

ΔΙΑΚΡΙΤΙΚΗ AS A ΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΗ ΤΕΧΝΗ IN THE *SOPHIST*¹

The διακριτική τέχνη (the art of separating or discriminating), from which the sixth definition of the *Sophist* starts (226b1–231b9), is puzzling for commentators. *Prima facie* the art of separating does not fit the initial division of art between ποιητική τέχνη (production) and κτητική τέχνη (acquisition) at 219a8–c9.² Therefore, scholars generally agree that, although mutually exclusive, ποιητική and κτητική are not exhaustive and leave room for a third species of art, διακριτική τέχνη, on a par with ποιητική and κτητική.³ However, I argue that textual evidence suggests otherwise.

Later during the sixth division (at 226e8–227a1) we indeed learn that medicine (ιατρική) is a species of purification (καθαριστική), which itself is a species of διακριτική. But medicine, whether it is conceived as removing evil from the body or helping the body to recover health, is certainly a form of *care* (θεραπεία) for the body (see for instance, the expression τὰς ὑπὸ

¹ I thank Sylvain Delcomminette, Pieter d’Hoine, Laura Brown and the anonymous referee for *CQ* for discussions and comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

² I am quoting the Greek text from the new Oxford edition of the *Platonis Opera*, vol. 1. See E.A. Duke, W.F. Hicken, W.S.M. Nicoll, D.B. Robinson, J.C.G. Strachan (edd.), *Platonis Opera*, Tomus I, Tetralogias I–II continens (Oxford, 1995).

³ See for instance F.M. Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge* (London and New York, 1935), 171 and 177–8; L. Brown, ‘Definition and Division in the *Sophist*’, in D. Charles (ed.), *Definition in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford, 2010), 151–71, at 159 n. 18; M.L. Gill, ‘Division and Definition in Plato’s *Sophist* and *Statesman*’, in D. Charles (n. 3), 171–99, at 180–1 and 192 n. 38; M.L. Gill, *Philosophos: Plato’s Missing Dialogue* (Oxford, 2012), 145–6.

τῶν ἰατρῶν θεραπείας at *Protagoras* 354a5⁴). Now, the art of caring is cited among the examples of production at the beginning of the *Sophist* (at 219a10–b2). Therefore, medicine, a part of διακριτική and a kind of care, seems productive. Moreover, another part of διακριτική, the art of carding (ξαντική), is clearly treated as productive in the *Statesman* (the Stranger speaks of the ἔργα of carding at *Statesman* 282e4). Finally, at *Statesman* 282b1–c10, the Stranger uses the couple διακριτική/συγκριτική (the art of combining) for dividing wool-working (ταλασιουργική), a productive art (cf.ποίησις, *Statesman* 282a7). Since, as these texts suggest, parts of διακριτική are productive, διακριτική cannot be a third species of art on a par with ποιητική and κτητική. Διακριτική is intertwined with ποιητική.⁵

Does it mean that (not only parts of but) διακριτική τέχνη itself is productive? We cannot totally rule out that Plato completely disregards the initial division between ποιητική and κτητική in the sixth definition of the *Sophist*,⁶ and that διακριτική τέχνη could be productive

⁴ For the dialogues that do not belong to the first two tetralogies, I am using the Greek text edited by Burnet. See I. Burnet, *Platonis Opera* (Oxford, 1901–7).

⁵ Because of this connection between διακριτική and ποιητική, it is wrong to argue, as F.M. Cornford does, that the starting point of the sixth definition has no contact with the starting points of the other definitions and that therefore the sixth definition is not a definition of the sophist (see F.M. Cornford (n. 3), 181–2; and also L.–A. Dorion, ‘Aristotle’s Definition of Elenchus in the light of Plato’s *Sophist*’, in J.L. Fink (ed.), *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle* (Cambridge, 2012), 251–70, at 252–3). Although I agree with Cornford and Dorion that the sixth definition portrays the Socratic *elenchus* (see my ‘Socratic *Elenchus* in the *Sophist*’, *Apeiron* 51 (2018), 371–90), I do not think that the place of the διακριτική τέχνη in the definitional tree of the *Sophist* can be used as an argument to show that.

⁶ Cf. K.M. Sayre, *Metaphysics and Method in Plato’s Statesman* (Cambridge, 2006), 66.

and something else, acquisitive for instance.⁷ However, the exhaustive and exclusive division of art between ποιητική and κτητική is never questioned in the dialogue (it is even repeated at 265a4–5), which might indicate that it remains valid throughout the *Sophist*. It is also more charitable to provide Plato with a consistent account of the divisions of art in the *Sophist* than having him changing his mind in the course of the dialogue. Another possibility, which preserves the initial division of arts into productive and acquisitive, is that the couple διακριτική/συγκριτική creates a transversal cut among all arts.⁸ Besides being productive or acquisitive, a given art would then either separate or combine. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that every acquisitive art either separates or combines something: in which category would the angler and the wrestler fall, for instance? By contrast, the productive arts mentioned at the beginning of the *Sophist* (219a10–b1) are easily divided according to the couple διακριτική/συγκριτική: farming or tillage (γεωργία) is there explicitly associated with the care for mortal bodies (περὶ τὸ θνητὸν πᾶν σῶμα θεραπεία), which, as we saw, has a διακριτική τέχνη as one of its part (medicine);⁹ whereas imitation (μιμητική) and the creation

⁷ Seth Benardete toys with this idea in S. Benardete, ‘Plato *Sophist* 223b1–7’, *Phronesis* 5 (1960), 129–39, at 135.

⁸ See S. Delcomminette, *L’inventivité dans le Politique de Platon* (Brussels, 2000), 255 who stresses that the couple διακριτική/συγκριτική is said to be all-pervasive (κατὰ πάντα) at *Statesman* 282b7.

⁹ In addition, the Stranger introduces διακριτική with the help of three actions (filtering (διηθέω), sifting (διαττάω) and winnowing (βράσσω), 226b5–6), that play an important part in the farming process, see J. Solana, ‘Socrates and “Noble Sophistry” (*Sophist* 226b–231c)’ in B. Bossi and T. Robinson (edd.), *Plato’s ‘Sophist’ Revisited* (Berlin/Boston, 2013), 71–85, at 71 n. 2

of utensils (σκευή) must imply a combination or a composition of some sort (see notably, for the creation of utensils, τὸ σύνθετον at 219a11 that clearly matches the συγκριτικὴ τέχνη introduced in the *Statesman*). Taking the cut between διακριτικὴ/συγκριτικὴ as *internal* to the productive arts seems therefore the best way to maintain the initial division into acquisitive and productive arts.

Admitting that the starting point of the sixth definition is productive, why did Plato not tell us? Maybe he did, in an indirect way.¹⁰ Recall that the Stranger introduces the sixth division by a saying: ‘when one can’t catch [a beast] with one <sc. hand>’, that Theaetetus immediately completes ‘...one must use both’ ({ΖΕ.} (...) οὐ τῆ ἑτέρᾳ ληπτόν; {ΘΕΑΙ.} Οὐκοῦν ἀμφοῖν χρή, 226a7–8). I interpret the two ‘hands’ as representing the two parts of art that have been initially distinguished: productive and acquisitive. Before the sixth division, the first five divisions took their starting points in different parts of the acquisitive art.¹¹ So only one ‘hand’ has been used. By insisting just before the sixth division that one must now also use the other ‘hand’, I take it that Theaetetus and the Stranger agree that they must switch from the acquisitive art that has guided the enquiry until now to the art that has been left aside so far: the productive

¹⁰ By ‘telling in an indirect way’, I mean the same as M.L Gill when she writes: ‘Plato expects his students to read the arguments on the page carefully and critically, but he also expects them to observe signposts in the text that press them to make connections the speakers do not explicitly make and to construct arguments that go beyond the surface text’. (M.L. Gill, *Philosophos* (n.3), at 13).

¹¹ This is uncontroversial among scholars. Division one (cf. 221c6–223b7) starts from hunting (θηρευτικὴ); divisions two to four (cf. 223c1–224e5) from exchanging (μεταβλητικὴ, ἀλλακτικὴ); and division five (cf. 224e6–226a5) from combat (ἀγωνιστικὴ). All these arts are acquisitive, cf. 219d5–e3.

art. In that way, they indeed use ‘both hands’ for capturing the beast. Of course, as such, the occurrence of this saying does not constitute a proof, but once it is seen through the lens of the accumulated evidence from the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* that I gathered, this apparently innocuous saying becomes a subtle and discrete way for Plato to announce to his reader the necessity to switch to a division of the productive art.¹²

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¹² While there are other scholars who think that διακριτική is productive, they do not systematically argue for that claim, see M. Dixsaut, *Le naturel philosophe: Essai sur les dialogues de Platon* (Paris, 2001³), 339–40 and J. Solana (n. 9), at 71 n. 2. Otto Apelt was hesitant on this question. Compare ‘Quodsi quaerimus utram ad partem principalis illius divisionis, qua omnes artes in ποιητικά et κτητικά dividebantur, pertineat haec διακριτική, sine dubio subiungenda videtur τῇ ποιητικῇ cf. p. 219b’ (O. Apelt, *Platonis Sophista* (Leipzig, 1897), 83) and ‘Ob man diese διακριτική τέχνη zur schaffenden oder zur erwerbenden Kunst rechnen soll oder zu keiner von beiden, darüber hat sich Plato nicht ausgesprochen’ (O. Apelt, *Platons Dialog Sophistes* (Leipzig, 1914), 134 n. 19).