

Emily Austin Seems To Think That Sex Is An Extravagant Pleasure aka natural but unnecessary. Do you agree?

Post by "Pacatus" of November 9, 2023 at 6:00 PM

On the notion that sex carries no benefits

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Dr. Austin quotes Vatican Saying 51:

"I hear from you that the movement of your flesh is abundantly disposed toward sexual intercourse. As long as you do not break the laws or disturb noble and settled customs or vex any of your neighbors or wear out your body or use up the things necessary for life, indulge yourself in any way you prefer. However, it is impossible not be constrained by some one of these things. **For sex never profits, and one must be content if it does not harm.**" [Translation by Kelly E. Arenson in Austin, Emily A.. Living for Pleasure: An Epicurean Guide to Life (Guides to the Good Life) (p. 175). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.]

Two possible translations from Diogenes Laertius

In the below-cited paper, the author examines two translations of Diogenes Laertius 10.118 on the subject:

"In D.L. 10.118 we read: [Greek text would not copy-paste] There is also a version of this text in the Vatican Sayings (VS 51), differing only by the omission of the Kai. Translators have traditionally rendered the version with Kai along the lines of: **They say that sex is never beneficial, and you are very lucky (or, "it is surprising," or "it is marvelous") if it does not do harm as well.**"

And an alternative by Jeffrey Purington: **"[They] say that sex never benefits, but it is desirable, provided that it does not harm."**

After examining other texts, the author concludes: "Until very weighty evidence is brought forward to the contrary, it seems to me that we should feel confident that the traditional translation is the right one: sex is never beneficial, and you are lucky if it doesn't actually harm you-by implication, it usually does."

<https://philarchive.org/archive/BREEOS>

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Now we know that sex does carry positive health benefits, provided it is enacted in ways that also cause no harm. So the claim that sex is never beneficial is just wrong.

I tried to do some research on what ancient physicians thought about the benefits/dangers of sex, and found little – most resources dealt with gender roles (with the strong androcentric biases that were prevalent) and what ancient physicians thought about the differences between male and female bodies (and procreation). The following sparse quotes might be indicative (and I vouch not at all for the sources):

“The ancient Greek physicians have not failed in their studies to indicate the beneficial role of sexual activity in human health. They acknowledged that sex helps to maintain mental balance. Very interesting is their observation that sex may help mental patients to recover. Nevertheless they stressed emphatically that sex is beneficial only when there is a measure in it, so they believed that sexual abstinence or excessive sexual activity affect negatively the mental and physical health of man. ... Therefore they believed that the loss and the exchange of bodily fluids during sex help body's humors to maintain their equilibrium which in turn will form the basis for the physical and mental health.” [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26480224/>]

“People who worked as doctors in [Ancient Greece](#) suggested sex as a way to combat diseases such as: depression, dyspepsia, icterus, lower back pain, weak vision etc. Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, supported that unrestrained intercourse could cure dysentery.” [<https://greekreporter.com/2013/11/16/sex...ancient-greeks/>]

A bit later:

“Galen knew that sex, perhaps even more than bathing, was pleasurable, but he argued that balance was necessary with this activity too. He believed that sexual release was healthful (and the retention of semen deleterious), and that intercourse was necessary for the continuity of humanity. However, he also warned that it was bestial to be preoccupied by sex.” [<https://exploregalen.com/project/activity>]

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The above is not much, I know – but my eyes were starting to cross. 😞