

Marriage & children seem less pleasurable today: financial worry, relational problems, high rates of divorce. Are they worth the pain (tarakhē τάραχή) they entail?

Post by “Elli” of July 2, 2026 at 4:02 PM

Epicurus classifies sex as a desire “natural but not necessary.” He does this for a very precise reason: sex activates two different neurochemical systems in the human organism. One of them is stabilizing; the other is destabilizing.

The stabilizing part is oxytocin - the hormone of bonding, trust, and emotional connection. This is why sex is “natural”: it creates a bond. Oxytocin moves us toward connection, care, and mutual support - all of which are compatible with the Epicurean Physiology, Canon and Ethics.

But this oxytocin bond becomes stable only if it transforms into friendship. If it does not become friendship, the destabilizing systems take over: dopamine (craving and pursuit), noradrenaline (arousal and anxiety), and vasopressin (possessiveness and jealousy). These produce turmoil, not pleasure. They generate instability rather than the “well-balanced constitution” that Metrodorus praised as *eustathia*. Today in neurobiology has a synonym word with "eustathia" as Homeostasis.

This is exactly why Epicurus says sex is natural but not necessary. If you do not have it, you do not lose your eudaemonia i.e. the homeostatic balance of body and soul. And if you do have it, it brings pleasure only when the oxytocin bond becomes friendship: a stable, reliable, fear-reducing relationship that Epicurus considered the foundation of self-sufficiency.

Without friendship - the state of security, trust, and mutual reliability - sex by itself activates the destabilizing systems; with friendship, it aligns with the natural ones. And that’s all.