

Should An Epicurean Marry?

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2018 at 2:21 AM

will cause no pain or grief, it is desirable. For the Epicureans “say that having sex never benefits, but it *is* desirable, provided that it does no harm.”⁵³ Sex is never advantageous, according to Epicurus, because it rids us of no pain; the desire for sex, then, is, at best, merely natural. But it is that. And hence sex is “worth pursuing,” even if it merely varies the katastematic pleasure of painlessness. For it feels good. Indeed, as I explained earlier, the kinetic pleasure of the body is the *only* thing which feels good. And feeling, according to Epicurus, is the criterion of goodness,

ery unhelpful, but

⁵³ Hermias, *In Platonis Phaedrum* 76 (= U. 483).

⁵⁴ For fancy food as providing variation, cf. Hermarchus *apud* Porphyry, *De Abstinencia* 1.51 (= U. 464): eating meat “contributes to variation of pleasures, as does sex or drinking foreign wine.”

⁵⁵ D.L. 10.118: συνουσίαν δὲ φασιν ὀνήσαι μὲν οὐδέποτε, ἀγαπητὸν δὲ εἰ μὴ ἔβλαψε. The second half of this sentence is usually translated as though Epicurus were saying of sex that “one should be content if it does no harm” (Long and Sedley, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 116, translating the version of this saying in *VS* 51). But Cicero reports that the Epicureans think *genus hoc voluptatum optabile esse, si non obsit, prodesse numquam* (*TD* 5.94), i.e., as J.E. King translates in the Loeb edition, “this kind of pleasures is desirable, should there be no obstacle, but is never of benefit.” And the μέν-δέ construction (also preserved in the three other versions of this saying cited at U. 62) likewise suggests that Epicurus’ point is not that one is lucky if having sex does one no harm, but that the desire for sexual intercourse is, “on the one hand,” not a necessary desire, but is, “on the other,” a natural one, since having sex is “desirable.”