Good Magic, Bad Magic: Socrates as Sophist?

In the *Sophist*, the sophist is described as a "magician and an imitator" (*goēta men dē kai mimētēn*) who "tricks" (*goēteuein*) people "with spoken images (*eidōla*) of everything."[1] This classification is part of a broader network of references to magicians, spells, and bewitchment Plato uses to cast unequivocal judgments against magic as a knack that generates illusions. In the *Republic*, imitators (including sophists) are repeatedly called magicians (*goēteus*) because they fashion enchanting illusions.[2] Plato sometimes condemns physical pleasure for "bewitching" the soul and shackling it to corporeal reality, blaming artists and poets (including, again, sophists) for taking advantage of people's susceptibilities to pleasures and appetites.[3] Magicians and their spells deceive us into accepting illusions as reality, be they artistic copies of originals, pleasures that appear best and realest when they are not, or speeches that present falsehoods as truths.

Yet, Socrates himself is likened to a magician.[4] He classifies his concluding myth in the *Phaedo* as an *epōdē*, a charm to be repeated such that one may remember the truth about the soul's immortality.[5] In the *Charmides*, he temporarily assumes the role of the doctor who uses charms to heal his patients.[6] If Plato so often compared sophistical trickery with magic, why would he also portray Socrates as a magician who uses charms?

---

[1] 234c, 235a. These translations are my own. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett Publishing, 1997).
[2] 598d, 602d, 601b, 607c-d.
[3] Socrates at *Phaedo* 81b: "But I think that if the soul is polluted and impure when it leaves the body, having always been associated with it and served it, bewitched (*goēteuomenē*) by physical desires and pleasures to the point at which nothing seems to exist for it but the physical." See also *Philebus* 44c, *Republic* 584a.
[4] *Meno* 80b.
[5] 114d6.
[6] 155a ff., discussed at length below.

Either Plato is presenting Socrates as a sophist, or he wants to distinguish the sophists' magic from Socrates'. The first option is highly unlikely. Plato goes to great pains to distinguish sophistry and philosophy, showing time and again why the sophists are dangerous and untrustworthy, and why Socrates is not a sophist. Jacqueline de Romilly articulated the second, more likely option thus: "Whereas the magic of the sophists aimed at producing illusion, Socrates' magic rests on the obstinate destruction of all illusions. It is the magic of implacable truth. […] It is therefore one magic against another, the one taking the former's place, but with opposite aims and means."[7] Although de Romilly correctly suggested that the sophists' magic aims at producing illusions, and that Socrates seeks to destroy illusions, she misconstrued their methodological differences. The sophists and Socrates have "opposite aims," but they do not employ opposite means. Their means display substantial incongruities. However, their differences are not of kind, but of application. *Pace* de Romilly, I will first problematize the binary distinction between sophistic and Socratic magic by showing that they are fundamentally similar insofar as their spells are cast through the psychosomatic powers of *logos*. I will then introduce a third category—character—to give partial reasons for their magics' different effects. Though obviously inextricable from both aims and means, character allows us to better appreciate the magician's firsthand involvement in his spells, whose extent distinguishes Socrates from the sophists. To advance this latter claim, I will turn to the *Meno* and explore two fundamental differences between sophistic and Socratic magicians: (1) unlike the sophistic magician, the Socratic magician is courageous enough to want to endure the paralyzing effects of his own spells; (2) while the sophistic magician is happy to concentrate the effects of his spells

[7] *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Harvard University Press, 1975), 36-37.

on manipulating emotions, the Socratic magician always seeks to reorient the expression of emotions toward reason.

I. Magic, Deceit, and Philosophy in the *Republic*

To understand the differences between sophistic and Socratic magicians, we should first survey Plato's characterizations of "deceitful magic." In *Republic III,* Socrates describes three ways for people to be deprived of true opinions unwillingly: theft, compulsion, and magic spells.[8] The "victims of theft" are either persuaded by argument (*logos*) or simply forget their true opinions with time. The compelled are those "whom pain or suffering causes to change their mind." The "victims of magic" (*tous goēteuthentas*) are instead those "who change their mind because they are under the spell (*kēlēthentes*) of pleasure or fear." To this last definition Glaucon replies that "everything that deceives does so by casting a spell (*goēteuein*)." For our purposes, what is relevant in this tripartite explanation is the role of fear and pleasure in magic. Here Socrates is explaining why we lose true opinions *against our will*. When we learn truer opinions, we willingly adopt them. When we encounter falser opinions than the ones we hold, we try to eschew them. If we do adopt them, it must be unwillingly, for no one prefers falsehoods to truths. Sophistic magic gives us false opinions, which sophists force upon us through spells that manipulate our emotions. This manipulation weakens our agency; it hijacks reason, leading us to accept false opinions unwillingly.

Shortly after this analysis, Socrates tells Glaucon that the one who is best equipped to resist deceitful magic is "gracious in everything, is a good guardian of himself."[9] That person is the philosopher, who is guided by reason. Reason allows philosophers to sift through false

[8] 413b1-c2.
[9] 413e1.

opinions and resist the destabilizing effects of fear and pleasure. This contrast is explored in different contexts throughout the *Republic*, where Plato attacks "educators and sophists" for appealing to emotions and appetites rather than reason and truth,[10] "clever enchanters (*magoi*) and tyrant-makers" for producing tyrants who are ruled by pleasures that, as mere appearances of true pleasure, are "some kind of magic (*goēteia*),"[11] and poets whose illusory and emotionally charged representations bewitch people and lead them astray.[12] Philosophy is the antidote to the world of illusion that magic creates and sustains. Through the exercise of reason, philosophy protects us from magic's deceitful compulsions, giving us a chance to expel ignorance and reify our autonomy.

II. Socratic and Sophistic Speech

Socrates is not a sophist, and the sophist is not a philosopher. Their methodological differences have been well documented.[13] For one, Socrates relies on questions and brief answers as his most reliable investigative tools, preferring dialogue to long-winded arguments in favor or in opposition of a particular thesis. This preference is the source of significant tension in the *Gorgias*, where Socrates repeatedly urges his interlocutors to contribute brief responses instead of lengthy speeches.[14]

Yet, both Socrates and the sophist share a commitment to persuasion. Their shared commitment was recently emphasized by Gabriele Flamigni: "the distinction between the two

[10] 492d.
[11] 584a8.
[12] 598d.
[13] See David Wolfsdorf, "Sophistic method and practice," in *A Companion to Ancient Education*, ed. W. Martin Bloomer (John Wiley and Sons, 2015): 61-76 and Evan Rodriguez, "Structure and Aim in Socratic and Sophistic Method," in *History of Philosophy and Logical Analysis 23*, no. 1 (2020): 143-166.
[14] He says the same thing, in different words, to Gorgias (449c) and Polus (461d). Interestingly, Callicles later reproaches Socrates for failing to follow his own rule (519d8-9).

persuasions is not at all sharp: if, in one sense, philosophical persuasion is something wholly different from rhetorical persuasion, in another sense it presents itself as the fruit of the philosopher's compromise with the rhetorician's activity."[15] de Romilly's sharp separation between the sophist and Socrates' means distorts the nature of this compromise. If by "means" we have in mind, as de Romilly does, the tool they use to cast their spells, their means are identical.

Implicit in both the sophist and Socrates' practice is a belief in the psychosomatic powers of *logos*. The *Charmides* provides a good example as regards Socrates. Charmides has been suffering from a headache for which he wants to find a cure. Critias sets up Socrates as the doctor with a remedy. When asked what the remedy is, Socrates says it is a leaf, "and that there was a charm to go with it."[16] This charm seems to be exclusively spoken. When Charmides tells him that he "will write down the charm at your dictation," Socrates evades the proposal with a series of playful questions, quickly moving the conversation forward.[17] He never tells Charmides that he cannot write it down, but he also never gives him permission. The "very well" (*eien*) that follows Charmides' request is ambiguous and hardly synonymous with "yes, sure." Given the reservations about writing Socrates expresses elsewhere, it is safer to assume that he does not mean to grant Charmides permission, but rather wants the young man to be all ears for the spells that are about to come.[18] The charm requires this kind of attention because it is not merely for curing headaches, but also for curing the soul.[19] Without it, the leaf is useless, and Charmides'

[15] In *Presi per Incantamento: Teoria della Persuasione Socratica* (Edizioni ETS, 2017), p. 6: "la distinzione tra le due persuasioni non è affatto netta: la persuasione filosofica, se in un certo senso è qualcosa di completamente diverso dalla persuasione retorica, in un altro senso si rivela il frutto di un compromesso del filosofo con l'attività del retore." My translation.
[16] 155e.
[17] 156a-c.
[18] See *Phaedrus* 275c.
[19] 156b ff.

healing most unlikely. As should become clearer in the next section, this "charm," though legitimately interpreted as a literal recitation Socrates learned from the Thracian doctor, is better understood as the dialogical interaction Socrates wants Charmides to experience by way of elenchus, the Socratic magic tool *par excellence*.

That sophists would also count on the psychosomatic powers of speech is evident from their characterizations in the *Republic* as magicians who stir people's emotions through words alone. For Plato, the final result of sophistic magic is deception, whereas Socratic magic brings about understanding and self-improvement, even though both use *logos* to bewitch their victims. What I want to emphasize by turning to the *Meno* is that their difference is most evident not in their means, but in their character—in the attitude Socrates and the sophist assume when casting a spell.

III. The Broad Torpedo Fish: Socrates' Courageous Humility

Writing in support of de Romilly, Elizabeth Belfiore suggested that "Philosophy opposes and disarms deceitful magic in a number of very clearly defined areas, and is in this sense a kind of 'counter-magic.'"[20] We can see this counter-magic at work in the *Meno*. At 80a, Meno and Socrates' inquiry into virtue reaches a standstill. Meno tells Socrates that he is in "a state of perplexity," and that Socrates' "bewitching and beguiling (*goēteueis me kai pharmatteis*)" is responsible for his confusion. This paralysis eventually opens the ground for Meno's paradox, and for Socrates' allusion to the theory of recollection as a provisional answer. But before they resume the search, Meno describes Socrates as a "broad torpedo fish" that "makes anyone who comes close and touches it feel numb."[21] The general struggles to accept that he "cannot even

[20] "Elenchus, Epode, and Magic: Socrates as Silenus," in *Phoenix 34*, no. 2 (1980): 128.
[21] 80a5-b2.

say what [virtue] is" even though he has "made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions."[22] The only explanation he can conjure for his newly revealed ignorance is that Socrates has stung him with his numbing powers. At this point Meno warns Socrates: if he "were to behave like this as a stranger in another city, [Socrates] would be driven away for practising sorcery (*goēs*)."[23]

Belfiore deflates the power of Socrates' spell. She suggests that "Meno is able but unwilling to speak because he realizes that he doesn't know the truth."[24] Although Meno does realize that he no longer has a clear idea of what virtue could be, the passage clearly shows that Meno is willing, but unable. His inability becomes more evident in a literal translation of Meno's confession that he "cannot even say what it is": "now I do not even have a word to say about what it is."[25] "I do not have" (*oud'echō*) should be read as conveying inability rather than unwillingness, which would be better expressed by "I do not want to" or "I will not." Meno *wants* to speak. He detests his paralysis, which makes him look foolish. Responding to Socrates would be a way out of his vexing embarrassment. But he is simply unable to utter anything meaningful about the question that inspired the entire conversation: "What is virtue?"

Thus far, we have a typical case of Socratic elenchus. If the scene stopped here, it would be difficult to see how the effects of Socrates' spells differ from those of the sophist's. The sophistic magician affects his victims, while he remains immune. He manipulates his listeners' emotions through speech, eliciting fear or pleasure in order to persuade them of false opinions. Meno is not necessarily afraid, but he is deeply confused and worried about his apparent ignorance. However, the unequal relationship between magician and victim we find in sophistic

[22] 80b3-5.
[23] 80b6-7: "εἰ γὰρ ξένος ἐν ἄλλῃ πόλει τοιαῦτα ποιοῖς, τάχ᾽ ἂν ὡς γόης ἀπαχθείης."
[24] Belfiore, "Elenchus, Epode," 133.
[25] "Νῦν δὲ οὐδ᾽ ὅ τι ἔστι τὸ παράπαν ἔχω εἰπεῖν." My translation.

magic is subverted completely by the dynamic Plato wants us to associate with Socratic magic, at least as depicted in the *Meno*. Whereas the sophistic magician only affects his victims, Socrates affects himself as well. This is the crucial difference.

When Meno compares him to a broad torpedo fish, Socrates does not deny the accusation. Rather, he turns it onto Meno: "You are a rascal, Meno, and you nearly deceived (*exēpatēsas*) me."[26] Here Socrates is alluding to Meno's own magical powers, which the general displayed (unconsciously) in his characterization of Socrates as a torpedo fish. The animal is an image, an illusion, a distortion of the real Socrates that stands before Meno's eyes. It is not unlike the deceptive images against which the *Republic* warns us. Socrates thinks Meno painted this image because he wanted an image of himself in return: "all handsome men rejoice in images of themselves."[27] As a devotee of Gorgias and a rhetorician in his own right, Meno is concerned with reputation and appearance, in body and speech. Socrates tries to hint at his misplaced concerns first by pointing the same finger Meno pointed at him. He tells Meno that he should watch his sophistic magic, which, though feeble in this episode, can deceive not only Socrates, but also whomever might interact with Meno.

Curiously, Socrates does not undermine Meno's illusory portrayal immediately. After his subtle reversal of the accuser-accused dynamic, he uses the image to make a further point, presumably because he thought playing Meno's game would be the most effective way to keep the dialogue intact given Meno's frustration. Here is the crucial move: Socrates accepts Meno's description, if and only if "the torpedo fish is itself numb."[28] He wants us to understand that he, too, is a victim of his own spell. As he declares, "I myself do not have the answer when I perplex

[26] 80b8.
[27] 80c4.
[28] 80c6.

(*aporein*) others, but I am more perplexed than anyone when I cause perplexity in others."[29] Meno may be confused, but Socrates is even more confused. In his search for answers, the torpedo stings himself.

We see a parallel situation in the *Euthyphro*. When Euthyphro voices his frustration at the conversation's circularity, he tells Socrates that he "is not the one who makes them go round and not remain in the same place; it is you [Socrates] who are the Daedalus; for as far as I am concerned they would remain as they were."[30] Socrates admits that he is moving the arguments around, but he cares to specify that he is "cleverer than Daedalus […] in so far as he could only cause to move the things he made himself, but [Socrates] can make other people's move *as well as my own*."[31] When he casts a spell on his interlocutors, that spell also falls on him.

Why is that the case? Although we can read some dissatisfaction in Socrates' admission that "now [he does] not know what virtue is," Socrates seems perfectly content with his aporetic condition. He is willing to be the torpedo fish that numbs itself, or to enchant himself with the same spells he casts on his interlocutors. This willingness stems from the fact that he knows that he does not know. His ignorance motivates him to search for answers, but he understands that inquiry is a dangerous game that is very likely to produce perplexity in the inquirer. Since inquiry is the only way to step closer to knowledge, however, Socrates is willing to undertake it, no matter where it may lead him and what it might do to him. Unlike Meno, he welcomes paralysis, insofar as it opens grounds for pursuing new inquiries that may lead to knowledge.

[29] 80c7-9. W. R. M. Lamb's translation renders Socrates' self-referential statement more explicitly: "it is not from any sureness in myself that I cause others to doubt: it is from being in more doubt than anyone else that I cause doubt in others." *Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Euthydemus*, Loeb Classical Library 165 (Harvard University Press, 1924).
[30] 11c7-d2.
[31] 11d3-5. My emphasis.

But are we to take Socrates seriously? If he is numbed by his own spell, why does his paralysis never seem as overpowering as it is for Meno, Euthyphro, and the host of interlocutors that experience his spells?[32]

There are many possible answers. The one I want to underscore is one at which I already hinted: Socrates' verbal admissions of ignorance are the antidote that enables him to fend off the paralyzing effects of his own magic. As a counter-magician, he wants to dispel illusions. One of the illusions he keeps encountering is the illusion of knowledge. People say they know when they do not. To destroy this illusion for himself, Socrates verbalizes his ignorance. He admits that he is like no other in that he knows he does not know. This verbalization is part of Socratic magic's arsenal; it belongs to the "beautiful words" that cure the soul and, according to the *Charmides*, foster *sōphrosynē*.[33] In this respect, Socrates displays courage because he is willing to suffer the same perplexity his spells induce in others. That courage stems from the humility he embodies when he admits that there is no other way for him to try to remedy his ignorance than submitting himself to all the possible outcomes of collaborative rational inquiry.

Crucially, Socrates is not eroding the illusion only for himself. Once two or more interlocutors are bound by the rules of dialectical exchange, the consequences of the exchange will affect everyone involved. Whatever happens to one interlocutor also happens to the other, however indirectly. When he pleads ignorant and casts the curative spell on himself, Socrates

[32] One could object that Socrates does occasionally lose his ability to speak. In the *Euthydemus*, he admits that "When I heard this I was thrown into confusion" (283d3). Before he could find his words, Dionysodorus "broke in," preventing Socrates from restoring his composure. It is worth noting that this happens when Socrates is not in charge of the exchange; he has neither dictated the rules nor been able to apply his own spells. This bullish move further stresses the difference between the sophist, who in this case works by rapid successions of spells, and Socrates, who lets his interlocutors feel the full effect of each spell with little (but, as I argue below, careful and essential) interference. Indeed, the entire dialogue could be read as a comparative study of sophistic magic and Socratic magic.

[33] 157a1-5.

involves his interlocutor in the process. The *Meno* and the *Euthyphro* show us that when an interlocutor is experiencing discomfort that might halt the dialogue prematurely, Socrates reassures them by admitting that he, like them, also does not know the answer. His verbalization, then, has a double effect: it cures Socrates, whose experience allows him to overcome the paralyzing phase rather quickly, and it begins to cure his interlocutor, who is given the opportunity to see that Socrates' magic does not aim at deception but rather at the genuine pursuit of truth, no matter how uncomfortably disorienting it turns out to be. In the *Meno*, Socrates has no shame to hide (because he has no pretense to knowledge) and can thus overcome *aporia* more effortlessly. Meno struggles, but, in becoming more acquainted with the ignorance-based reality the Socratic magician inhabits daily, he can at least trust that the inquiry's *telos* is not Socrates' domination, which would only deepen the general's shameful frustration.

Implicit in Socrates' admissions of ignorance are also pleas for help, which constitute the last part of Socrates' spell. Whenever he confesses his ignorance, Socrates also tells his interlocutor that the only way to try to remedy his ignorance is to learn what there is to learn from each other in dialogue. In the *Meno*, this plea for help is explicit. Socrates concludes the aporetic transition by telling Meno that he wants "to examine and seek together with you what [virtue] may be."[34] "Even though I am just as ignorant as you," one might add, "I still want to figure out what virtue is, together, because you can assist me." We should be proud of our ignorance and reach out for help; only so can we free the ground for genuine knowledge.

In sum, the *Meno* illustrates a sequence of spells: first, Socrates casts doubt on Meno's illusory depiction of him as the torpedo fish, while using it to advance to the second spell; second, he pleads ignorant, dispelling the illusion of knowledge and reassuring his victim that his

[34] 80d2-3.

intentions are genuine; third, he pleads for help, reaffirming his commitment to collaborative rational inquiry.

The sophistic magicians never accomplish anything like this. They never try, for their concern is neither truth nor the health of the soul. Admissions of ignorance would jeopardize their magic; the effectiveness of the sophists' spells depends on their interlocutors' gullibility. If the sophists were to confess that they do not know what they profess to know, the insincerity of their rhetorical maneuvers would become apparent. They would go out of business. Likewise, sophists would never ask for help. Pleading for assistance in matters they claim to know well is like admitting that they do not know those matters well. Since the loss of reputation is a bigger concern to the sophist than the potential discovery of truth, there is no room for ignorance. A sophistic magician may be nominally committed to teaching virtue and wisdom, but his use of magic suggests he neither knows what virtue and wisdom are nor has that aim in mind. He is even more ignorant than Socrates, because he pretends to know.

IV. Reason and the Emotions

The other notable difference between Socratic and sophistic magicians that the *Meno* passage illustrates concerns reason and the emotions. Both rely on eliciting emotions. As we have seen, the sophist casts spells that manipulate fear or pleasure to convince his victims of false opinions. To do so, he uses reason, or at least a form of reason that gives the appearance of sound rational inquiry. His concern, however, stops at the arousal of fear or pleasure. There is no intent to purge these emotions.

Socrates, too, elicits intense emotions with his spells, which seldom, if ever, make their victims feel pleasure. The torpedo fish hurts quite a bit. Indeed, it seems that *aporia* is always

accompanied by negative emotions like anxiety, confusion, and frustration. Meno's complaints betray a frustration that eventually leads him to issue the rather blunt warning to Socrates that if he goes around stinging people like he stung him, he will suffer the consequences. This is not a threat, but it is a stark declaration whose force is best understood as a reaction to the destabilizing frustration Socrates' magic has brought upon the general. Like Meno, targets of Socratic magic only (initially) experience discomfort, whereas their counterparts who are affected by sophistic magic could be fooled by pleasure and thus enjoy their bewitchment, hence the sophists' impressive success rate. Of course, Socrates would remind us that the pleasures the sophist tries to elicit are appearances of true pleasure. As such, they are fleeting and ultimately more harmful than the negative emotions caused by Socratic magic.

The important difference, then, is not the arousal of emotions, but Socrates' commitment to channeling emotions in the service of reason. Laura Candiotto suggested that the "aporetic state is a good example of the collaboration of emotions and reasoning, growing from the shameful recognition of contradictions."[35] Meno's elenchic refutation throws him into *aporia*, where he *feels* his inability to speak as frustration. Whether shame, frustration, or another emotion is better suited to describe Meno's response is an interesting question I will have to forego for brevity's sake. What matters for my argument is that *aporia*, which is a crucial stage of the elenchus and a pivotal moment for Socrates' magic, first plunges Meno into a dizzying emotional torrent. Only then, once he is "bewitched," can Socrates help the general subsume his emotions into reason.

Candiotto does not discuss the role of Socrates' reaction to the interlocutor's reaction, as if the interlocutor's aporetic response to the elenchic exchange were enough to facilitate his

[35] Laura Candiotto, "Aporetic State and Extended Emotions: The Shameful Recognition of Contradictions in the Socratic Elenchus," in *Ethics & Politics 17*, no. 2 (2015): 236.

recalibration of reason and subsequent changes in behavior, which Candiotto takes to be the elenchus' ultimate purpose. However, Socrates' own response to Meno's *aporia* is equally essential for this recalibration. Socrates quickly redirects Meno's frustration to salvage the inquiry. As I explained above, he first speaks in jest to deflate the tension that climaxed in Meno's accusation. Then, Socrates offers his admission of ignorance, after which he renews his vow to try to understand their guiding question together. Socrates is not profiting from Meno's frustration. He skillfully applies his spell to transform it into fuel for continuing the inquiry whose question he, more than anyone, wants to answer. Once Meno has reached a vulnerable aporetic state, Socrates shows him a way out. Paradoxically, that way out implies staying in, dwelling in ignorance, for that is what reason dictates. Before a question such as "what is virtue?", which has been steadfastly but unproductively investigated, reason dictates we accept our ignorance and continue striving for clarity. In addition to displaying his courageous humility, Socrates' admission of ignorance also shows Meno how to channel his emotions in the service of reason. The fact that Meno's famous formulation of the eponymous paradox about inquiry and knowledge follows this transition immediately further shows the effects of this distinctly Socratic spell.

Again, the sophists do not possess this spell; they would not even know how to use it, for their aim is to take advantage of their victims' emotional vulnerability for self-interested purposes. On the contrary, Socrates aims at genuine self-improvement, which can only unfold once destabilizing emotions are guided by the demands of reason, best expressed in the dialogical format that marks the selfless character of his counter-magic.

This analysis would benefit from a more detailed portrayal of "the sophist," whose practice and context I have left largely unexplained. It would also benefit from a clearer

discussion of what counts as a "spell," a term I have used loosely, conflating formal arguments and informal statements without specifying their potential differences. At times, I have also used "sophist" and "rhetorician" interchangeably, despite obvious differences. The rhetorician practices his knack in front of an audience. This format does not allow for any extemporaneous exchanges. Sophists like Gorgias or the brothers in the *Euthydemus* are willing to engage in conversation, resembling Socrates' magic more than a rhetorician on stage.[36] A more lucid analysis of the differences between sophists and rhetoricians would help deepen the contrast between different kinds of speech and the powers they express in different contexts.

Nevertheless, I hope to have shown that Socrates' "victims" are really better thought of as patients undergoing a difficult but rewarding treatment. Meno, for one, would much rather dwell in his apparent certainty than expose his ignorance. But without Socrates' enchantments, he would never be able to begin walking towards truth. The path is thorny and strenuous, but as Socrates knew, "beautiful things are difficult."[37] We can only hope that he was right.

[36] See Rodriguez, "Structure and Aim," especially 150-155.
[37] Cf. *Cratylus* 384b, *Hippias Major* 304e, and *Republic* 497d.

References

Belfiore. Elizabeth. “Elenchus, Epode, and Magic: Socrates as Silenus.” *Phoenix 34*, no. 2 (1980): 128-137.

Candiotto, Laura. “Aporetic state and extended emotions: The shameful recognition of contradictions in the Socratic elenchus.” *Ethics & Politics 17*, no. 2 (2015): 233-248.

Flamigni, Gabriele. *Presi per Incantamento: Teoria della Persuasione Socratica.* Edizioni ETS, 2017.

Plato. *Laches. Protagoras. Meno. Euthydemus.* Translated by W. R. M. Lamb. Loeb Classical Library 165. Harvard University Press, 1924.

Plato. *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Hackett Publishing, 1997.

Rodriguez, Evan. “Structure and Aim in Socratic and Sophistic Method.” *History of Philosophy & Logical Analysis 23*, no. 1 (2020): 143-166.

Romilly, Jacqueline de. *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*. Harvard University Press, 1975.

Wolfsdorf, David. “Sophistic Method and Practice.” In *A Companion to Ancient Education*, edited by W. Martin Bloomer. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.