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Not Your Xanthippe: Ventriloquizing Gender Based Epistemic Domination in Alciphron's Letters

In a collection of fictional letters written by the Atticizing second sophistic rhetorician Alciphron (most likely late second or early third BCE), we find an epistle that imagine the Epicurean philosopher Leontion (Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.92) writing to her friend Lamia, the historical girlfriend of Macedonian general Demetrius Poliorcetes (337 – 283 BCE). In it, Leontion complains about her love life among the Epicureans, saying that Epicurus himself is preventing her from pursuing her love interest, another philosopher by the name of Timarchus. Epicurus, she claims, is so enamored of her that he shapes his philosophical views to prevent this relationship. The letter goes so far as to claim that the jealous Epicurus declares it *as a matter of doctrine* that Timarchus - who has been sending lavish gifts and doting on Leontion - is precisely the sort of lover a good Epicurean ought to avoid (4.17 5-8). In the midst of spelling out these charges, Leontion remarks that Epicurus wants to play the role of Socrates by chatting and ironizing (σωκρατίζειν καὶ στομυλεύεσθαι θέλει καὶ εἰρωνεύεσθαι, 4.17.3) and intends to make her into his Xanthippe (Ξανθήπην ἐμὲ οἶεται ποιήσειν, 4.17.3).

Not wanting to become someone else's Xantippe is a striking claim. Building on recent work that explores the gendered reception of ancient philosophy (Fletcher, Saxonhouse) and the philosophical epistolary tradition (Gordon, König), this paper will explore what this statement means. By piecing together evidence from both the Platonic corpus and the Socratic epistles, we aim to reveal the various ways in which Xantippe is understood to have suffered as the result of Socratic philosophy and its tradition. What this study reveals, among other things, is that in Alciphron's fictional letters we find a strikingly modern-seeming acknowledgement that philosophical doctrine has been carefully authored to dominate women.

Works Cited

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