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Preferred panel: The Powers of Persuasion (#5)

Title of paper: Persuasion in the Prologue of Sophokles' *Philoktetes*

Synopsis:

Persuasion in Greek tragedy, as Buxton has pointed out, often defines itself against force on the one hand and deceit on the other. The complex interplay of these elements in Sophocles' *Philoktetes* comes into clearer focus with the recognition that the prologue is structured as (de Jong's term) a mirror story.

Odysseus' aim in the prologue is to coopt Neoptolemos into obtaining Philoktetes' bow. Odysseus begins by employing the language of compulsion: he suggests that the younger man has no recourse but to obey his orders (50-53, 54-55). He also employs persuasion, arguing that inaction will hurt the Greeks (66-67) and that any dishonor will be only temporary (84-85).

Neoptolemos, however, resists the idea of acting by "wicked contrivance" (88); he regards either force (90-91) or persuasion (102) as preferable to deceit. In response, Odysseus abandons the language of compulsion in favor of additional persuasive arguments:

- a) Neoptolemos' resistance is a function of his inexperience (96-99).
- b) Neither persuasion nor force can succeed against Philoktetes (103).
- c) Advantage trumps other considerations (111).
- d) Success will enhance Neoptolemos' reputation (119).

Neoptolemos is ultimately persuaded (120), and both he and Odysseus use the language of assent to ratify their agreement (120, 121). But has Odysseus won him over by persuasion alone? If Neoptolemos' conquest of Philoktetes, as debated in the prologue, is a mirror story of Odysseus' conquest of Neoptolemos, we should expect Odysseus to employ deceit as well as compulsion and persuasion. Indeed, Odysseus implies that Neoptolemos will need only Philoktetes' bow to capture Troy (68-69, 113, 115); but as the account of Helenos' prophecy subsequently reveals (611-13), Philoktetes' willing participation is also required. Reading the prologue as a mirror story resolves inconsistencies connected with Helenos' prophecy and exposes the full measure of Odysseus' mendacity.