

Why the Goal Is the Process: Aristotle, Eudaimonia & the Autotelic Life in Photography

What's poppin', people? It's Dante.

Going for a walk here in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia. Welcome to the woods. Today I'm thinking about goals — and what it truly means to *aim* at something in art, in photography, and in life.

Recently I finished reading Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and there's a particular idea that has been lingering in my mind: **eudaimonia** — human flourishing. To flourish is to cultivate virtue, strength, courage, and to become the best version of yourself, internally and externally.

And Aristotle says something powerful:

Every action has a telos — a goal — but some actions contain the goal within themselves.

The Goal Is Within the Process

Over the years I've realized something:

The meaning of photography is found within the click of the shutter itself.

The goal is the act.

The purpose is the process.

The reward is being fully alive while doing the thing.

This is what the ancient Greeks called **autotelic**:

- *autos* = self
- *telos* = goal

The goal is the doing.

The meaning is in the act.

The reward is the present moment.

When you create because it fuels your inner spiritedness — not because of the outcome — you touch something divine.

This, to me, is what eudaimonia feels like.

Freedom From Outcomes

The modern world trains you to chase outcomes:

- followers
- likes
- publications
- galleries
- attention
- validation

But attaching yourself to the end product kills your spirit.

When I detach from the outcome and photograph out of pure curiosity, out of play, out of love for life — that's where I thrive.

Meaning is found in the click of the shutter, not in the praise that follows.

I'm not interested in being productive.

I'm interested in being alive.

Play Over Productivity

In our society, toil is a virtue. Grind culture. Metrics. Output.

But I say **play more.**

Return to the inner child.

Follow your curiosity.

Let yourself fail.

Let yourself experiment.

The present moment is a gift — the goal hidden inside the act itself.

When you photograph from a state of play, you're living autotelically.

The Autotelic Artist

Ask yourself:

Would you photograph for the rest of your life if you knew no one would ever see the pictures?

If the answer is no, then your goal is external.

If the answer is yes — if you would photograph *just to photograph* — then you are creating from a pure state.

I'm not afraid to admit it:

Photography is a selfish act. I do it because I love life, because I love seeing, because it brings me closer to myself.

It fulfills me.

It expands me.

It raises my vitality.

And the more I walk, the more I see.
The more I see, the more I photograph.
The more I photograph, the more curious I become.

Curiosity is the fuel.
The photograph is the byproduct.

Meaning Is Created Through Doing

Flourishing is simple:

- Do what you love.
- Do it often.
- Do it without attachment to outcomes.
- Do it with intensity and intention.

When you stop forcing yourself to play someone else's game — and instead return to the playground of your youth — *your most authentic expression emerges effortlessly.*

Photography becomes gratitude.
The shutter becomes life-affirmation.
The mundane becomes extraordinary.

Ask Yourself One Question

Why do you do what you do?

If you contemplate this deeply — honestly — you may realize the same thing I did:

You love doing things for the sake of doing them.

And that is the essence of the autotelic life.

That is flourishing.

That is eudaimonia.

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