



# Interpreting Sophocles' Philoctetes Through Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy: How Do We Educate People to Be Wise?

*Martha C. Beck*

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This book argues that the works of Aristotle and Sophocles demonstrate their belief that the purpose of tragedy is to educate audience members and help them attain practical wisdom. This book applies many of the categories in Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics, Politics, Poetics and Rhetoric" to the three main characters in Sophocles' play, "Philoctetes: Neoptolemus, Odysseus and Philoctetes". All three characters act at extremes in relation to the virtues of courage, anger, truthfulness and shame. Their relationships to each other are also flawed in various ways, and each character commits injustices as they abuse the power they have over each other. Aristotle's list of the prominent character-traits in young people, middle-aged people and the old in the Rhetoric are applied in this book to Neoptolemus, the youth, Odysseus, the middle-aged ruler, and Philoctetes, an old man. Aristotle's criteria for tragedy in the "Poetics" are applied to Sophocles' play as a whole. Both Aristotle and Sophocles believe there exists universal standards for a well-lived life and universal patterns in the ways people fail to live well.

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