

Epicurus vs Aristotle: the Role of Reason vs Sensation Seeking?

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 8, 2025 at 1:47 PM

In reaction to a recent post with a song titled "Cheese on Bread", I've been thinking about the role of reason, and for Epicureans we have the Letter to Menoeceus... but also I've been wondering about reason according to Aristotle...and I did a quick search:

Quote

The following is an AI response:

Aristotle articulated the idea that humans find their highest fulfillment in exercising reason, especially through contemplation, making it a key part of a flourishing life.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Book 10, he defines the highest human good ([eudaimonia](#) or flourishing) as the excellent exercise of reason, culminating in the contemplative life, which he saw as the most divine and self-sufficient human activity, superior to political or practical life.

Here's a breakdown of where to find these concepts:

- **[Nicomachean Ethics](#)**, Book 1, Chapter 7: Aristotle introduces the idea that human flourishing (eudaimonia) involves fulfilling our unique function ([ergon](#)), which he identifies as the activity of the soul in accordance with reason or virtue.
- **[Nicomachean Ethics](#)**, Book 10, Chapters 7-8: This is where Aristotle makes his strongest case for contemplation (the life of the intellect and philosophical inquiry) as the highest form of human activity, superior to the practical life of politics or ethics because it's more self-sufficient, continuous, and akin to the gods.
- **Core Concept: [Eudaimonia](#)**: His entire ethical framework, detailed in the [Nicomachean Ethics](#), centers on *eudaimonia*, the idea that true happiness isn't fleeting pleasure but a state of living well and doing well, achieved through virtuous activity, especially intellectual virtue.

In essence, Aristotle argues that while living virtuously in society (practical wisdom, moral virtues) is crucial, the ultimate fulfillment comes from exercising our highest faculty—reason—through contemplation, making it the pinnacle of a flourishing human life.

Epicurus talks about the life of reason and philosophy in the Letter to Menoeceus, and so he would agree with Aristotle about the importance of reason, and yet we have the idea that Epicurus said that the highest good is "pleasure"... and which can end up pointing to "cheese on bread".

So how do we make sense of this? Maybe we need a deeper compare and contrast between Epicurus and Aristotle? And also I think we need to have a more clear definition of "pleasure" and specific activities of what the mind should be engaged in? Wouldn't Epicurus think that reason is more important than the types of food one eats?

And...Is there any truth to thinking that "sensation seeking" is in competition with "exercising the mind of reason"?