

■ On Sophocles's *Philoctetes* 1409-44: Heracles *ex Machina*, *Pathos*, and *Aporia*¹

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Abstract

This paper explores how the theatric convention of *deus ex machina* adopted in Sophocles's *Philoctetes* 1409-44 works. Instead of seeing the epiphany of Heracles as an illogical stop-gap measure, I will analyze how Heracles optimizes his semi-god role to fix the dramatic impasse. At the first glance, the conciliatory function of Heracles *ex machina* leads to a deceptively happy ending, which indeed prompts a scrupulous analysis of the issues pertaining not only to the intrinsic structure of the play itself but also to the extrinsic social, political and medical circumstances. To reveal the uncommon finale of Sophocles's *Philoctetes* and to re-evaluate the strategic application of *deus ex machina*, I will propose three approaches: first, how the rationale of Heracles's persuasion is related to the major themes of this play and how the adoption of *deus ex machina* is conducive to the structural coherence; second, how the epiphany of Heracles stimulates a radical critique of the prevalent sophistry and how the heroic image of Philoctetes is reshaped under the political and ethical contexts of the Greek world in the fifth century BCE; third, how Heracles *ex machina* showcases the incompleteness of the healthcare system in Sophocles's contemporary time. Whereas Heracles's diagnosis and prognosis of Philoctetes's suppurating foot are highly problematic, the underlying concerns of *Philoctetes*—such as

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¹ The citations and the enumeration of lines from Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Philoctetes* and *Antigone*—hereinafter abbreviated as *OT*, *Phil*, and *Anti* respectively—are based on *The Loeb Classical Library* 20 and 21 (Sophocles 1994).

the inadequate understanding of pathogenesis, the undersupply of doctors, and the shortage of medical recourses—constitute an important subject of reflection for Sophocles’s contemporaries and for us as well.

Keywords: Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, *deus ex machina*, Heracles, disease

Introduction

Sophocles's *Philoctetes* features the theme of persuasion through highlighting how Odysseus manages to recall the deserted general Philoctetes back to the battlefield. At first, Neoptolemus, following Odysseus's instructions, attempts to capture Philoctetes and the bow through a deceitful strategy, which is of considerable use so that Philoctetes by and by takes Neoptolemus as a reliable friend and entrusts his bow to this young man. But, having witnessed how Philoctetes is afflicted by a festering foot, Neoptolemus, feeling a twinge of regret, decides to discontinue his collusion with Odysseus's scam of stealthily snatching Philoctetes's bow, returns the bow to Philoctetes, and consents to take Philoctetes home (*Phil* 1408). Thereupon, the plot reaches a patent impasse. If this play ended at the scene that Philoctetes is heading homeward, neither Helenus's prophecy² concerning the capture of Troy nor the epic convention of the Trojan War would be fulfilled. However, it transpires that at the very moment when Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are poised to leave for Meliboea in Thessaly, deified Heracles³ unexpectedly breezes onto the stage to tackle the gridlock (*Phil* 1409-44). Philoctetes stops short of neglecting his preordained heroic vocation; fortunately, Heracles turns up in time to persuade his former protégé Philoctetes into embarking on a rescue trip in Troy (*Phil* 1423-24). In a twinkling, Philoctetes turns out to be completely receptive to the enlistment. As a result, the dilemma is momentarily lifted, but then an uncharacteristically happy ending ensues, alerting us to the question of whether the way *Philoctetes* closes runs counter to the general sense of tragedy and to the rendering of Philoctetes as a protagonist with grim determination not to team up with the Greek leagues again.

The enacted epiphany⁴ of Heracles at the end of Sophocles's *Philoctetes* embodies a Greek theatric convention, *deus ex machina*, which is carried out by an apparatus of a crane or a *mêchanê* to introduce "the roles of gods to fly suddenly onto the stage" (Martin 131).⁵ This agent, as a key to an insoluble problem or

² Helenus, who was the prophetic son of King Priam of Troy, was forced to divulge that only when Philoctetes was present could Troy be taken. In *Philoctetes*, Sophocles adds two more indispensable conditions: one is the bow inherited from Heracles and the other is the assistance of Neoptolemus.

³ Heracles had once been a mortal and reputed for his heroic exploits, and he was worshiped as a herogod or an apotheosized mortal.

⁴ Epiphany, a customary literary device in different genres of Greek literature—from epic to tragedy, is the physical manifestation of a divinity to a mortal either in a dream, in a waking vision, or in a real-life event. Countless literary examples of epiphany encounters between gods and mortals precisely substantiate the essential Greek mentality of anthropomorphism.

⁵ Rush Rehm explains the machine as "a kind of crane used to suggest movement through the air;" and sometimes "gods and goddesses appeared on the roof of the skene-building, known as *theologeion*" (70). It is plausible that an elevated crane was employed to present the aerial arrival of supernatural beings.

crisis, is mostly considered a contrived device, by which the apparent conflict is contained at the sacrifice of the unity of the play. Martha Beck makes it a point that Sophocles's *Philoctetes* is "a unified whole," but "the only exception to this is the intervention of Heracles at the end of the play" (145). Ostensibly, Heracles *ex machina* as a form of numinous solution is as good as a stopgap measure. That is, Heracles *ex machina* employed at the close of *Philoctetes* is such a stupendous cure-all that all the conflicts are expected to be removed rapidly. For Norman Austin, the most undesirable part of this play is "the epiphany of Heracles with which the play concludes" (191). But some scholars such as Robert J. Newman refutes this speculation and insists that "Philoctetes does not remain unchanged, but rather makes an initial step toward reintegration into human society during the course of the dialogue with Neoptolemus (*Phil* 1402-8) which prepares him for his final reconciliation with the Greeks" (305). Besides, Anne Hunsaker Hawkins believes that the very *deus ex machina* in Sophocles's *Philoctetes* cannot be taken merely as an expedient *modus operandi*; alternatively, we had better pay due attention to the ethical and tragic dimensions of the play (356). The co-existence of these opposing viewpoints about the ending of the *Philoctetes* indeed motivates me to reconsider if the application of Heracles *ex machine* is apposite.

I will propose three approaches to explore the well-timed intervention of *deus ex machina* in Sophocles's *Philoctetes*: first, how the rationale of Heracles's persuasion bolsters the thematic unity of the play; second, how Heracles's argument showcases that the new heroic paragon has much to do with collective glory as well as individual honor; third, how the concerns underlying Heracles *ex machina* form a coherent part of the disease theme and a working explanation for the slog of Philoctetes's suffering. The first section of this paper will address how the employment of the *deus ex machina* boosts the dramatic tension at work between the body of the play and its denouement. This paper argues that the epiphany of Heracles in *Philoctetes* rings consistent with the plot and has the substantial function both to reconcile the internal clashes between characters and to accord the plot with the external mythical context. Furthermore, such a puzzling finish invites the more in-depth analysis of the issues of how to oppose the decaying heroic paradigm and of how to create an illuminating scope to a new hero in face of the insincere sophistry prevailing in society. For this reason, the second section

Edith Hall details that "by the time of Euripides and Sophocles, gods could make appearance aloft in the machine, suspended from a crane on the special level reserved for superhuman beings" (7-8). Technically, *deus ex machina* may have been an important innovation for the theatrical performance in the fifth century BCE. Alan H. Sommerstein enumerates several substantial alterations of the Greek dramatic facility introduced in the late 460s BCE: the introduction of the *skênê*-building "at the back of the acting area," the *ekkyklêma* and *mêchanê* (7).

will cast light on how Philoctetes constantly learns to face those unfathomable torments and to enhance his worthy image by restoring the time-honored virtues and achieving something grand for the upcoming society. The third section will illustrate how Heracles's problematic diagnosis and prognosis of Philoctetes's condition can reveal certain aspects of the fifth-century Greece such as the role of a doctor, the logistics of medical resources, and the undersupply of doctors. In brief, the denouement of *Philoctetes* prompts us to have a rethink of the thematic unity, the shifting social and political principles, and the pressing concern over the medical resources during wartime.

Heracles *ex Machina*

In *Poetics*, Aristotle deprecates the application of the *deus ex machina* (1454a33-b9), which is frequently reckoned to be an extraneous, artificial and improbable means to close a play.⁶ Aristotle's objection to the *deus ex machina* is grounded on his depreciation of visually stunning elements (*Poetics* 1450b16-20; 1453b1-11). Admittedly, many instances of *deus ex machina* in Euripides' works⁷ do produce some ostentatious effects—but usually at the cost of the structural coherence. However, this is not the case for Sophocles's *Philoctetes*. Far from being an extravagant and showy gimmick, *Heracles ex machina* is so properly placed that the inner workings of the *Philoctetes* are readily observable. Thanks to the epiphany of Heracles,⁸ Sophocles's *Philoctetes* ends with a vision of magnificent action, a satisfactory answer to the audience's expectation, the realization of Helenus' prophecy, and conformity to the fabric of the epic tradition.

First of all, the instruments of a transitional pause⁹ and a flashing flip are employed to boost the effectiveness of *deus ex machina*. Differing from “con-

⁶ The *deus*-ending of the play is generally judged to be inadequate by many scholars from Aristotle to Renaissance critics, most of whom insist that employing the *deus ex machina* to end a play provides nothing but an artificial, untenable, and last-minute resolution to an inept plot.

⁷ There are many instances of the *deus ex machina* in Euripides' works, while few in Sophocles's and Aeschylus's plays.

⁸ Jebb annotates that “the apparition was a sudden one” and effected “by the actor coming out upon a high platform [θεολογεῖον] at the back of the scene” (217n1409). In fact, representation of deities by human actors was fairly common in Greek religion or ritual festivals, and there were various forms of divine appearance: straightforward epiphany, impersonation of a deity by priestly personnel, and the enacted advent.

⁹ Two of the crucial tragic features are suffering and recognition: the former can be summarized as a “destructive or painful act,” and the latter as “a change or transition (*metabolē*) from ignorance to knowledge that leads either to great affiliation or intimacy on the one hand, or to hatred or enmity on the other” (Rinon 3). The recognition is thus a transition, either from good luck (*euthuchia*) to bad luck (*dusthuchia*) or *vice versa*. In Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, *Heracles ex machina* certainly introduces a dramatic transition.

trivances of the gods” [ὤπαλάμια θεῶν] (*Phil* 177),¹⁰ the on-stage epiphany of Heracles best illustrates the idea of “the persistent anthropomorphism of Greek religion, with its stress on this world rather than on an after-life” (Finley 49). Nonetheless, it is the plain unvarnished truth—rather than Heracles’s supernatural power—that precipitates Philoctetes into the volte-face in attitude:

μήπω γε, πρὶν ἂν τῶν ἡμετέρων
 αἰῆς μύθων, παῖ Ποίαντος·
 φάσκειν δ’ αὐδὴν τὴν Ἡρακλέους
 ἀκοῆτε κλύειν λεύσσειν τ’ ὄψιν.

Not yet, before you have listened to my words, son of Poëas; and say that your ears hear
 and your eyes view the form of Heracles. (*Phil* 1409-12)

Heracles’s talk starts with the phrase “not yet” [μήπω γε]; while the adverb μήπω registers a forthright negation of the foregoing direction; the add-on γε is to steer the attention to the ensuing statement. In other words, “not yet” [μήπω γε], as a verbal signal to caution Philoctetes to pause for a while before going ahead, indeed introduces a dramatic caesura, which magically transforms the tone of despair into that of hope. The connectivity to the thematic foci within the wider mythic context is forthwith restored. Unlike Odysseus, who is inclined to exploit verbal dexterity, Heracles attempts to persuade Philoctetes simply *via* his sensible, audible and palpable forms [ὄψις]. Heracles is not a rank outsider, because the symbolic potency of Heracles and his bow permeates this play. Throughout the play, the apotheosis of Heracles is reiterated.¹¹ For example, “to the banks of Spercheius, where the man with the brazen shield joined the gods as a god, blazing with fire divine, beyond the hills of Oeta” [Σπερχειοῦ τε παρ’ ὄχθας, ἔν’ ὁ χάλκασπις ἀνὴρ θεοῖς πλάθῃ θεός θείω πυρὶ παμφαῆς, Οὔτασ ὑπὲρ ὄχθων] (*Phil* 727-29). At the critical moment, Heracles shows up physically from the very contraption of *deus ex machina*, whose force is further intensified by the contrast between rag-covered Philoctetes on the desolate island and imposing Heracles on the lofty stand. To sum up, by means of these two techniques—an abrupt caesura and an impressive epitome, Heracles is able to inaugurate a compelling communication with Philoctetes.

¹⁰ Παλάμη, palm of one’s hand, is used to signify violent deeds, devices, and handiwork.

¹¹ Norman Austin judges Heracles *ex machina* in this play to be implausible in that “the action has been proceeding inexorably in one direction, and only when each human character has reached his final and irrevocable position does Heracles appear, and with one short pronouncement he effectively erases the whole development of the plot” (191-92). In my understanding, the exhibition of Heracles’s bow, which is an indispensable token in this play, preludes the imminent advent of Heracles.

Heracles ex machina is conducive to developing the major theme of friendship in Sophocles's *Philoctetes*. The backdrop of this play, the island of Lemnos,¹² is designed to be an uninhabited and detached island. Hawkins elaborates that Lemnos is "a setting well suited to the important theme of *φιλία*," because "making the island deserted is a way of dramatizing the need for and importance of human relationships" and "the solitude of Philoctetes, as much as his physical twinge, evokes pity in the chorus and Neoptolemus" (342). Heracles's unaffectedness can be the perfect antidote to Philoctetes's innermost rancor. In this regard, the appearance of Heracles is to revive the paragon of heroic virtue as well. That is, the visitation of the immortal Heracles at the last scene of *Philoctetes* tends to celebrate the paradigmatic integrity valued by ancient Greeks.¹³ Instantly, Philoctetes gives credence to Heracles's words, less because of the god-like attributes which Heracles has been granted than because of the reciprocity between Heracles and Philoctetes, between friends, between a giver and a receiver, and between a hero and his follower. It is not always true to say that, in the case of recalling refractory Philoctetes back to the Greek army, only the prodigious incentive proffered by Heracles is workable. Although the superhuman agency is borrowed to remove the deadlock and to alter Philoctetes's stubborn streak, Heracles is trying to motivate and mobilize Philoctetes less with resort to the higher puissance than by virtue of the mutual trust between friends. Conversely, how duplicitously Odysseus interprets the plans of Zeus (*Phil* 989-90) is dismissed merely as a contemptible pretext. By such a contrasting picture, Heracles's *bona fides* will come to maximize the creditworthiness of his speech.

In addition, the leitmotif of the bow is substantially intensified by Heracles's presence. From the start of this play, Philoctetes relates himself to the bow in the following manner: "I am he whom you have heard to be the master of the weapons of Heracles, the son of Poeas, Philoctetes" [ὄδ' εἴμ' ἐγώ σοι κείνος, ὃν κλύεις ἴσως τῶν Ἡσακλείων ὄντα δεσπότην ὅπλων, ὁ τοῦ Ποίαντος παῖς φιλοκτῆτης] (*Phil* 261-63); that is, he attributes his unique lineage to Heracles

¹² The *Iliad* describes how Philoctetes was left on the island Lemnos as follows:

ἀλλ' ὃ μὲν ἐν νήσῳ κείτο κρατέρ' ἄλγεα πάσχων
 Λήμνῳ ἐν ἠγαθήῃ, ὅθι μιν λίπον υἱεὶς Ἀχαιῶν
 ἔλκεϊ μοχθίζοντα κακῶ ὀλοόφρονος ὕδρου (*Iliad* II. 721-23).

But Philoctetes lay suffering mighty pains on an island, on a sacred Lemnos, where the sons of the Achaeans had left him in anguish with an evil wound from a deadly water snake.

Sophocles picks up Philoctetes as a unique protagonist, whose exceptional vigor of character and reluctance to compromise with the trickster Odysseus and unfaithful Greek comrades define him as a tragic hero.

¹³ The name Philoctetes suggest the theme of *philos*, which generally conveys the related network of friendship and specifically consists of people linked by a bond of respect in the community.

by claiming his position as the master [δεσπότην] of the bow. Sometimes, Philoctetes regards the bow as a friend, addressing “O beloved bow” [ὦ τόξον φίλον] (*Phil* 1128). In either case, the bow is regarded as the linchpin for re-establishing a god-human connection and for activating a constructive interaction between Philoctetes and Heracles. Neoptolemus portrays that the bow itself is the incarnation of a god: “is it possible for me to look at it from close, and to hold it and kiss it as though it were a god?” [ἄρ’ ἔστιν ὥστε κάγγύθεν θεῶν λαβεῖν καὶ βιασάσαι με προσκύσαι θ’ ὥσπερ θεόν] (*Phil* 656-57). Similarly, Heracles, apotheosized in the quasi-ritual bequeath of the bow on Mount Oeta, is a tangible synthesis of the disparate elements of a man [ἄνθρωπος] and a god [θεοῖς]. Throughout Sophocles’s *Philoctetes*, the bow is a symbol of everlasting friendship, a synecdoche for Heracles himself, a metaphor for the stamina which Heracles is endowed with, and a metonymy for the upcoming epiphany of Heracles. In brief, the crowning apparition of Heracles at the end of this play perfects the motif of the bow.

As the culmination of the friendship theme and the crucial point of the dramatic recognition, Heracles *ex machina* appears to twist the crisis into a happy ending but actually remains a highly problematic finale. Generally speaking, the interposition of Heracles can be interpreted optimistically as an operative tactic, negatively as a renunciation of Philoctetes’s autonomy, or pessimistically as an outright denial of human efforts in grappling with the ills of mankind. At the first level, Sophocles spins a rather confident, idealistic, and even upbeat tone. That Philoctetes jumps at the chance to rejoin the Greek contingents right after Heracles’s persuasion is a testimony to the Athenian optimism in celebrating an instinctive recognition of inborn nobility. The shift marks a turn from authority to reciprocity, from trickery to friendship, or from divinity to humanity—although *via* a semi-divine apparition. However, the happy ending is fairly deceptive; a cautious reading will direct us to discern that the seemingly pacifying epilogue of *Philoctetes* may well nullify the likelihood of human rapprochement. In Tessitore’s words, the outcome of *Philoctetes* “makes the conflict between Odysseus and Philoctetes intractable” and Sophocles thus “cuts off any possible human reconciliation between these two men” (77). In most of Sophocles’s plays, mortal protagonists are usually allowed sufficient freedom to find their own way to what is ahead. And, by corollary, Philoctetes should not simply be enmeshed in the fated web. The *deus ex machina* is of vital efficacy to quiet the cacophony among the Greek heroes—but unfortunately *via* disclaiming human autonomy. Two less pressing but more arduous difficulties henceforward arise: first, Philoctetes, despite aspiring to be a honorable hero, has not yet proved himself a charismatic protagonist; second, while the crisis is purposefully turned into a peaceful solution, the main

topic about Philoctetes podiatric complaint is merely circumvented. In the following sections, I will explore how Sophocles's employment of the *deus ex machina* in this play altogether showcases his attempt to broach two subjects: first, the continuity and innovation of the heroic paradigm; second, the immature technology, undersupplied resources, and inadequate healthcare in the fifth century BCE or thereabouts.

***Pathos* [πάθος]: Heracles's Labors and Philoctetes's Sufferings**

I now turn to the controversy over the question of whether the very utilization of *deus ex machina* in Sophocles's *Philoctetes* is a proper way to corroborate that Philoctetes, the eponymous protagonist, is an emblematic hero.¹⁴ Obviously, Philoctetes has a morally satisfactory character, but he is not charismatic at all. We can find in Philoctetes certain dispositions contradictory to the stereotyped elements of a courageous personality. It is really puzzling why Philoctetes cannot but accept the fate of an involuntary excommunication and then the destiny of re-entering the Greek forces at the cost of his autonomy. The nine-year sojourn in Lemnos¹⁵ is an unusually anti-heroic, unpromising, unproductive, and exacting tribulation. Upon Heracles's showing up, Philoctetes is at the peak of his defiance—Philoctetes at the precise moment is harboring reckless folly and even hubristic blindness. Even though a tragic hero is generally characterized by a knotty mixture of courage and folly, idealism and blindness, and self-sacrifice and self-destructiveness, Philoctetes seldom actively displays his distinguished features—positive or negative. However, it turns out that Philoctetes, though incapacitated, persistently toughs out all difficulties with his singularly sure-footed ways. Philoctetes is not merely in exile but also in complete isolation, which may drive most men out of joint with the cosmos or with an imaginatively harmonious totality of the world. It is discerned that Sophocles attempts to remold Philoctetes

¹⁴ Generally, we expect a hero to be possessed of four basic attributes: being good, being courageous, being true to life and being consistent. Aristotle sheds a new light on the concept of a tragic hero, who is neither completely equivalent to a paragon of virtue and justice nor utterly the same as the wretched man undergoing misfortune through any real badness or wickedness. In other words, a tragic hero is good and decent, but neither a villain nor a model of perfection. Another key point is that, according to Aristotle, the tragic hero must learn to overcome his tragic flaw or *harmatia*. And what is stressed in my paper is that Philoctetes, as a typical hero in Sophocles's tragedy, not only evokes the heroic pattern but also sets up an example for the public to follow—one is for individual integrity and the other is for the social commitment.

¹⁵ Lemnos, according to Greek mythology, is a special environment for gods or heroes to get cured. For example, Hephaestus suffers a nine-year exile on Lemnos and thus he acquires his magical powers before returning to Olympus. Besides, the blinded Orion goes to Lemnos and meets Hephaestus, who helps Orion to get healed by the Sun.

as a hero transforming from an unremembered derelict to an up-and-coming savior, from a deserted castaway to the most laudable contributor to the formation of a community. In Heracles's argument is a new perspective that a brave man should shoulder the responsibility of community affairs and worthy honor is related not merely to personal reputation but also to collective glory.

Rather than out of the blue, Heracles's advent is intended as an enlightening lodestar for Philoctetes to follow; however, a sense of irony permeates the exemplar of Heracles's greatness. Heracles's talk underscores the inimitability of his consummate labors, but, in the meanwhile, Heracles encourages Philoctetes to emulate the alluring prominence as Heracles himself has achieved:

καὶ πρῶτα μὲν σοὶ τὰς ἐμὰς λέξω τύχας,
 ὅσους πονήσας καὶ διεξελθὼν πόνους
 ἀθάνατον ἀρετὴν ἔσχον, ὡς πάρεσθ' ὄρᾶν.
 καὶ σοί, σάφ' ἴσθι, τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν,
 ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ' εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον. (*Phil* 1418-22)

And first I will tell you of my fortunes, of how many labours I endured to go through to win eternal glory, as you can see. For you too, know it for sure, destiny is the same, after these sufferings to make your life glorious.

This passage supports the thesis that "Philoctetes, like Heracles, must move through and beyond his distress to win the glory to which he is destined" (Hawkins 356). Yet under this simplistic slogan of winning eternal glory is a sort of incommensurability, because there is no straightforward equivalence between Heracles's labors and Philoctetes's sufferings. First of all, it is indeed impossible for Philoctetes to transcend the insurmountable gap between human beings and supernatural beings. Conceptually, the metamorphosis that Heracles himself becomes fully civilized and unambiguously divinized (Segal, *Tragic World* 293) exemplifies how to mutate from mortality into immortality. No matter how illustrious the eternal glory [ἀθάνατον ἀρετὴν]¹⁶ of the providential bliss allocated for Philoctetes is, *Philoctetes* is remembered for the telling theme of the unjustifiable fortune [τύχας]. All in all, Sophocles at the same time appreciates Heraclean courage and eulogizes those willing to committing themselves to the society at the cost of personal interest.

¹⁶ The Greek concept of ἀρετή in its primary sense refers to heroic virtue par excellence, that is, valor. But Sophocles here stresses ἀρετή as reputation obtained by efforts. Jebb points out that the same phrase ἀθάνατον ἀρετὴν appears in Plato's *Symposium* (208d), indicating "the reputation which survives on earth," which is close to the Homeric formula of "imperishable fame." I will take into consideration a more precise interpretation of ἀθάνατον ἀρετὴν, that is, the very immortality that Heracles wins ultimately. Taken together, the term ἀθάνατον ἀρετὴν signifies the hero's bravery, undying fame, and Heracles's apotheosis as well.

Via presenting the advent of Heracles at the end of *Philoctetes*, Sophocles moves the focal point from an individual's grief to the community's optimal welfare. The transition of core concern from individual accomplishments to community commitment maps out, as Barry B. Powell pinpoints, the radical alteration "between the glory-hungry heroes of Homer's Trojan War and the glory-hungry *polis* of the classical period" (61).¹⁷ Indeed, the diction of "sharing the glory" is recurrent in this play (*Phil* 69; 115; 1305). Segal underscores that "Heracles's appearance regenerates the possibility of absolute values in the tragic *logos* and *mythos*" and "effects at least a partial reconciliation between the splendid but harsh intransigence of the old heroism and the flexibility demanded by the new society of the fifth-century *polis*" (*Tragedy* 338). Philoctetes is required to waive his personal interests for the sake of the Greek league. Philoctetes, like an upstanding citizen serving the needs of the Athenian empire, is entitled to full-scale freedom, but he has to make decisions expressly on whatever benefits his society. On the one side, Philoctetes incarnates the Homeric nobility, which is marked by an unbending courage to resist being assimilated into the meaner, pragmatic, and egocentric realities. On the flip side, *Philoctetes* elucidates a mixture of old-generational dignified figures and new-fangled patriotic elements. Philoctetes, plagued by the unmitigated disharmony between individual and community, is forced to restrain himself for the sake of the greater good of the Greek common cause and to follow all the benchmarks formulated under the collective mechanisms of the developing geopolitics. In short, Sophocles devises a rather instructive tool to propagate patriotism.¹⁸ To put it differently, the prototype of Heracles's labors and the ideologically larger enterprise of the *polis* are subtly annexed in *Philoctetes*.

Heracles's theory that the ultimate fame originates from completing the toughest tasks is implicitly against a social malaise of hypocritical pragmatism. Philoctetes stands out as a throwback to the heroic era. To say that "Philoctetes is in a sense the last of the heroes" (Segal, *Tragedy* 296) is not merely to applaud Philoctetes's uncompromising fidelity to the erstwhile heroic ideals but also to reprove the fifth-century Athenians for their skeptical and hypocritical inclination. Philoctetes has "the true voice of one who treads his path under constraint" [ἐτύμα

¹⁷ Powell estimates that this shift can be dated "to the early seventh century BCE, to judge from shields dedicated at the shrine of Zeus at Olympia" (61).

¹⁸ Sophocles, as a general in the Samian Revolt of 441-439 BCE, is supposed to be rather familiar with the local cults and myths of the eastern Aegean and the island of Lemnos. In addition, the military context matters. Josh Beer, who tends to relate the play to the fifth-century political stage, recalls the notable Alcibiades and identifies the fictive Lemnos exactly as "the main theatre of naval operation of the Polynesian war" (135). The statement that the *deus ex machina* serves as political propaganda (Abel 129) is valid in Sophocles's *Philoctetes*; but it is hard to prove if this case refers to a specific contemporaneous agenda or policy.

φθογγά του στίβον κατ' ἀνάγκαν ἔρποντος] (*Phil* 205-09); likewise, Heracles utters a voice of the noble, upright and civilized self, which is supposed to be pitted against disingenuous sophistry. In Segal's words, "divinely sponsored *mythos* resolves the impasse in the social and moral order caused by faithless and deceitful *logos*" and thus "*mythos* is here truer than *logos*" (*Tragedy* 337). Odysseus, likened to a canny politician, pretends that what he does is nothing but to execute [ὑπηρετῶ] the will of Zeus (*Phil* 989-90); however, Philoctetes detests this kind of double-speak tact, reacting furiously: "hateful creature, what things you find to say! By sheltering behind gods you make the gods liars" [ὦ μῖσος, οἷα κάξανευρίσκεις λέγειν· θεοὺς προτείνων τοὺς θεοὺς ψευδεῖς τίθης] (*Phil* 991-92). Sophocles magnifies the oxymoronic connotations of true liars, *via* Odysseus' witty reply—"No, truth-tellers! And the journey must be made" [οὐκ, ἀλλ' ἀληθεῖς· ἢ δ' ὁδὸς πορευτέα] (*Phil* 993). In the fifth and fourth century BCE, religion "no longer completely satisfied the Athenian curiosity about life and death matter" and Greek intellectuals "glorified reason over superstition, and inquiry became the honored method of investigation" (Dyngneson 137). Yet the overblown suspicion of the normative practices may go out of control.

The theatric implementation of *deus ex machina* imparts Sophocles's primary concern over both the problem about the abuse of rhetoric in the fifth-century society. Obviously, the issue about how the so-called divine words are often distortedly rendered with a pervasive skepticism is much more stressed than the topic about how the realization of the Helenus's prediction¹⁹ has been procrastinated for a long time. In Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, the oracle is opportunistically manipulated by Odysseus into different circumstances. By doing so, Odysseus belittles and even ridicules the supernatural omnipotence, but paradoxically *via* aggrandizing the impact of the predicted track. More importantly, the relevance of the political ambience in the Classical period should be carefully reconsidered, since *Philoctetes* tends to disclose the tensions and ambiguities within the fifth-century political ideology. On the one hand, the value of myth for ancient Greeks resides in "its capacity to subsume and rationalize the immediate circumstances of human experience" (Castriota 5); on the other hand, "*civism* was derived from religious interpretations of man's relationship to a designated god" (Dyngneson 8).

¹⁹ The prediction divined by Helenus is rendered by the Merchant as follows:

ὄς δὴ τὰ τ' ἄλλ' αὐτοῖσι πάντ' ἐθέσπισεν
καὶ τὰπὶ Τροίᾳ πέργαμ' ὡς οὐ μὴ ποτε
πέρσοιεν, εἰ μὴ τόνδε πείσαντες λόγῳ
ἄγουντο νήσου τῆσδ' ἐφ' ἧς ναίει τα νῦν. (*Phil* 610-13)

they (the Greeks) would never take the towers of Troy, unless they persuaded Philoctetes and brought him from the island where he is now living.

In either case, Philoctetes, both an archetype of Greek hero and a model citizen, ought to stick to the conventional norms and adjust to new circumstances as well. Sophocles, via dramatizing the corruption of an old-fashioned pattern, is meticulously managing to fashion new heroes, who can abide by the traditional norms and better their society as well.

While the characterization of Philoctetes revolves around the continuity, innovation, and transmission of certain core values, the interaction among Heracles, Philoctetes, Odysseus and Neoptolemus reflects varying aspects of the political, historical and social milieus of fifth-century Athens. Upon the acceptance of Heracles's proposition, Philoctetes refreshingly turns to a moral and intellectual scrutiny, automatically ceases spewing jeremiads, and instantaneously accepts his role in carrying out the very "splendid promise" [λόγος καλός] (*Phil* 352). The grand prospect will be delivered on as long as Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, two lions in a pride or two companions lions [ὡς λέοντε συννόμω] (*Phil* 1436), are going to devastate Priam's city. Moreover, the potentiality of the eternal glory [εὐκλεῖα θέσθαι] (*Phil* 1422) or the enduring renown, according to Richard Buxton, is double-edged: "*kleos* in *Philoctetes* is both the report of the hero's disease-ridden misfortune and the prospect of his glory at Troy" (170-71). The phrase beautiful word [λόγος καλός] may refer to the visionary utterance, the alluring incentive, or the gorgeous oration. From a positive perspective, the very λόγος καλός mentioned by Heracles exactly stimulates Philoctetes to reach his career apex. In a negative sense, the refrain λόγος καλός is thematically an echo to Odysseus' sophisticated style.²⁰ In this play, Odysseus is living proof of the pejorative sense of λόγος καλός: Odysseus wittingly manipulates the prophetic enunciations to meet his own interest and subordinates reverence to expediency. That Odysseus is calculatingly demonized in *Philoctetes* epitomizes how blisteringly Sophocles attacks the trendy oratory. Odysseus is pegged as a type of sophist who has a good command of the duplicitous strategy and dazzling eloquence, while Heracles follows a sort of Achillean paradigm and converts a heroic image into a respectable civic leader. Besides, whereas Odysseus' goal is a palpable victory even achieved by deceitful setup, Philoctetes positions himself to be a venerable figure by championing his lifelong probity.

Rather than a timely suture or medicaments for Philoctetes's bleeding foot, spoils [σκῦλον] and the prize [ἀριστεῖα] are the very incentives advanced by Heracles to prompt Philoctetes to take action:

²⁰ Hawkins illustrates that Odysseus' dispassionate and practical speech (*Phil* 40-47) "epitomizes one kind of φρόνησις, reason in its most practical sense as the shrewd calculation of a tactical strategy" (346).

... σκῦλά τ' ἐς μέλαθρα σά
πέμψεις, ἀριστεῖ' ἐκλαβὼν στρατεύματος,
Ποίαντι πατρί πρὸς πάτρας Οἴτης πλάκα.

... and bringing the spoils to your abode, after receiving the greatest prize of the army,
for your father Poeas to the topmost plain of Oeta, your native place. (*Phil* 1428-30)

Three key notions deserve more remarks: spoils [σκῦλον], the greatest prize of the army [ἀριστεῖ' . . . στρατεύματος], and native place [πάτρας . . . πλάκα]. The word spoils σκῦλον is derived from the verb σκύλλω,²¹ that is, to tear down the skin or hide of the animals. The derivative σκύλος refers, for instance, to a lion's skin or the outer husk of a nut. By Greek convention, the spoils²² are arms stripped off from a slain enemy; and Greek heroes as usual write their names on the spoiled arms and then dedicated their booty to a particular deity. Heracles mentions that Philoctetes can bring the spoils [σκῦλον] to his abode (*Phil* 1428); but then what Philoctetes obtains from the expedition [ἄ δ' ἂν λάβῃς σὺ σκῦλα τοῦδε τοῦ στρατοῦ] must be offered as a memory of Heracles's bow (*Phil* 1431). Jebb annotates that "all the σκῦλα mentioned in 1431 were to be dedicated to Heracles" and summarizes that "the σκῦλα of 1428—destined for the house of Poeas—are distinct from the σκῦλα of 1431" (254). Jebb's annotation on two kinds of σκῦλα exactly demonstrates that Philoctetes's stately valor is never the same as Heracles's hallowed prestige. The σκῦλα (*Phil* 1428) may refer either to spoils allocated to Philoctetes from the common booty as his share of the prize [ἀριστεῖα] or trophy given by the Greeks as reward for Philoctetes's contribution or a special honorarium earmarked for Philoctetes. In this light, prize,²³ a substantive equivalent to honor,²⁴ is embraced as a recommendable antidote to abate the resentment chronically planted in Philoctetes's soul. Heracles accentuates that Philoctetes should be a hero braving the unjustifiable hardship. Heracles places much stress on commemorating Philoctetes's fatherland and treasuring his

²¹ Aside from the meaning of tearing down the skin from the animals, fish, or the dead enemies, σκύλλω can mean maltreat, molest, annoy, feel troubled, and, medically, shave the patient's head.

²² The term of σκῦλα appears in one of Jesus' parables: "But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides the spoils" [ἐπὶ δὲ ἰσχυρότερος αὐτοῦ ἐπελθὼν νικήσῃ αὐτόν, τὴν πανοπλίαν αὐτοῦ αἴρει ἐφ' ἣ ἔπεποίθει καὶ τὰ σκῦλα αὐτοῦ διαδίδωσιν] (Luke 11:22).

²³ The concept of prize [γέρας] is interchangeable with honor, gifts, privilege or prerogative conferred on kings or the noblemen in ancient Greece. For example, the quarrel over the γέρας in the *Iliad* actually involves not only the apportionment of what was taken from the pillaged cities but also the proper honor by which the king or the hero was gloried (*Iliad* I: 123-25).

²⁴ S. J. Harrison hypothesizes that Sophocles's *Philoctetes* is a strong case for the heroic cult—in which a hero will receive worship after his death (173). Based on this premise, it is acceptable to say that Philoctetes will become a hero-god after his death. But this theory remains a proposition in search of a proof.

heroic genealogy. The gist of *Philoctetes* seemingly consists in “the celebration of the transmission of patriarchal virtue of power, through myth and cult, from Zeus to his actual son Heracles, and from Heracles to his friend Philoctetes, through the talismanic, all-powerful bow” (Hall 320-21). However, what is under scrutiny in Sophocles's *Philoctetes* is exactly the man-made systems—medical and social alike—which fail to function well.

Heracles does not conclude that Philoctetes is a true hero, and he just says that Philoctetes will become the most honorable one. Philoctetes will be remodeled into a brave scapegoat to salvage the Greek contingents and into a competent candidate to restore the *polis* order. What is more, the clincher of Heracles's line of argument is that Philoctetes's problem will be remedied, but he must go to Troy: “You shall go with this man to the city of Troy and first be cured of your grim sickness” [ἐλθὼν δὲ σὺν τῷδ' ἀνδρὶ τρὸς τὸ Τρωικὸν πόλισμα, πρῶτον μὲν νόσου πάυση λυγρᾶς] (*Phil* 1423-24). Philoctetes's grim sickness is imagined to have been caused by divine power, that is, due to a supernatural snakebite; in ancient Greek mentality, Philoctetes is allegedly the source of public miasma. But being abandoned is not necessarily the same as being penalized; on the contrary, the nine-year insulation is for Philoctetes an optimized medium of rehabilitation and elevation. An ulterior reason for the quarantine on the uninhabited Lemnos is that such a near zero-point survival can spur the rebirth of a stronger self. At the behest of Heracles, Philoctetes accedes to participation in the Greek expedition (1445-47). However, the therapy is being ignored and postponed—even though Heracles assures Philoctetes the curability of his disease.²⁵ Despite foreseeing the prospective recuperation at Troy, Philoctetes has little access to basic medical care. Even though from the extraordinarily long-drawn-out affliction Philoctetes may reap a higher status sometime in the future or a marvelous reward posthumously, it is not well grounded that Philoctetes has to stomach the ordeal of the chronic malady. Sophocles's *Philoctetes* leaves us with a tragic scenario that the fame Philoctetes will enjoy is a deferring exile on a defamiliarized island.²⁶

²⁵ It is said that Pindar's *Pythian Ode I* records that “Philoctetes's poisonous bite is described while he was asleep, Machaon cut away the gangrenous flesh from the festering ulcer, poured wine over it, and sprinkled on the wound a herb that Asclepius had obtained from Chiron” (Phillips 17).

²⁶ To be precise, there is no happy ending at all; or, at most, there will be. Sophocles's *Philoctetes* does not end with a scenario of how Philoctetes is cured, but with a vision that he will be a true hero and will get the best therapy—an interstice always exists between now and the future!

Aporia

In Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, a proper healing for Philoctetes's ulcerating foot is always postponed. The chorus, describing Philoctetes as a suspicious, but lonely, unhappy, and much-tortured man (*Phil* 137, 156, 169-90), simply feels curious why this enfeebled cripple, maimed invalid, and deserted barbarian will rise to the greatest prominence. In a broad sense, the state of being uncivilized is a disorder. Segal considers Philoctetes's savagery "over-determined" by the "savage disease," which is "both cause and effect of his exile on his deserted island" (*Tragedy* 292).²⁷ Philoctetes has to fight against the uncivilized existence and destitute circumstances as well as battle with the unrelenting pain. Heracles forwards the message that it is crucial for Philoctetes to re-enter into civilization, claiming that Philoctetes's illness will be ameliorated from a wild and savage mode to the somewhat less "terrible" (λυγρῶς) condition (*Phil* 1423-24). Philoctetes's trauma has the considerable function to trigger a downward mediation and upward soul-searching, which for Segal indicates a kind of inward reflection of the very savage or *agrios* character similar to the devouring disease itself (*Tragedy* 316). However, neither the projection of Philoctetes's inner savagery nor the emanation of the gods' will can satisfactorily explain away the etiology of Philoctetes's malady. Obviously, Heracles does not offer a convincing analysis for Philoctetes's excruciating and undiminished throes.

Heracles's argument (*Phil* 1425-44) is misleading for three reasons: a sweeping generalization in rationalizing Philoctetes's misadventure, an indefinite prognosis concerning Philoctetes's aggravating symptoms, and an inconsiderate suggestion of a precarious transfer of the disabled Philoctetes to the threatening front at the battleground. In the first case, Heracles postulates that if Philoctetes wants to be on a par with the greatest hero and to be remembered by his vigor, perseverance, and character, Philoctetes had better desist from the bottomless self-pity and eradicate the root of all troubles [τῶνδ' αἴτιος κακῶν]:

ἀρετῇ τε πρῶτος ἐκκριθείς στρατεύματος,
 Πάριν μὲν, ὃς τῶνδ' αἴτιος κακῶν ἔφυσ,
 τόξοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖσι νοσφεῖς βίου,
 πέρσεις τε Τροίαν. . .

And you shall be judged first of the army in valour, depriving of life Paris, who was the cause of these troubles, and taking Troy. . . (*Phil* 1425-28)

²⁷ Segal demonstrates the multiple-layered meanings of the civilized-uncivilized antithesis systematically and recapitulates his main points concisely with a diagram attached to the article "Philoctetes: The Myth and the Gods" (*Tragedy* 327).

Because of his dogged determination to hold on to life and to his self-respect, Philoctetes comes to earn a fine reputation. If Philoctetes merely wanted sympathy, then he would be no better than a wretched man. Philoctetes does not mean to angle for compassion; instead, he is wrathful simply because he has little knowledge about the genesis of his illness, his predicament, and his pain. To soothe Philoctetes, Heracles repeats that Paris is held accountable for the scourge of all these grueling troubles, which cover any diseases and encumbrances that not only Philoctetes but also the Greeks have to put up with.²⁸ In this way, to be an enterprising hero, Philoctetes is expected to obliterate “the cause of these troubles” [τῶνδ’ αἴτιος κακῶν], conceived of as interchangeable with the trigger for the brawls between Greeks and Trojans. Evidently, because Heracles’s point of view is framed by such a sweeping generalization, the etiology of disease²⁹ is mistaken to be the same as the responsibility for the war.³⁰ Because of this logical fallacy, the Greeks, whose culpability for deserting Philoctetes is neglected, are erroneously becoming victims. Philoctetes’s agony is apparently ignored by Heracles, who never identifies the culpable agents of Philoctetes’s festering wound.

Secondly, Heracles’s cure-all prescription for Philoctetes—a kind of holistic cure through rebuilding a harmonious relation with society and with gods—is indeed of little use:

τοὔτο δ’ ἐννοεῖθ’, ὅταν
 πορθῆτε γαῖαν, εὐσεβεῖν τὰ πρὸς θεοῦς·
 ὡς τᾶλλα πάντα δεῦτερ’ ἡγεῖται πατήρ
 Ζεὺς, οὐ γάρ εὐσέβεια συνθνήσκει βροτοῖς·
 κἂν ζῶσι κἂν θάνωσιν, οὐκ ἀπόλλυται.

But remember when you conquer the land to show reverence to the gods; for all things come after this in the mind of Zeus my father. For reverence for the gods does not die along with mortals; whether they live or die, it never perishes. (*Phil* 1440-44)

The statement that Philoctetes’s life is never unworthy [ἀνάξιος] and Philoctetes will be free from distress implies that health should be defined not only as a bodily salubrity but also as a holistic status. Darrel W. Amundsen

²⁸ Diplomatically, Paris’s improper behavior led to an outrage against the honor and prestige of Menelaos, while, ethically, Paris did something similar to an act of impiety toward the Greek norms ordained by Zeus, that is, the law of hospitality.

²⁹ Barry Robson and O. K. Baek remind us that “Hippocrates rejected the views of his contemporary society that considered illness to be caused by possession of evil spirits and disfavor of the gods” (58). By ascribing all troubles to Paris, Heracles seems to brush aside the rationalistic approach to diseases and confuses the problem of Philoctetes’s foot illness with the disasters resulting from the warfare between the Greeks and Trojans.

³⁰ Since most Greek tragedies involve a consistent rethinking about the complicated present, past, and future, their topics are usually on a convoluted web of causes and responsibilities.

remarks that at least among the Greeks of the fifth century BCE or later, health “was an ideal, indeed the highest good, set above beauty, wealth, and inner nobility” (33). However, the delay in treating Philoctetes wounded foot may well mute his hope of winning superior wellbeing in the future. If Heracles’s main thesis is that every human concern, even justice and the rough and tumble of human life, is subordinate to reverence [εὐσέβεια] (*Phil* 1444), then, as Aristide Tessitore calculates, “the appearance of Heracles provides only a qualified endorsement of Philoctetes’s position” (85). By dint of Heracles’s pep talk, social norms are somehow elevated and the Greek armies are practically cemented; but the ultimate medal of eternal fame is less a panacea than a placebo. Although Heracles may assume the role of mediating between the immortal and the mortal, he makes no headway towards arbitrating in the dispute among human beings, articulates no intention to formulate a consensus of opinions, and is not capable of treating Philoctetes’s physical infirmity. The *deus ex machina* in Sophocles’s *Philoctetes* aims at relieving the discord between Philoctetes and Odysseus and at reconciling the tension between an afflicted individual and the embattled Greek league, but the fundamental demand for personal retribution and the panorama of a larger common good are far from harmonized. In practice, what Heracles prescribes has little effect in alleviating Philoctetes’s podiatric pain.

The third awkward point in Heracles’s argument is that Philoctetes—though injured and crippled—will be referred to Asclepius,³¹ the putative reliever [πασστήρ]:

ἐγὼ δ’ Ἀσκληπιὸν
πασστήρα πέμψω σῆς νόσου πρὸς Ἴλιον.
τὸ δεύτερον γὰρ τοῖς ἑμοῖς ἀντήν χρεῶν
τόξοις ἀλῶναι. (*Phil* 1437-40)

And I will send Asclepius to Ilium to put an end to your disease. For it is fated to be taken once again by the aid of this bow.

Three problems are compounded: first, Heracles will never clean, bandage or cure Philoctetes’s wound; second, the location for further medications and surgery is Ilium; third, such a risky transfer is categorically inevitable. First, if Heracles *ex machina* is not simply an appendage to the plot or a stoppage measure, then Heracles’s instructions will constitute an integral and irremovable part of the play and thus a choice epilogue to the theme of diseased foot, which is said to be

³¹ Later the sanctuaries of Asclepius became the most significant healing centers, where “a potent mixture of medicine, auto-suggestion, faith healing, and divine intervention” was practiced (Garland 105). According to Brooke Holmes, “in the later fifth century, the cult of Asclepius, the hero-son of Apollo who eventually becomes a god, begins to spread throughout the Greek world, flourishing in the Hellenistic period and under the Roman Empire” (80-81).

“an event caused by the gods” [ἐκ θείας τύχης] (*Phil* 1326) or “the fortunes given . . . by the gods” [ἐκ θεῶν τύχας] (*Phil* 1316-17).³² Like the epiphany dream in temple medicine, the appearance of Heracles performs a sort of faith healing; but unlike the Asclepius practitioners, the semi-god Heracles merely gives Philoctetes a referral to other competent healers. Heracles, far from a surrogate doctor, shunts seriously wounded Philoctetes off to Asclepius and his sons.³³ Above all, the conclusion that a real therapy for Philoctetes's ailment will be given—but is actually suspended ad infinitum with the end of the play—may just discredit the authoritative power released by Heracles.

Conveying the injured Philoctetes to Troy is the worst-case scenario, but it is a must. In ancient Greece, those rescued from battlefields could survive from their injuries, since ancient Greeks had considerable medical expertise in war wounds.³⁴ In Sternberg's words, “health care in ancient Greece was a structure built and rebuilt over time using a variety of materials: folk remedy, magic, religions and science” and “knowledge of herbs and roots abutted unlikely superstition, while prayerful supplication to the gods adjoined observation, surgery, and systematic reasoning about the human body” (22). Maybe Philoctetes, murmuring that “so one period of time after another went by for me” [ὁ μὲν χρόνος νυν διὰ χρόνου προύβαινέ μοι] (*Phil* 285), has perceived that he misses the best timing for therapy. Due to limited access to available resources, Philoctetes, lingering on Lemnos, keeps no hope for recovery (*Phil* 296-99). Nevertheless, there are alternative avenues. For instance, he can turn to Pyllos, the son of Hephaestus, or the priests of Hephaestus on Lemnos, all of whom are fairly skillful at treating the bite of the water snake or hydros (Segal, *Tragedy* 310-11). Moreover, to reenter a city like Troy³⁵ is never among the practical countermeasures against the intolerable

³² In the fifth century BCE at Athens, Corinth, Epidaurus, and Cos, “one might leave home temporarily to seek healing in a religious sanctuary, especially one built for Asclepius” (Sternberg 23); however, the Asclepius sanctuaries were quite different from modern hospitals. Although later Hellenistic cities usually boasted extensive shrines of the healing god of Asclepius which functioned as hospitals, it is imaginable that no such kind of hospitals existed in the fifth-century BCE or earlier.

³³ Machaon, son of Asclepius, is a soldier at the Troy war as well as a surgeon during the Trojan War (*Iliad* 2.729-32). According to mythical tradition, when Menelaus was wounded, Menelaus sent a messenger for Machaon, who skillfully treated Menelaus's injury by extracting the barbed arrow, sucking the wound and applying a secret ointment made known to Asclepius by Chiron. Besides, Machaon was said to fight in the army of Nestor, who, fearing for Machaon's safety and deeming that a doctor is worth many men, took him into his chariot.

³⁴ Sternberg cites instances of wounded men being carried out of the war spot: Sarpendon by his comrades (based on the *Iliad*), the heroic generals such as Brasidas, Epaminodas, Agesilans or Alexander the Great (according to ancient historians), and some rank-and-file hoplites (109). In the ancient battlefield, the limited resources refrained the Greeks from sending back all the wounded generals and men; and, as far as Philoctetes's case is concerned, it is near impossible to list “sailing him home” as a top priority.

³⁵ For the wounded, a transfer to Ilium smacks of an extra danger. Sophocles's *Philoctetes* premiered

primitiveness of the deserted life. Troy, which is the next stop for Philoctetes, is going to collapse; there more troubles will be incurred rather than terminated. Whatever the risks, sailing to Troy is the ultimate order that Philoctetes must obey (*Phil* 915-16).

As far as the military logistics and medical recourses are concerned, it is better to clean and bandage Philoctetes's wound before he is transferred to other places; but Philoctetes will not be taken care of until he arrives at Troy. According to Sternberg, a tough problem in ancient wartime is: "how fighting men on the move should handle their sick and wounded comrades" (104). Sternberg finds that although there were various types of conveyance available in the ancient times such as "able-bodied men, litters, pack animals, wagons, and ships," the crux of difficulty consists in "who, if anyone, was responsible for the transport of incapacitated soldiers," particularly when the armies fought further and further away from Greece (112-14). Supposed that the Greek army had adequate accoutrements, the same policy that Philoctetes is settled on a relatively safe site on the way to Troy would not be altered, since the provisions—such as food, water, armor, arms, military machines, cauldrons, and other unspecified supplies—are usually kept for the long-distance and long-term warfare rather than for one debilitated individual. Walter Kaufmann hypothesizes that to consummate *Philoctetes* with the *deus ex machina* is to transform Philoctetes into "the savior of his people" (234). It is praiseworthy that Philoctetes will not be released from his own impairment until he shows up to save those who once deserted him. After all, Philoctetes had his singular virtue of patience [καρτερία] or tenacity of life. However, even though Heracles underscores that Philoctetes's tolerance can be a prelude to an abiding honor, no adequate justification is given to explain the prolonged and unmerited affliction, the deferred medication and irrational calculation of conveyance to Troy.³⁶

For these reasons, we can conclude that Heracles gives a tentative fix, not a complete solution. But the shortfall of Heracles's argument precisely alerts us to certain problems in Sophocles's contemporary age: the insufficient knowledge pertaining to pathology, the undersupply of doctors, and the shortage of medical

in 409 BCE when the naval battles had recently taken place around Lemnos and the contentious area of the Hellespont (Rehm 139).

³⁶ Philoctetes's suffering is best observed by the Chorus: "but there is none other among the mortals whom I have heard of or have looked upon who has met with a more hateful destiny than this man, who having done nothing to anyone, done no murder, but being a just man among just men, was perishing thus undeservedly" [ἄλλον δ' οὐτὶν ἔγωγ' οἶδα κλύων οὐδ' εἰσιδὼν μοῖρα τοῦδ' ἐχθίονι συντυχόντα θνατῶν, ὃς οὔτε ἔρξας τιν', οὔτε τι νοσφίσσας, ἀλλ' ἴσος ἐν ἴσοις ἀνήρ, ὅλλυθ' ὠδ' ἀναξίως] (*Phil* 680-85).

resources. The conceivable hazards of transporting wounded soldiers like Philoctetes altogether result in an *aporia*, a state of helplessness and hopelessness. Drew Leder conjectures that if a modern physician were present, “Philoctetes’s problem might be diagnosed as a chronic localized infection, perhaps, actinomycosis, extending into the bone” (1). While Leder stresses that an illness, differing from a disease, can be neither objectified through a well-classified physiological order nor identified with an anatomical lesion, we can discern that Philoctetes’s condition—as both an illness and a disease in Leder’s sense—is indicative of rather limited medical capacity for approaching the related ailments. The profound sense of epistemological vulnerability results from the problem that a sick person knows neither pathogenesis nor future consequences of the disease. A true redemption of the excruciating exile, in this light, is up to the enlightenment or a long civilizing process, through which the underlying mechanisms of disease are step by step better understood. If it is true that “the highest σοφία is represented by the *deus ex machina* that concludes the play” and “the wisdom Heracles concludes confers is neither scientific knowledge nor philosophic understanding, but rather epiphanic apprehension of divine meaning and purpose” (Hawkins 343), then Sophocles’s *Philoctetes* deliberately leaves a quite pessimistic vision about human beings’ incompetence in advancing medicine. If the instance of Philoctetes’s illness is to illustrate the incidence of wartime hysteria, an everlasting mark of the rankling sore bespeaks the fundamental doubt over human medical technology. So to speak, Sophocles’s *Philoctetes* reveals an *aporia*: a real cure is always postponed, no matter how grand, beautiful or convincing Heracles’s promise is.

Conclusion

The remarkable stroke of *deus ex machina* in Sophocles’s *Philoctetes* is never eclipsed by Heracles’s somehow imperfect argument. Instead, culminating the play with Heracles *ex machina*, Sophocles successfully produces a thematically consistent tragedy, expertly broaches the subject of the social and political problems in his contemporary society, and solicitously invites a long-term scrutiny of the serious medical problems caused by wars. The epiphany of Heracles is indeed of great help to break the logjam between Odysseus and Philoctetes; and Sophocles’s *Philoctetes* proves an inviting tragedy, which calls forth a rethink of the true hero in society and a changing attitude towards the betterment of medical knowledge. The ingenuity of this play not only consists in the thematic coherence that Heracles *ex machina* fortifies but also comes from various subjects Sophocles alerts the audience to pay attention to. All in all, *Philoctetes* articulates a profoundly tragic

pitch that the herculean task of curing certain diseases is not yet completed. The terminal stop is conclusively a departure point for the objective of remodeling a heroic *pathos* and a subject of reflection upon an *aporia* which always underlies the territories of medical technology and knowledge.

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淺釋弗克里斯悲劇作品 《菲羅克忒忒斯》1409-44行： 海力克斯、「天降之神」與悲劇英雄 的困頓

摘要

本文主要重新檢視與評估索弗克里斯悲劇作品《菲羅克忒忒斯》的結尾。海勒納斯(Helenus)預言菲羅克忒忒斯將取特洛伊王子配洛斯(Paris)的性命、並拿下特洛伊城，言之鑿鑿；但《菲羅克忒忒斯》進行至1408行，劇情進入一個僵局，菲羅克忒忒斯憤然拒絕再加入希臘大軍，準備航行回家鄉。似乎是在情急之下，已無它法，索弗克里斯搬出當時希臘劇場的新寵—「天降之神」(*deus ex machina*)；果真海力克斯(Heracles)登高一呼，菲羅克忒忒斯立即回心轉意。為成為永垂不朽的英雄，為全希臘共同大業，菲羅克忒忒斯答應前往特洛伊。索弗克里斯的神來之筆，解決情節的僵局，卻不慎給此齣悲劇一個快樂的結局(happy ending)；然而，快樂的結局只是表象，本劇曲終佈滿懸疑，菲羅克忒忒斯仍未啟動他的英雄之旅、他的腳傷也尚未處理，這齣悲劇就如此落幕，留下更多省思的空間。我將從三個問題切入探討《菲羅克忒忒斯》1409-44行：第一、「天降之神」的援用是否與《菲羅克忒忒斯》全劇的結構、主題與關注一致？第二、海力克斯的神顯如何反映西元前五世紀的古希臘政治倫理新觀點？第三、《菲羅克忒忒斯》1409-44行又如何凸顯腳傷的主題？「天降之神」的機制確實強化本劇的主題與結構，更重要的是，透過強烈唐突的閉幕，刺激觀眾不斷思索不同時代英雄的角色與使命，並且巧妙反映當時戰爭頻仍下，醫師短缺、醫療資源不足、與醫病倫理等相關課題。

關鍵字：索弗克里斯，《菲羅克忒忒斯》，「天降之神」，海力克斯，疾病