, "Technical Terms in Aristophanes," *CQ* 21 (1927) 120. It is used pejoratively by Philoctetes (408, 440). Cf. also *OC* 806f; fr. 201A Radt; Eur. *Bacch.* 268f. The theme of words in the play is surveyed by A. J. Podlecki, "The Power of the Word in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 233–50.

⁹³ 983, 985, 1297. He also threatens violence at 1241–43, 1254f. Cf. also 998, where he speaks of the sack of Troy in terms of βία.

⁹⁴ The trichotomy δόλος/βία/πειθῶ, clearly established by Odysseus himself in the prologue (101–03), is an important structural theme for the play. See especially A. F. Garvie, "Deceit, Violence and Persuasion in the *Philoctetes*," *Studi classici in onore di Quintino Cataudella* I (Catania 1972) 213–26.

⁹⁵ 314, 321, 592. Long 102 notes only one other such use of βία in extant Sophocles.

⁹⁶ On this kind of inconsistency see *supra* n.83. It is usually the failure to act on one's emotions or live up to promises that gives cause for reproach. Odysseus' lapse

An amoral pragmatism is also suggested by the way Odysseus couches his appeals to Neoptolemus in terms of moral reputation.⁹⁷ It is true that Greeks often speak in such terms without implying that the virtue in question is a sham.⁹⁸ But Odysseus' focus is contrasted with others within the play,⁹⁹ and outside it aligns him with various unscrupulous characters. He might be one of those of whom Adeimantus speaks in Plato's *Republic*. Glaucon has mentioned the benefits, the *τιμαὶ καὶ δωρεαί*, that accrue from an appearance of justice (361B–C). Adeimantus then complains that fathers tell their sons (361E–63A):

ὡς χρῆ δίκαιον εἶναι, οὐκ αὐτὸ δικαιοσύνην ἐπαινοῦντες ἀλλὰ τὰς ἀπ' αὐτῆς εὐδοκίμῃσεις, ἵνα δοκοῦντι δίκαιῳ εἶναι γίγνηται ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης ἀρχαί τε καὶ γάμοι καὶ ὄσα περ Γλαύκων διῆλθεν ἄρτι, ἀπὸ τοῦ εὐδοκμεῖν ὄντα τῷ δίκαιῳ.

These are not sophists but ambitious parents, yet they are only a small step away from Antiphon's advice to use justice for expediency (*ξυμφορόντως*) by obeying the law only in the presence of witnesses (87 B44A col. 1 D.-K.). As with the nurse in *Hippolytus*, their common-sense pragmatism converges with certain sophistic views.

The scholiast on 99 condemns Odysseus not as a sophist but as a politician: *διαβάλλει τοὺς καθ' ἑαυτὸν ῥήτορας ὁ ποιητῆς ὡς διὰ γλώσσης πάντα κατορθοῦντας*. And indeed Odysseus proves to have less in common with Gorgias than with the pragmatic politicians we meet in Thucydides. Such are the Athenian spokesmen at Melos, who dismiss questions of justice as so many fine words (*ὀνομάτων καλῶν*) irrelevant to the realities of power (5.89). In the Mytilene debate Diodotus, the democratic defender of *λόγοι* (3.42.2) uses *δεῖ* as Odysseus does, for the 'necessity' of the expedient (46.4, 47.4f), in contrast with the moral issue, which he explicitly discounts as irrelevant (44.1f, 47.4f). His opponent Cleon is no ethical innovator but an anti-intellectual despiser of *λόγοι* (37). He purports to uphold justice in the highly traditional form of brutal retaliation (38.1), arguing that this coin-

here is of a more general kind: a failure to adopt the kind of strategy he claimed is best.

⁹⁷ So at 82, 85, 119, but not 51, which refers to the task at hand rather than the future.

⁹⁸ See Dover 226–29.

⁹⁹ Neoptolemus too speaks of reputation (93f; cf. 906, 908) and is seduced by Odysseus' promises of a name for virtue (120), but his main focus is on the action that will produce the reputation in question (note the verbs at 87f, 95). Philoctetes likewise dwells on the kind of behavior that earns a noble reputation. For him it is *τὸ χρηστόν* that brings renown (475–79).

cides with Athenian self-interest (40.4).¹⁰⁰ Yet he uses $\delta\epsilon\iota$ in the same way, arguing that even if Athenian rule were improper, Mytilene should still be punished in the interests of expediency (40.1, 4). Between them they illuminate various facets of Odysseus' character—his willingness to praise or abandon persuasion, to exploit justice or discard it, as the expediency of the moment dictates. There is no doubt that these characters, like Odysseus, show evidence of sophistic influence. Like them, however, he is not so much a sophist as an embodiment of the kind of political opportunism for which some sophistic theories offered a convenient intellectual justification.¹⁰¹

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
March, 1987

¹⁰⁰ *Cf.* Neoptolemus at 925f (where he is not yet free from Odyssean influence).

¹⁰¹ Part of this paper was read at the convention of the American Philological Association in San Antonio (30 December 1986). I am grateful to those present for their comments, and likewise to others who have read the paper at various stages. In particular, I thank Michael Halleran and the anonymous reader for this journal for detailed and helpful suggestions.