

INTRODUCTION

The philosopher: such is the name the twelfth-century Byzantine bishop Eustathius time and again gives Odysseus.¹ The man of many turns, the most versatile of all Greek heroes both in Homeric epic and in his later incarnations, by the twelfth century could also boast of a long journey across philosophy, and one that was bound to continue, down through the ages, even to the modern world. The goal of this study is to map a small portion of that journey: Odysseus' philosophical adventures in the core period of ancient thought.

From the late fifth century onward, among Odysseus' many roles that of the wise man stands out as one of his most compelling performances. Yet no full-scale study of his philosophical impersonations exists. W. B. Stanford in his now classic book *The Ulysses Theme* devotes one chapter and a number of scattered observations to philosophical treatments of Odysseus, but does not go into much detail.² The vast scope of his study obviously did not allow for an in-depth examination of each post-Homeric avatar of Odysseus, and Stanford in any case was more concerned with literary analysis than with the history of ideas. Among his book's many merits is to have sparked more interest in the "Ulysses theme," but, again, the main focus of recent studies has been Odysseus in creative literature and art or more generally his manifold presences in Western (and non-Western) cultures, ancient and modern.³ If scholars have tackled specifically philosophical readings of Odysseus, they have usually confined themselves within one school of thought.⁴ Odysseus, however, was exploited and discussed across the philosophical spectrum. No comprehensive examination of these treatments of Odysseus is available, to show the articulations, the elements of continuity and of change, in his philosophical history.

But one might ask: after all, are we justified to single out philosophical readings of Odysseus and devote a separate study to them? An approach driven by moral concerns characterizes interpretations of Odysseus both in philosophical texts and outside philosophy. Every refashioning of him in ancient literature is at the same time a moral evaluation; and each and every picture produced by creative authors is reductive compared to the richness of the Homeric character. Odysseus becomes the deceitful speaker (as in Pindar), the skilled but ruthless politician (as in several tragedies), the glutton (in several comedies), and so forth. We witness something of a paradox: the most complex of Homeric heroes in his post-Homeric reconfigurations is cut into pieces, as it were, and judged for one of his traits. This fragmentation is not simply owing to the tendency of post-Homeric authors (except, we can assume, for the poets of the Epic Cycle) to treat only one episode in Odysseus' career rather than many, as in the *Odyssey*, but is connected to the "Growing Hostility" (as Stanford entitles chapter 7 of his book) against our hero, which can be traced as far back as Pindar or possibly earlier.⁵ Odysseus' character, because it invites more and more questions about its goodness, fails to preserve its multifaceted Homeric turns.

In that he becomes close to a type, the nonphilosophical Odysseus rubs elbows with his philosophical counterpart(s). In philosophical texts, however, in addition to serving as the representative of certain character traits, Odysseus serves as illustration of doctrine. He is not merely judged but also utilized to expound a theory or a model of behavior (to be followed or not). Seneca polemically engages with these philosophical exploitations of Odysseus in *Ep.* 88, in which he blames every school for appropriating Odysseus as the mouthpiece of its tenets. Philosophers found Odysseus "good to think with": it will be the main task of this study to investigate how.

HEARING BLAME OF ODYSSEUS: AN ATHENIAN PLEASURE

A second characteristic of philosophical readings of Odysseus, as opposed to strictly literary ones, is that they are generally appreciative of him. From Socrates to his direct disciples as well as his more remote descendants, Cynics and Stoics, from the Epicurean Philodemus (first century BC) to Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch, Odysseus seems more apt than any other hero to incarnate each philosopher's moral ideals.

Why then does Odysseus come to impersonate the wise man? To attempt an answer, we might benefit from looking at the essential features of the nonphilosophical portrayals of Odysseus that were circulating when philosophers first

adopted him as their hero. The treatment here will necessarily be summary: it will focus only and briefly on fifth-century portrayals and in particular on shared perceptions about Odysseus as we can infer them from those portrayals, for it is with such perceptions that Socrates and his followers, including Plato, seem to have actively engaged at the beginnings of Odysseus' philosophical history. More background detail, when relevant, will be offered in the course of the discussion in the individual chapters.

Stanford maintains that in the fifth century Odysseus was under virulent attack. Though this assessment perhaps needs to be nuanced—the protagonist of the *Odyssey* does not seem to have been treated as badly in drama as was the leader of the Trojan War; the abundance, since the archaic period, of images of Odysseus in art, especially, again, the Odysseus of the *Odyssey*, points to the hero's popularity, even if popularity does not necessarily mean uncritical endorsement of his actions—there is little doubt that at least in the final decades of the century Odysseus was subject to bad press. If asked, “Would you like your son to imitate Odysseus?” I guess that most respectable Athenians in this time would have answered negatively (in spite of the contention, made by the son of the general Nicias in Xenophon's *Symposium* 4.6, that Odysseus was among the Homeric characters a young man might wish to resemble, along with such canonical models of excellence as Achilles, Ajax, and Nestor).

Tragedy is the main “source” for negative assessments of Odysseus and for their appeal to large audiences.⁶ Of course, in appraising the tragic Odysseus we must apply caution, for many of the plays featuring him are lost and their titles and sparse fragments generally do not allow any firm reconstruction of the plot.⁷ As mentioned above, tragedies inspired by the *Odyssey* do not seem to have attacked its protagonist—though we might wonder how truly “tragic” those plays were, if they staged the always resourceful and ultimately successful Odysseus as their main character.⁸ In any case our insufficient evidence should keep us from generalizations. All the more so because it is in the nature of the genre to exploit characters in different ways according to dramatic needs as they arise—and in this regard polymorphic Odysseus was an ideal dramatic character—so that, for example, we should not rush to read in the contrast between the humane Odysseus of Sophocles' *Ajax* and his callous counterpart in *Philoctetes* a change in Sophocles' own evaluation of Odysseus. Yet we cannot overlook that in *all* his significant appearances in extant tragedy except in *Ajax* (and, if we include satyr drama, in Euripides' *Cyclops*) Odysseus is a rogue. He is the main villain in the first half of Euripides' *Hecuba*, the frigid mouthpiece for the *raison d'État*; he lurks behind the doom of the Trojan women in Euripides' homonymous play; he

is the instigator of the mob and the sinister supporter of Iphigenia's sacrifice in both *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*; and the merciless opportunist and pragmatist, indifferent to human suffering, in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. In *Rhesus*, which stages Odysseus' and Diomedes' raid in the Trojan camp, Odysseus is a thievish trickster, and behaves less courageously than his younger companion.

Odysseus' accusers, to be sure, are also his enemies. Another cautionary measure we have to take in assessing the tragic Odysseus (and tragic characters in general) is to consider "who speaks."⁹ The vast majority of the characters who damn Odysseus have suffered at his hands (or their friends have): for instance, Hecuba in Euripides' homonymous play and in *Trojan Women*, Cassandra in *Trojan Women*, Philoctetes, the chorus in Sophocles' *Ajax*, and (to some extent) even Odysseus' political allies Agamemnon and Menelaus in *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Nonetheless, except in *Ajax*, Odysseus' actions on stage confirm, or even implement, the accusations hurled against him by his enemies. In addition the very fact that in the extant plays dramatists rarely allow sympathetic characters to comment on Odysseus (two examples are Agamemnon in Aeschylus' tragedy of the same name, though only in passing [841–42], and Teucer in the second half of *Ajax*) is significant: those inclined to praise him are not asked to speak. More important still, characters unsympathetic to Odysseus, such as Hecuba, Cassandra, Iphigenia, Philoctetes, are generally meant to inspire sympathy in the audience.

The two scenes in *Trojan Women* in which Hecuba first, Cassandra second, vent their hatred for Odysseus strongly suggest that the audience reveled in hearing him blamed. For both scenes are built as a crescendo culminating in an outburst of spite against him. When she is told that she must become the slave of Odysseus, Hecuba erupts into an *a solo* in which she pours out insult after insult against her future master, ending with "my lot is the most unfortunate" (279–91).¹⁰ Cassandra's blame of the Greeks similarly reaches a climax in her prediction of Odysseus' woes on his return journey—an overview of the *Odyssey* but with no mention of the happy ending or of heroic deeds (430–43). The successful politician, the scourge of the Trojan women, in the far-reaching vision of the prophetess will himself meet with endless suffering. In 415, when the play was produced, the shadow of the Melian massacre was looming large over the Athenian theater and the contentious expedition to Sicily was on its way. Many in the audience doubtlessly sympathized with Cassandra's prophecy that the war-enthusiasts would suffer, and identified Odysseus with them. Likewise in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, produced shortly after *Trojan Women*, the news that Odysseus' fortunes were in a bad state (536) must have pleased many a spectator as much as it did Iphigenia, who wished him dead.

But, we might ask, would the Athenian audience *as a whole* agree with the negative picture of Odysseus presented in those plays? The great majority of them are by Euripides, who was hardly successful in his lifetime (he won only three or four victories against the twenty-four or so of Sophocles). Supporters of the war quite possibly felt attacked by the tragedian who condemned it and who branded Odysseus (and them by association) a war criminal. If this is true, we should for now qualify our initial statement: blame of Odysseus perhaps did not appeal to the Athenian audience at large but to the aristocrats, and more generally those who opposed the war policies pushed by the extreme democrats.

Several plays, however, assume that hearing blame of Odysseus pleased at least a significant portion of the audience. So, for instance, does Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Neoptolemus is instructed by Odysseus to speak ill of him in order to gain Philoctetes' confidence: "Say whatever you want against me, the worst of the worst ills. None of them will pain me, but if you don't do it, you will bring grief to all the Argives" (64–67). When Neoptolemus resolves to go through with Odysseus' schemes, he indeed spares his accomplice no insult: he begins by referring to Odysseus by means of high-sounding Homericizing phrases that antiphrastically highlight his lack of heroism (Ὀδυσσεύως βίας [321] and δῖός τ' Ὀδυσσεύς [344]);¹¹ recounts in a moving tale how Odysseus was unfairly allotted the arms of Achilles, which he had claimed; and imagines his rival to defend his rights, and he himself, in response, to "strike him with all kinds of insults, no one lacking" (374–75), as befits "the most wicked, and born of the most wicked ones—Odysseus" (384).

Is Neoptolemus forcing himself to speak ill of Odysseus against his true sentiments? We might think so, for at the end of his tale he steps back: "I don't fault him as much as I do those in power," since the city belongs to its leaders (385–88). Some critics take Neoptolemus' words to suggest his embarrassment at insulting Odysseus,¹² while others consider the lines an interpolation precisely because they clash with the negative way Neoptolemus speaks of Odysseus elsewhere in the play.¹³ Whether they are genuine or not, Neoptolemus' words, however, do not imply that he was going against his feelings when he spoke ill of Odysseus, but only that he is shying away from insulting his superior further. I would indeed think that the son of Achilles, by birth adverse to crookedness and untrained in it, performs his role so well because at least to some extent he speaks his mind—and that the audience is supposed to perceive his sincerity and to appreciate how naturally blame of Odysseus inflames a noble heart.¹⁴

Whatever the case might be, that flow of insults of Odysseus meets with the expected approving responses from Philoctetes, who contributes more than his

share of denigration in perfect agreement with Neoptolemus (406–409; 417–18; 429–30). Their duet culminates with Neoptolemus thinking of Odysseus when Philoctetes in fact is describing Thersites as “clever and formidable with his tongue” (440). For Odysseus to be taken for the character he hated the most at Troy is the ultimate offense.

The audience thus hears insult after insult against Odysseus, spoken by an accomplice of his (not, in principle, an unsympathetic character, though I have suggested that Neoptolemus’ words might express sincere antipathy for him), echoed and amplified by his innocent victim, and “motioned,” as it were, by Odysseus himself. Odysseus’ willingness to be spoken ill of in order to succeed in his mission recalls Orestes’ availability in *Iphigenia in Tauris* to being called a matricide if this helps prevent his sacrifice—except that Orestes is represented as a sufferer rather than an evildoer. Iphigenia will deftly make use of her brother’s “sorrows” (ἀνίασις, κακοῖσι: 1031, 1034), not flaws of character. We are led to feel compassion for Orestes the matricide but to despise Odysseus the deceiver.

Odysseus’ readiness to offer himself for abuse is a degraded version of his Homeric capability to abase himself and patiently to bear up with all kinds of offenses as he plots to reconquer his household.¹⁵ His behavior is also reminiscent of his habit, in the same circumstances, to tell “lies similar to the truth” (*Od.* 19.203). If captured by the audience, the parallel must have added truth-value to Neoptolemus’ insults against Odysseus. Just as in the *Odyssey* Odysseus conceals his identity but encodes aspects of it in his fictions, in *Philoctetes* he physically hides away but lets his character surface through Neoptolemus’ words.

Even when Odysseus is presented in a positive light, playwrights nonetheless take for granted that audiences enjoy hearing him blamed. In Euripides’ *Cyclops* Odysseus does not fall short of his Homeric inventiveness and courage. Yet, as soon as he walks on stage and introduces himself, he elicits this comment by Silenus: “I know the man, a sharp, rattling fellow, the son of Sisyphus” (104). Silenus speaks from hearsay, not from experience. He reports the *vox populi*, and no doubt earns hearty laughter from the audience. All the more so because Odysseus does not contradict him: “Yes, I am that one. But no insults!” Odysseus stops Silenus but all the same identifies with the scoundrel that Silenus has heard he is. Later in the play Silenus again pokes fun at Odysseus’ bad reputation: “if you eat his tongue,” he tells the Cyclops, “you’ll become witty and quite talkative” (314–15). We hear the audience colluding once more.

In *Ajax* Sophocles likewise assumes a shared disparaging view of Odysseus

and brings it into bold relief by allowing the chorus (admittedly an unsympathetic one) to speak ill of him repeatedly (148–49; 955–58; 971). Its criticisms, soon to be proven wrong by Odysseus' noble behavior, must nonetheless have found enough resonance with the audience to appear plausible and relevant. Sophocles builds his magnanimous Odysseus against the background of commonplace denigration of him.

From what we can judge from the scanty evidence, the Sophists shared in this negative evaluation of Odysseus. Hippias and Gorgias seem to have targeted Odysseus' pliable intelligence, which they equated with immorality. Notably, Gorgias wrote a *Defense of Palamedes* in which Odysseus was accused of shamelessness, envy, and fraudulence (κακοτεχνία), and Hippias quite likely (at least if we believe Plato's *Lesser Hippias*) attacked Odysseus' versatility, which he identified with falsity.

Denigration of Odysseus in sophistic literature might testify to the appeal that blame of Odysseus held for the upper-class Athenians to whom the Sophists catered. The Sophists' opposition to Odysseus appears surprising indeed if read purely in light of their doctrines or practice, for the Sophists advocated the paramount importance of persuasion in human dealings and, like Odysseus, used their speaking skills for gain.¹⁶ Why then did they condemn the versatile and eloquent hero instead of making him their patron? Stanford points out that the Sophists fall into the common tendency to blame someone else for one's dearest faults. But this is a vague explanation. Rather, I would suggest that for them to approve of Odysseus would mean to go against the opinions of their constituency unnecessarily.

Contemporary sources such as Sophocles' *Philoctetes* "superimposed" the Sophists on Odysseus because of their allegiance to language.¹⁷ Since the connection was meant to be disparaging to both, the Sophists might have sought to polish their image by condemning loudly the character who was insultingly paired with them. All the more so because their potential pupils were likely to disapprove of Odysseus. The Sophists looked to the moneyed classes: either the aristocrats, unsympathetic to Odysseus, or more commonly the nouveaux riches, who, we can assume, had interest in sharing with the aristocrats their negative view of Odysseus in order to please them, with the aim of climbing the ladder to power.¹⁸ A Sophist would have nothing to gain by challenging his constituency's prejudice against Odysseus. As a matter of fact, Hippias is shown to agree precisely with a gentleman of the upper class in thinking Achilles better than Odysseus (Plato *Lesser Hippias* 363b1–4).

ODYSSEUS' IMMORAL CLEVERNESS AND IMMORAL DARING

Odysseus' negative traits in tragedy and in sophistic literature can be summarized as follows: falsity, unprincipled endorsement of the winner's policies ("might makes right"), and a propensity coldly to defend the rule "the end justifies the means" at all cost. His cunning, eloquence, and inventiveness are no longer positive qualities, as in Homer, but dubious talents. Even when they happen to serve the common good and a god-willed cause, as in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, they are condemned as intrinsically immoral. Heracles succeeds in bringing Philoctetes to Troy, whereas Odysseus fails, though both work for the same end in accordance with Zeus' plans (989–90; 1415). Heracles' authoritative intervention as *deus ex machina* at the conclusion of that play brings out the necessity for Philoctetes to submit to the gods' will, but also Odysseus' moral inadequacy as the interpreter of that will.

Specifically, Odysseus embodies the morally questionable type of the σοφός. In tragedy the term has a range of meanings spanning from "clever" to "knowledgeable" to "wise";¹⁹ but when it is applied to Odysseus, it never connotes moral wisdom except in *Ajax* (1374). In *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemos describes him as a σοφός παλαιστής (clever wrestler, 431) and understands that Philoctetes is speaking of Odysseus when he says, "formidable and σοφός with his tongue" (440).²⁰ In this play Odysseus' σοφία serves justice only if justice resides in success: on this view, which is Odysseus', Neoptolemus "will be called both σοφός and ἀγαθός if he accepts to deceive Philoctetes (119), σοφός for the stratagem, ἀγαθός for the sack of Troy.²¹ But Neoptolemus, as he comes to disallow Odysseus' ethics of success, divorces the latter's conception of σοφία from any notion of justice. When Odysseus attacks him for neither saying nor proposing to do σοφά things, Neoptolemus fires back: "But if they are δίκαια, they are better than σοφά things" (1245–46). Neoptolemus rejects σοφά things in the name of an ideal of justice that shuns deceit, regardless of its goal, and consequently charges Odysseus with being σοφός in the sense of clever, but not morally wise (1244: "you are σοφός by nature, but what you say is not σοφόν").

The tragic Odysseus does not hide that σοφία for him is no moral wisdom, when he tells desperate Hecuba: "It is sensible to have the thoughts that necessity demands even when fairing ill" (Euripides *Hecuba* 228: σοφόν τοι κὰν κακοῖς ἂ δεῖ φρονεῖν). Superficially this pronouncement might recall several passages in the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus shows himself aware of the mutability of human fortunes and of the necessity to adjust one's thoughts to it. In *Odyssey* 18, for instance, he warns Amphinomous, one of the suitors, against overconfidence, re-

minding him of man's exposure to reversals of fortune. Consider especially this sententious phrase: "and man bears it [misfortune] in sorrow, with an enduring heart" (l.135). But in that circumstance Odysseus is not a political winner; he is the one who is "faring ill" and warns Amphinomous at his own risk, after having suffered insult after insult from other suitors. In contrast Euripides' character is pressing σοφόν thinking on his helpless victim, whom he has just notified of the Greeks' decision to sacrifice her daughter Polyxena. Odysseus in *Hecuba* speaks "philosophically" to dress up his advocacy of *Realpolitik*, as he eventually reveals by using σοφός again to design the powerful ("if you obey those who are more σοφοί than you," 399), and as Polyxena makes clear by rephrasing in plain language what Odysseus expressed in a pompous maxim of "wisdom": "do not fight against those in power," she tells her mother (404).

Criticism of Odysseus intensified in the late decades of the fifth century. The great majority of the extant tragedies that denounce him date to this period, and so does Gorgias' *Palamedes*.²² Euripides won few victories, but one of them was for the posthumous production of *Iphigenia in Aulis* in 406. Almost contemporaneous with this play is Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (409), which also won first prize. Disparagement of Odysseus apparently was appealing to larger and larger audiences.

Stanford speculates, in my view correctly, that Odysseus' reputation worsened along with the corruption of democratic institutions and increasing disenchantment vis-à-vis Athenian politics during the Peloponnesian War.²³ One manifestation of such disenchantment was the loss of confidence in the power of words. Katherine King has nicely traced the developments in the opposition words and deeds as it occurs in fifth-century Athenian authors.²⁴ As she points out, in Homer words and deeds are complementary rather than in conflict: Odysseus knows *more* and has *better* thoughts, while Achilles fights *better* (*Il.* 19.217–20).²⁵ In the extant evidence the opposition first appears in Euripides' *Telephus* (438 BC), with Achilles as the doer and Odysseus as the speaker. King ventures to suggest that Euripides' admiration in that play went to Odysseus, and comments: "This play was written during the great days of Athenian democracy under Perikles, when optimism was high about the working of the assembly and delight in the power of words had not yet been soured by the perversions of demagogues and the usurpations of meaning induced by wartime despair."

When confidence in the power of words failed, Odysseus paid the price: the same Euripides who in *Telephus* might have shown preference for Homer's most effective speaker, in *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia in Aulis* identifies him with the type of the demagogue, the "smooth talker" (ἡδυλόγος) pushing for an immoral cause.²⁶

In *Hecuba* it is Odysseus, and he alone, who persuades the divided army to go through with Polyxena's sacrifice (130–40). In bringing the Greek warriors out of an impasse he replicates Homeric episodes in which he likewise arrays the army with a powerful speech (as in *Iliad* 2, where he persuades the Greeks to fight on). But in *Hecuba* the cause Odysseus defends with his effective eloquence is morally wrong.

The identification of Odysseus with the type of the demagogue might explain why his Homeric moderation is erased from tragic pictures of him (except in *Ajax*). In *Iphigenia in Aulis* it is—of all characters!—Achilles who displays self-restraint: “I know to moderate grief in misfortune as well as joy in full-sailed prosperity” (920–21).

These are startling words in the mouth of the most passionate and violent of heroes. In his study on Achilles in tragedy, Pantelis Michelakis takes Euripides' “sanitized version of Achilles” to reflect “the need felt . . . more generally in late fifth-century drama and historiography for the individual to control his violent emotions, in order that the πόλις be protected from personal politics and civil strife.”²⁷ Why did this ideal not put forward Odysseus as the prototype of the self-controlled politician? Odysseus certainly had stronger credentials than Achilles to exemplify the type.

Perhaps the personal goal of Odysseus' efforts in the *Odyssey*, to recover his household, could be seen to promote civil strife—as in fact it does at the end of the epic.²⁸ But this does not seem enough reason for late fifth-century writers to disregard Odysseus' qualifications as moderate leader, for which ample evidence could be found in the *Iliad*. It is more likely that Odysseus failed to become a model for the self-restrained politician because of his close association with the figure of the demagogue, which read like the exact opposite of that ideal leader: unscrupulous, moved by ambition, the embodiment of “personal politics.” Even in *Iphigenia in Aulis* this is the role Odysseus is assigned to. Far from controlling his own emotions, he manipulates the crowd's to satisfy his ambition: he will lead the mob to drag Iphigenia to the altar and will perform the task “at once chosen and willing” (αἰρεθεὶς ἐκόν, 1364).

Odysseus-the-demagogue is greedy for success and rewards. A liking for κέρδος (profit, gain) characterizes him already in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but with no blame attached. Though κέρδος “never ceases to evoke the idea of getting the better of someone in not particularly heroic ways,”²⁹ in Homer Odysseus' privileged connection with it on the whole is not disparaging and can even be complimentary: it is not disparaging when Diomedes chooses him for the sake of κέρδος (*Il.* 10.225) as his partner for the nighttime expedition in the

Trojan camp, and is highly complimentary when Athena uses the plural κέρδη “to denote the intellectual acuity that links her and her favorite.”³⁰ Conversely, in fifth-century drama Odysseus’ attachment to κέρδος and in general to success bears a stigma, as throughout Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*.³¹

Odysseus’ ruthlessness in pursuing anything for profit also earned him the epithet πανούργος, “ready to do anything for a given purpose.”³² Whereas in Homer Odysseus nobly dares and nobly endures, in tragedy he puts his ability to bear up with hardship to the service of shameless deeds.

If there is a defining trait of the Homeric Odysseus, perhaps it is his being “in the middle voice,” as John Peradotto put it,³³ acted upon as much as acting. The verbal root that best describes the epic Odysseus, and not only the more “passive” hero of the *Odyssey*, but also the leader of the *Iliad*, is τλα- in its double meaning of “daring” and “enduring” (as in τλήμων and πολύτλας). In Homer the τλα- terms, in the sense “to dare,” have no negative meaning: they denote an effort to go through with a hard thing for a good end.³⁴ Odysseus excels at this effort just as he excels at endurance. A telling example is *Iliad* 10.231–32: though many champions volunteer for the reconnaissance mission into the Trojan camp, only Odysseus’ offer suggests to Homer τλα- terms (τλήμων, ἐτόλμα; cf. also 248: πολύτλας and, toward the end of the narrative, τλήμων again [498]). Conversely, in tragedy the effort implied by a τλα- term often goes against one’s noble inclinations and moral principles, and the end is questionable.³⁵ The latter is especially the case when τλα- terms are applied to Odysseus or used by him. With the exception of Sophocles’ *Ajax* tragic Odysseus is indeed πολύτλας because he puts no limit to his immoral daring.³⁶ Let me give two examples.

The denigration of Odysseus in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* is reflected in the meaning of the τλα- terms when employed by or in relation to him. For instance, when Odysseus enjoins on Neoptolemus, τόλμα (82), for it is sweet to win, the term has pejorative connotations: dare do that which is against your noble nature (84: “give yourself to me” for a shameless deed). In contrast, when Philoctetes pleads with Neoptolemus that he should “dare” take him on board (τλήθι, 475 and τόλμησον, 481), he urges the young man to fight repulsion for the sake of a just cause. Philoctetes employs τλα- terms also to contrast Odysseus’ wickedness and Neoptolemus’ nobleness: while he admires Neoptolemus for enduring, τλήναι, his ills and for staying by him (870), he charges Odysseus with “daring anything” (πάντα δὲ / τολμητά, 633–34), and calls him “beyond daring,” τόλμης πέρα, or “you, most daring one,” τολμήστατε.³⁷

My second example is from Euripides’ *Hecuba*. Odysseus tells Hecuba, after informing her of the Greeks’ decision to sacrifice her daughter: “bear up with

it,” τόλμα τάδ’ (326). Soon thereafter the chorus echoes the term τόλμα with damning implications for Odysseus: slaves must “bear up with everything that should not be, overcome by violence” (τολμῶ ἢ ἄ μὴ χρή, τῆ βίᾳ νικώμενον, 333). The proximity of the two lines, the quasi-homophony of τόλμα and τολμῶ (even stronger on a metrical reading), and their identical position at the beginning of the verse say loud and clear that the slave Hecuba must *endure* that which Odysseus’ unethical *overdaring* forces on her. In sharp contrast to his Homeric ancestor, the enduring hero who exhorts his fellow fighters to “bear up,” τλῆτε, with the war in everyone’s interest (*Il.* 2.299), Odysseus in *Hecuba* summons his victims to “bear up” with the winner’s policies.³⁸

Disparagement of Odysseus in tragedy involves also the “passive” side of his kind of heroism: his fortitude, which is simply ignored. In drama Heracles replaces Odysseus as the paragon of undeserved suffering and endurance. One can contrast the meaning of τλα- terms when applied to each hero: “immoral daring” in the case of Odysseus, “suffering, enduring,” in that of Heracles (cf., e.g., Sophocles *Trachiniae* 71; Euripides *Heracles* 1250, 1270).

Heracles’ entitlement to endurance over Odysseus comes to the fore in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, which features both characters. Whereas Odysseus impersonally invokes external forces (the Greeks’ welfare, the gods’ will) as the reason Philoctetes must go to Troy, Heracles sympathetically urges him to follow his own example, and he does so in the name of their common lot as toiling heroes: both have endured a life of labors, and Philoctetes, like Heracles, will be rewarded for it (1418–22). Seth Schein compares Heracles’ intervention at the end of the play and in *Od.* 11.617–26, where Heracles identifies with Odysseus as he does with Philoctetes in the play, for their shared life of suffering.³⁹ The parallel brings out the distance that separates the πολύτλας hero of the *Odyssey*, with whom Heracles can sympathize (“you, too, drag out some evil lot”), from the cold, unfeeling character of Sophocles’ play, who shamelessly dares but no longer suffers.

TIME FRAME AND METHODOLOGY

It fell on Socrates’ followers, and quite likely on Socrates himself, to take up the task of rehabilitating Odysseus. Just as they challenged received opinion in many other domains, the Socratics opposed the prejudice against Odysseus that was commonplace in late fifth-century Athens. Odysseus, however, did not appeal to them just because he was under attack. He also had positive qualities that could find favor with Socrates’ followers. To some of them, such as Antisthenes and

later the Cynics, his original methods and his individualism, coupled with his endurance, could recommend him as the “philosopher” who strenuously fights against the trappings of society and conventional thinking. A major attraction of Odysseus for the Socratics was his deceptive appearance, and, related to it, the challenge he posed to the canon of *κἀλοκαγαθία*, for instance by wearing rags or by claiming that the best looks do not make the best man: one is gifted with beauty, but another with intelligence and charming eloquence (*Od.* 8.167–73). Odysseus’ misleading appearance joint with his care to distinguish intellectual abilities from physical ones might have inspired Socrates’ disciples to see in their teacher, ugly outside, full of treasures inside, an avatar of Odysseus.

Since Odysseus appealed to Socrates’ followers for both positive and negative reasons, the Socratic rehabilitation of him runs along two complementary lines: on the one hand it engages with the attacks leveled against Odysseus by turning them around, so that, for instance, eloquence, σοφία, and versatility become good features again; and on the other it restores Odysseus to qualities, such as his “passive” endurance, which were denied him (or at least ignored) in contemporary disparaging portrayals.⁴⁰

Because of the paramount role played by the Socratics in promoting Odysseus as a philosophical hero, this study begins with them, in particular with Antisthenes. Prior to Socrates’ followers there is little evidence for the importance of Odysseus in philosophical thought. As suggested above, the Sophists’ disparagement of Odysseus was probably no more than uncritical endorsement of the widespread prejudice against him. The other pre-Socratics, at least in the surviving fragments, do not mention him explicitly.⁴¹ Even Parmenides and Democritus, who built aspects of their persona as “the knowledgeable man” or the inquisitive traveler on Odysseus,⁴² do not seem to have engaged in evaluating Odysseus for his own sake.⁴³

The lower chronological limit of this study is set around the time of the *Essay on the Life and Poetry of Homer* attributed to Plutarch but belonging to the second half of the second century AD. Readers might be disappointed not to find a more extensive discussion of the Neoplatonic interpretation of Odysseus that developed in the third century. For it is in Neoplatonism that the Homeric character rises to true stardom. The Cynic and Stoic idealization of Odysseus seems uninspired compared to the transfiguration he undergoes in Neoplatonic thought, in which he becomes the emblem for the soul tossed about on the “sea of matter” and longing for its unearthly home. I will dwell only briefly on this fascinating recasting of Odysseus (for instance, I attempt no analysis of Porphyry’s famous allegory *The Cave of the Nymphs*) because it represents a major break in

the history of his interpretations, the inauguration of a new strain of thought. As Félix Buffière aptly puts it, for the first time Odysseus is not “man” but “soul,” and his journey ends beyond the physical world.⁴⁴ It is true that already prior to the Neoplatonics “Ithaca” is given several figurative meanings, especially by the Stoics: one’s inner self, one’s obligations as a citizen, steadiness of mind, or the call of wisdom. But none of those meanings takes Odysseus back to a meta-physical fatherland, the remote and invisible home of our soul.

In spite of the discontinuity it creates, however, the Neoplatonic interpretation of Odysseus does not spring fully armed from the head of Zeus but is prepared by earlier developments, especially within the so-called Middle-Platonism of the second century AD, with Maximus of Tyre and Numenius among its main representatives. It is on these developments that I focus in the conclusive chapter, trying to retrace the steps that lead Odysseus to become the symbol for the soul fighting for its liberation from the body. A decisive factor in promoting Odysseus’ disembodiment is his thirst for knowledge, or rather the discussion it generates: how does Odysseus’ desire for “theory” fit his commitment to life in this world? Are the two compatible? Should one take precedence over the other? Should Odysseus listen to the song of the Sirens and forsake his communal responsibilities, or even his earthly life, or should he put his knowledge to the service of our terrestrial adventure, and of his own?

If Odysseus becomes a *locus mythicus* around which to debate such issues, it is because of his recognized entitlement to wisdom. As mentioned above, Seneca (in *Ep.* 88) records how Odysseus’ reputation for wisdom provided the main philosophical schools with evidence to uphold their theses: the Stoics claimed that Odysseus advocated virtue, the Epicureans, pleasure, the Academics, suspension of judgment . . . Odysseus’ philosophical refashioning, which begins as a challenge, is no longer one in the early centuries of the Imperial period. The philosophical corpus in which he is hailed as a paragon of wisdom is substantial enough to offer a solid basis for continuing idealization. Moreover, signature traits of Odysseus, such as his ability to endure blows in silence, and of his biography, such as his experience as an outcast, persecuted by the wrath of a god, were bound to appeal increasingly to moral philosophers as they came to grips with the hazards of life under Imperial rule. Though outside philosophy pictures of Odysseus remain mixed, he achieves a greater and greater philosophical popularity, which is still reflected, over ten centuries later, in the epithet “the philosopher” with which Eustathius celebrates the Homeric character.⁴⁵ Eustathius, to be sure, has centuries of Christian culture behind him. Nonetheless, contrary to what was happening in the West, where Odysseus was appreciated

essentially for his “Christian” abstinence and indifference to temporal goods, in the East the classical tradition remained alive.⁴⁶ Through Byzantine scholarship and a reliable compilation of Homeric textual criticism Eustathius’ monumental commentary on Homer ultimately draws on ancient pagan sources, and thus bears witness to Odysseus’ philosophical credentials in earlier periods.⁴⁷ Doubtlessly by Seneca’s time Odysseus has usurped the title “the wisest hero” from Nestor, who apparently held it in the second half of the fifth century BC.⁴⁸

Odysseus’ philosophical popularity in the early Imperial period is shown in the relative agreement among thinkers on their evaluation of him. *Pace* Seneca, whose *Ep.* 88 highlights only differences in the philosophical appropriations of Odysseus, there is also a certain correspondence in various aspects of the interpretation of him among, for instance, Seneca himself, the allegorist Heraclitus (the eclectic author of *Homeric Problems*), the Stoic philosopher and sophist Dio Chrysostom, and the Platonizing moralists Plutarch and Maximus of Tyre, both over the importance of this or that episode in the hero’s career (the Sirens, Circe, and Calypso win the prize) and over their meaning or the overall assessment of Odysseus’ behavior (his resistance to pleasure and pain appeals to almost all philosophically minded readers of him). It is quite likely that Odysseus’ reputation for wisdom extended beyond philosophy, at least into school teaching.⁴⁹ Moralists who deal with him at this time are interested in reaching out to large numbers by avoiding esoteric technical language. Plutarch’s most extensive comments on Odysseus come from his pedagogic writings, such as *How to Study Poetry* or *On Talkativeness*. The *Essay on the Life and Poetry of Homer*, in which Odysseus is an unflinching good character, reproduces mainstream moral ideals as taught at school.

With these observations we are stepping on a minefield: if philosophical treatments of Odysseus extended beyond philosophy, how neatly can we separate philosophy from other literary genres in our discussion? I have already mentioned the difficulties inherent in attempting to distinguish a philosophical Odysseus from his other literary incarnations. An additional problem with such a distinction concerns the status of philosophy as a genre. Several years ago, one of my instructors in Italy gave a lecture on Xenophanes in which apparently he did not treat the sage of Colophon as a philosopher proper, and some in the audience protested against this “Entphilosophierung des Xenophanes.” My instructor, of course, was right. As more recently Andrea Nightingale has reminded us, philosophy becomes a separate and self-defined genre only in the fourth century.⁵⁰ Then philosophers talk about other philosophers and see themselves as belonging to a separate tradition. As far as interpretations of

Odysseus are concerned, however, we cannot expect the dialogue to remain confined within philosophy, for the most visible presences of the πολύτροπος hero in literature continue to be outside philosophy even when he earns philosophical credentials. Though, as suggested above, in the last two centuries or so of the period under consideration philosophers could rely on a separate tradition of interpretations of Odysseus, it would be misguided to think that they ignored pictures of him in other genres, both past and present. We should be aware of a double line of development in the philosophical interpretations of Odysseus: in some cases they are indeed the result of philosophers talking to one another. Thus, debates over Odysseus' suitability as a Cynic hero seem to be internal to the Cynic movement and to reflect its own specific concern with poverty (though they possibly spill over into nonphilosophical literature, such as Horace's satire on legacy hunting [2.5]). Likewise Seneca's *Ep.* 88 and Lucian's *The Parasite* 10, where the defender of the parasitic art claims Odysseus "back" from the philosophical mistreatments he has endured, might bear witness to a polemic among philosophers over Odysseus, with each school vindicating him as its hero against other schools (at the same time, however, each philosophical appropriation of Odysseus could also be independent of the others and merely grounded in the popularity of Odysseus as a paragon of wisdom). But on the other hand philosophers keep interacting with other traditions. For instance, when Seneca criticizes those who speculate on the location of Odysseus' wanderings instead of referring to Odysseus as a model to correct their own "wanderings" (again, in *Ep.* 88), he is objecting to ways of treating Odysseus that were common among geographers, historians, and more generally men of learning. Or when Plutarch defends Odysseus from charges of greed and soft living, we cannot tell whether he is responding to other moralists (Cynic, for instance) or whether he has in mind a larger variety of sources.⁵¹

Because of this circulation of perceptions about Odysseus, attempts will be made to situate a philosopher's interpretation of him in its context, both as far as nonphilosophical incarnations of Odysseus are concerned, and as regards the cultural climate that, in some cases, might have influenced a philosopher's approach to Odysseus (for instance, Philodemus' choice of him as model for the ideal ruler will be studied with an eye to Philodemus' audience, the antimonarchic Roman aristocrats of the first century BC). We shall also look at possible influences of philosophical interpretations of Odysseus outside philosophy, as a key to their importance. And, needless to say, we shall keep the Homeric Odysseus constantly in mind, for he remains a major touchstone for philosophical authors.

Some readers might ask why this study does not include a systematic discussion of allegory, since allegory strongly affected philosophical uses of myth.⁵² The reason for this absence is threefold. In the first place, the emerging of allegory is not linked to the figure of Odysseus. It is not Odysseus who inspired philosophers to read myths allegorically, as is the case, to give a well-known example, for the Homeric gods fighting each other in the *Iliad*; rather, it is allegory that, once in circulation, found in Odysseus, as in other mythic characters, appropriate material for its exercise. Connected to this is my second consideration in not dealing with allegory as such: though Odysseus eventually earns a higher philosophical status through the application of allegory to him, the beginnings of his idealization as a wise man are unrelated to allegorical readings of his deeds. In our evidence the first philosopher to promote Odysseus as his model hero, the Socratic Antisthenes, does not apply allegory to his interpretation,⁵³ unless by “allegory” is meant something as general as “Odysseus represents the wise man.” But, diluted to this degree, allegory is no useful hermeneutic tool. Third, as I hope to show, in many instances allegorical treatments of Odysseus are in a continuum with nonallegorical ones: for example, the appreciation of Odysseus’ pursuit of moral excellence does not significantly change because of the introduction of allegory. Whether Calypso is a goddess or an allegory for the temptation of pleasure, Odysseus in either case is praised for his choice of leaving her, which proves his excellence. Or the allegory “Odysseus blinding the Cyclops stands for the philosopher aspiring to contemplation” can be traced back to Plato’s nonallegorical refashioning of Odysseus as a contemplative type. I shall, however, pay attention to the allegorical nature of individual readings when only allegory made them possible, as for the Stoic refashioning of the μῶλυ, the magic root that saves Odysseus from Circe’s drug, as his λόγος.

On the positive side, readers might be surprised to find in this study, namely in the discussion of the Socratics and their descendants (Cynics and Stoics), repeated mentions and at times even extensive treatments of Heracles alongside Odysseus. This is because the two heroes—and only they—have earned an equally high status among those philosophers. As if following in the footsteps of Homer’s memorable staging of their encounter in Hades (*Od.* 11.601–26), Socratics, Cynics, and Stoics have regularly paired the two enduring heroes, both of whom were forced to wander by the wrath of a deity and, faced with all manners of hardship, “conquered all terrors” (Seneca *De constantia sapientis* 2). In bringing the two together I shall, however, highlight also differences in their treatments, less obvious than their shared traits and more apt to throw light on the specific nature of Odysseus’ philosophical significance. Considerations of cultural back-

ground will turn out to be of interest also in this respect, because Odysseus met with harsher criticism than Heracles. Whereas the philosophical idealization of Odysseus develops against literary representations (and to some extent a *communis opinio*) generally hostile to him, that of Heracles since its beginnings—with Pythagoras, and subsequently in Prodicus' famous allegory *Heracles at the Crossroads* and in Antisthenes' lost works on Heracles—has points of contact with literary portraits of him, such as Bacchylides' in his *Fifth Ode*, Pindar's in *Olympian Three*, and Euripides' in *Heracles*, which celebrate him for his righteous actions.⁵⁴

My work is organized for the largest part chronologically and by schools of thought, except for the last two chapters, which combine examinations of readings of Odysseus belonging to a specific philosophical tradition (the main thread being in chapter 4 Epicureanism and in chapter 5 Platonism) with a broader thematic approach, across philosophical affiliations. This shift of emphasis reflects the increasing popularity of Odysseus as a philosophical hero in the later centuries covered by this study, which, as suggested above, is demonstrated both in a certain correspondence between philosophical pictures of him and in his greater relevance for the discussion of important moral issues. For instance, Odysseus is hailed as a model of “tough friendship” (that is, true friendship) by both the Epicurean Philodemus and two (mostly) Platonic authors, Plutarch and Maximus of Tyre. The main question treated in the final chapter, Odysseus' evaluation in respect to the “best life,” emerges as a common concern among philosophers in the early Roman period, as documented again by Seneca and Lucian. In particular we shall compare two answers to that question, the Platonic and the Stoic one, both of which negotiate but in different ways Odysseus' contemplative drive with his role as a dedicated member of the human community.

Discussion about how to balance Odysseus' contemplative inklings with his responsibilities in the world resurfaces in more modern interpretations of the hero. From its virtual disappearance in medieval Europe it is revived in the Renaissance, with authors explicitly drawing on classical sources. I have chosen to append to this study (in the epilogue) an examination of the nature of Odysseus' wisdom with respect to contemplation and action in humanistic and Renaissance writers, in order to highlight how our hero remains a fundamental reference in this new spur of debate over the content of wisdom and the role of the wise man in the world.

NOTE ON THE TREATMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

This book is an attempt to bridge literature and philosophical thought, which two subfields unfortunately tend to remain separate in the study of Greco-Roman antiquity. Technical philosophical language has been avoided whenever possible, and discussion of pointed philosophical issues, as well as scholarly debate over details of literary interpretations, has been kept to a minimum and confined to the notes, with an eye to the reader interested in Greek and Roman culture at large in addition to those concerned specifically with philosophy or literature. Scholars of philosophy *stricto sensu* should not expect to find in-depth treatments of entire philosophical texts or theoretical questions, since this book aims to retrace the trajectory, along an array of philosophical authors and problems, that brought a mythic figure, and originally a character of literature, into the philosophical limelight. My hope is that this study will speak to students of ancient literature, culture, and philosophy.