This workshop will reexamine a well-known fragment by Diocles of Carystus, a medical theorist of the 4th century BCE who was celebrated in antiquity as the “younger Hippocrates” but whose works have not survived intact. In the fragment, Diocles questions the value of pursuing explanations – αἰτίαι – when investigating the dietary powers of foods. Werner Jaeger famously argued that Diocles here reveals himself to be a devoted student of Aristotle, one who is intent on applying Aristotelian methodological principles to the study of medicine. Recent scholarship has tended to interpret the fragment much more modestly, as being confined to certain practical problems inherent in dietetic inquiry. Without wanting to revive the speculative tendencies of Jaeger’s approach, the talk will argue that recent interpretations seriously underestimate the importance of Diocles’ position for the history of science. In the fragment, Diocles is proposing a novel and empirically oriented approach to theory construction, one that stands in sharp contrast to the rationalism of much fourth-century scientific theory.

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