ARISTO OF CEOS: THE FRAGMENTS CONCERNING EROS

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In 2006 a new edition—texts and translation with notes—of the fragments of the Peripatetic philosopher Aristo of Ceos was published in the series Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities, commonly known as RUSCH.¹ I took part in preparing this edition, being largely concerned with the translation. Along with the other editors, I had occasion to focus on a block of texts that had been assigned by an earlier editor, Wilhelm Knögel, to Aristo’s work entitled Erôtika homoia.² We accepted this assignment, but I had doubts regarding at least one fragment and worries concerning the meaning of the title Erôtika homoia. I remain puzzled, and when asked to contribute an article to the present Festschrift honoring Dimitri Gutas, it occurred to me that I was being presented with an opportunity to express my worries and to offer some reflections. I have hardly resolved all the puzzles that the several texts present, but perhaps I have succeeded in advancing a few thoughts that the honoree of this volume will find of interest. In the past, Dimitri has been a contributor to the RUSCH series³ and worked with me on other Peripatetic authors, most especially Theophrastus. His contributions to the edition of Theophrastean fragments, 1992, are many,⁴ and his recent edition of Theophrastus’ Metaphysics is outstanding.⁵ I hope that he will not be disappointed with what follows and that by bringing new perspectives, he will resolve one or more of the difficulties that continue to puzzle me.

³ He has contributed to RUSCH vols. 2, 5, and 11.
⁴ Theophrastus of Eresus, Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought, and Influence (Leiden: Brill, 1992 = FHS&G [G standing for Gutas]).
⁵ Theophrastus, On First Principles (known as his Metaphysics), Philosophia antiqua 119 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
It is hardly surprising that the Peripatetics took an interest in eros. For Plato, Aristotle’s teacher, not only wrote two dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, in which eros figures prominently, but also developed a doctrine of sublimated love: erotic desire is elevated from body to soul and on to the world of Forms, in which truth resides free from the continuous change that all too often mars the world in which we live. To be sure, Plato’s doctrine of sublimation is intriguing and in some ways inspiring, but as presented by Plato it is also an exercise in fantasy that falls far short of the reality it claims as its goal. The early Peripatetics recognized that, and if the surviving fragments of Peripatetic works on eros are not misleading, Aristotle and his followers chose to ignore the Platonic doctrine. They did, however, have much to say about eros not only in lecture within the school but also and especially in dialogues that circulated widely and in various collections for use within and outside the teaching curriculum.

In his *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle largely ignores eros. He does touch upon it in the chapters on friendship,⁶ but it is not the focus of a special book or chapter. Elsewhere, however, eros took center stage: namely, in Aristotle’s *Erôtikos* and *Theses concerning Eros*. The former was almost certainly a dialogue, and the latter is likely to have been a collection of arguments used primarily in dialectical and rhetorical instruction. In the case of Theophrastus, three titles that make explicit mention of eros are recorded: *Erôtikos*, *On Eros*, and *Political, Natural, Erotic, Ethical Problems*. Most probably, the first refers to a dialogue, the second to a treatise for use in lecture within the Peripatetic School, and the third to a collection of problems: each problem will have been introduced by *dia ti*, “why” or “for what reason,” and a selection of problems was devoted to questions concerning eros. Clearchus, the Peripatetic from Soli on Cyprus, wrote a work entitled *Erôtica*. The Greek adjective is neuter plural: the title may be deliberately vague, referring to erotic “matters.” But two Clearchan fragments dealing with eros exhibit the *dia ti* format, so that one might supply *problêmata* and view the work as a collection of problems similar in form to the Theophrastean collection already cited. We should, however, keep in mind that the work was at least two books in length, so that the work may have contained not only problems but also other

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⁶ *NE* 8.3 1156b1–3, 8.4 1157a3–14, 9.1 1164a3–8; *EE* 7.3 1238b32–9, 7.10 1243b14–22.