



THE essential catalyst

AN ESSAY ON HUMAN SOLIDARITY AND AUTHENTIC LIVING IN AN ABSURD WORLD

THE
essential
catalyst

FIRST EDITION



essential catalyst full playlist

The Essential Catalyst
First Edition

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and Katie Manley for helping
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In this work, I talk of things far greater than myself and my lived experiences. I try not to present myself as an authority on anything I claim, for truly what do I know? But, I wholly recognize my privilege in the matter. I accept my role in action and will gladly pass on the torch to whomever best deserves it. Not that I do. Capitalism and patriarchy disproportionately affect members of other racial groups as well as the lives of countless others discriminated against on an arbitrary basis. For this reason, I plead that you listen to the stories and callings of those whose lives are directly impacted. Those are their stories to tell, not mine.

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Philosopher Cornel West

Race Matters (1994) and *Democracy Matters* (2004)

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek

The Sublime Object of Ideology (1989)

and *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2007)

Scholar Gayatri Spivak

Can the Subaltern Speak? (1985)

and *A Critique on Postcolonial Reason* (1999)

Philosopher Judith Butler

Gender Trouble (1989) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993)

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE...

Do not stop there.

Please go find and support more artists!

Local and international!

fever dream

Intro

How is it that in the nation of the free, in the homes of the privileged and plentiful, there exists this great big nothing weighing on the hearts and minds of millions every day? How is it that such a nation continues to benefit from putting its people through the wringer of fear for some “far off” economic and environmental collapse, yet no one seems to want to fight to survive such an exodus? Is there really something so massive and powerful yet totally invisible that dictates the totality of our lives—from enjoying Cincinnati-style chili to creating a domestic terrorist? If this thing essentially controls society, how can we ever overcome it? Questions like these are only the fuel for the beginning of a social revolution that’s pleading to be heard & demanding to matter.

I am pursuing this project primarily because I suspect I can't be confident in any ideology until I properly analyze it and its practicality in depth. I used to espouse my core beliefs along the lines of "perspectivism" and "ecofeminism," but what are they to me other than gestural hot-button descriptors of how I live my life? Does it even mean anything to anyone else and, if it doesn't, will anyone really be bothered to go look it up for themselves? It feels a lot like when I had "activist" in my Twitter bio at some point in high school-ish. A friend asked me what I was even involved in... Pfft, *I wasn't*. I had been to the March for Science protest at the Capital in 2017, but there was no reason for me to claim to be an activist when I'm sat here at home doing virtually nothing all day. Sure, these causes—ecofeminism and the like—are great things to anchor to, but something never felt right to me. More so, it felt like a display of intelligence when I did it; "Ooo, look at these big words and complex ideologies and political movements! Aren't I clever and informed?"

That certainly isn't the case for everyone, but for me, as much as I wanted to believe I was all of those things, something felt off. A big something, it turns out. It need not be that complicated. Compassion checks all those boxes, is easily understood, and is *universal*.

One might ask how perspectivism and compassion differ, and while that's a good question, it seems to me that they each have their own limiting scopes—like camera lenses. Perspectivism is a widely liberal ideology, attempting to treat the ailments of each and every individual instead of the source of their collective pain. Liberalism, in American politics, does essentially the same thing, though, in reality, they justify the pain and suffering as just another means to an end. And the American “left” really isn't liberalism, but relative to the political action of the GOP, it certainly seems like it...

Anyway, relativity is an interesting philosophical framework in that it is really only useful to those who seek to benefit from the comparisons being drawn: The contemporary liberal party in the United States is the best option we have, *relatively speaking*. Using nuclear power as a transitory source of energy is a bad idea, *relative to the concerns of those that live near the plants*. Woven bags are better than plastic ones, *relatively speaking*. Access to clean drinking water is not a “public right,” *relative to the corporate interests of Nestle*.¹

See, perspectivism is *like* relativism in that you try to consider the widest breadth of possibilities, but it differs in that it doesn't validate individual atrocities. Essentially, there is a *limit* to what is relatively more or less moral because although one thing may be *technically* more moral than another, you also have to consider its full impact. If, for example, it is causing enough valid distress, it doesn't bear well against the perspectives of those being done harm. Perspectivism is a tricky ideology to feel confident in, especially when socio-economic struggles manage to put together any semblance of resistance toward their oppressors. But we circle back to the liberalism of it all—it can't help but overlook the bigger picture. Compassion on the other hand exceeds the goals of perspectivism and certainly of relativism. Compassion understands power differences and the intoxicating temptations of wealth and greed whispered to us in our sleep. Compassion is at odds with the great systems of oppression that plague

us now and in embracing a certain empathy for all life on Earth, we may be able to forge a new way of living that explicitly benefits no one, oppresses no one, and is built for all.

SO WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

It has given me great discomfort, in wanting a peaceful submission of social change, and hoping I am in the right, while *fully and completely* understanding why some believe a certain allowance of violence may be the harbinger of change that we need. But how can we know? Is violence really required to bring about human flourishing? That seems paradoxical.

Human solidarity can be felt in the digital ethos of communities worldwide. People can connect with others online simply because of some specific niche interest they share. Media used to be so limited in scope, forced to appeal to a large audience simply because it was practically and economically infeasible to reach enough people interested in something more specific. Globalization has also made it harder to see the greater power dynamics at play. Media of course plays into the same circular bolstering of “the norm” as the rest of us are. We are all participants in the continuation of capitalism and the like, even if we disapprove of it. Our individual dissent doesn't matter so long as we are content with the acceptance that while things aren't perfect, they're preferable to life in any other country in the world.

We've found ourselves at the heart of dissent, fueled by a critical lack of compassion, maintained—I believe—by the very system which governs our being. Our youth and naivety as a species is being tested, for cultural dynamics change and evolve so numbingly fast. Together, with the overdependence on abstractions like money and power, we face a barrier like no other. But history moves on; this barrier stays put, trapping and dooming us to history past. *Humanity has a choice: either remain complacent in this great perversion of life and death; or stand up, say no, and assert that there is beauty and meaning in a life of solidarity.* We cannot and must not deny this assertion in any individual being, for then what does that make us? Yet another failed revolution in the toils of history.

I draw from a number of texts to argue what the best way forward might look like and how to rebel against the pervasive submissions of social structures the likes of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, etc. The main source of inspiration for this passion project comes from Albert Camus' work on human nature and murder, *The Rebel*. In it, he argues that revolutionary action is doomed to fail from the onset if it is not waged on a common dignity found in all of humanity. He wonders if there is a degree of permissibility in regards to violence and murder as a means to a necessary and moral end. We'll soon question this conclusion, asking ourselves if this presents a confounding contradiction to the idea that each and every life matters and indeed, contains beauty... *The Rebel* is an amazing and thoughtful essay—written beautifully, of course—exploring and coming to terms with the nature of life and death and our relationship to it—highly recommended.

The other substantial text this project draws upon is a work by the great writer and thinker, Mark Fisher, titled *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* We cannot in good faith construct an argument about human nature and living in the world without knowing enough about the greater social systems at play. These things act in the background, subverting and reinforcing how we think about our lives and the “appropriate” reactions to certain experiences. The emergence of industrial capitalism changed how we interact with the world, and this text helps us recognize those intrusions, especially since Camus had no experience within contemporary post-globalist capitalism. *Capitalist Realism* is a short but potent book and does a good job preparing you to see how capitalism operates, engaging you to question its true efficacy—highly recommended as well.

Together, along with more ancillary sources [such as Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* and Owen Flanagan's *The Problem of the Soul*], I attempt to make sense of our lives as we experience them, dream of a future driven by passion, assess and discuss the reality of taking action, and ultimately argue that compassion is the essential catalyst through which human solidarity is achievable.

Buried Alive

Me

In the introductory section of Camus' *The Rebel*, he posits that the entirety of his endeavor to explore the subject matter is, in essence, an attempt to make sense of his own time.¹ Similarly, I am approaching this project in the hopes that I can better understand myself and what it is I actually stand for. I suppose in that regard, this project is inherently selfish, but then again, maybe all stories are the selfish inner-narratives of an artist struggling to create something... out of nothing. Whatever the case, it will be important to set up some context to which we can apply the theories of our exploration. To start, I'll tell you a little about myself.

Growing up, as the oldest of my family, I was the first to experience many things; puberty, high school, college, paying taxes... My parents tried their best to shield my siblings and me from the absurdities of the world, particularly the harsher realities of the times. A noble endeavor—for which I cannot assign blame—but once the veil of bliss started to wash away and I was exposed to the raw happenstance of the world, I easily became overwhelmed. I realized that there was value in words and in interactions; that there were stakes far beyond anything I was capable of comprehending. Worse yet, I realized how small I was in the grand scheme of things.

I grew increasingly anxious, trying to stay within this arbitrary bubble of comfort I had inherited from childhood. With every irrational worry, I was inadvertently training my brain to respond to uncertainty with isolation. I let other people do my talking for me, relying on my extroverted friends to connect me with others, inform my own actions in public, and adapt to new environments. As a consequence, I didn't feel like I belonged

the essential catalyst

anywhere, for I spent most of the time isolating myself even in places of relative comfort.

In college, I realized that my brain just wasn't wired for learning computer science in the ways of traditional academia, so I chased after whatever hints of passion I could find. My history with computers was just as strong as my history with art, so switching to graphic design made complete sense to me and to anyone that knew me. Even before I had taken an HTML course in high school that ultimately led me to pursue computer science, I had all but dedicated myself as a future graphic design major.

At first, I didn't quite understand the process of making art. Admittedly, it wasn't until my last year that I realized the process of creation goes far beyond simply "getting it done," or checking something off the to-do list. Far from simple bureaucratic busywork, art is something that can really only be good (or worthy of a good grade, in this case) if one actually *believes in it* and *wills it to be good*. An art project may be pitched like homework, but insofar as getting it done, the only thing it has in common is the time it will take to do it. And there will always be projects that you just don't relate to and that's fine—you can do perfectly well by just getting it done—but it is unlikely that the work will stand out or inspire. That doesn't mean yours will be bad, but it is evident to others that those who apply themselves to their art are the ones most likely to make something beautiful.

To apply any amount of creativity to a project, I have to be personally and passionately compelled to do so. I suspect there is a universal truth to this, but the very act of finding that inspiration is something that continues to elude me. ~~I know not the degree to which I am neurodivergent~~ [since writing this I've actually gotten tested for inattentive ADHD... easily passed that test!], but it makes sense that I would find something boring and not worth the time if I don't care about the subject. It takes so much effort for me to apply myself, traveling to the core of my creative mind and asking for guidance. I was struggling to understand myself and my capabilities—like a tortoise that doesn't know how to retreat into its shell. I was vulnerable and submissive to social pressures in the hopes of being spared. And with a general lack of direction or passion in my life, one can imagine

it was difficult to apply myself to any project, for school or otherwise.

This state of helplessness and fatigue wasn't easily shaken by a newfound interest, though. I explored my passions primarily through courses I found...well, most interesting. I seem to be very good at retaining information about climate change and philosophy, for example. At this point in my life, I separated my experience as a student into a dichotomy of time: *in class or out of class*. Because I was struggling so significantly, every minute in class drained me. I felt empty when I got out of class and taught myself that learning is relegated to inside the classroom only. But if you're truly passionate about something, shouldn't you be excited to learn and grow outside the classroom as well? Even though I had started to find things that interested me, I had immense trouble applying them to my projects. The automatic response to taking on such a responsibility was that of an anxiety to create.

In course work and in my personal projects, I harbored a certain hesitation to apply myself to the process. My lack of passion led to a fear of failure, as I didn't understand what was prohibiting me from achieving good marks. The risks associated with creating something worthwhile became entangled with the possibility of failure. I became catatonic even with my best ideas. In the event that I stumbled upon a great concept, my execution was always lacking due to that anxiety to jump in head-first.

When I was considering switching majors, it felt obvious to inquire about the graphic design program here at the University of Dayton. Since my dad has worked for the university longer than I've been alive, I have always known I would end up here after high school. Art was my favorite class in high school, up until a group of friends and I had taken programming one or whatever the class was called, where we learned basic HTML. I basically fell in love with the precision and apparent aptitude I felt in creating and designing shitty websites. Little did I know that experience wasn't universal to computer science as a whole. Three semesters in, I recognized I didn't have the discipline to essentially teach myself how to code from a textbook with minimally helpful lectures. I retreated to graphic

design in the hopes of continuing to work creatively within software.

I spent years romanticizing a career and hobby centered around 3D modeling and texturing, but UD was primarily an engineering (and party) school. The art department lacked funds and interest in such a field, so graphic design was the closest I was going to get to being taught 3D art. Because of that and my brutish understanding of passion and living life in general, I put off learning Blender—the primary software for most independent, newbie 3D artists. This is not to equate it with training wheels though, for Blender is a truly remarkable piece of software. It's a fellow open source comrade. Regardless, I had downloaded Blender and tried to follow tutorials before, but couldn't maintain interest in the learning process. It felt so daunting, booting it up, fumbling around the viewport, and getting lost in the many different nodes and modifiers...

When the pandemic rolled around though, I found myself struggling to stay occupied. I was stuck in my childhood bedroom, isolating from my family because they made me feel so stressed about my future. The constant reminders of needing a job and work for a portfolio... as if I wasn't already terrified of failing in such prospects. Each time it was mentioned felt like they were adding an extra bag of sand on my shoulders. They had good intentions, for they were worried for me—they wanted me to live a good life as much as I did. But their worries became mine, and I bore both of our collective anxieties. It grew harder to proceed with every stacked bag. Eventually though, around September of that year, with my legs wobbling and my balance teetering, my anxiety caught up to me. I realized I only had such a short time left in college. I knew I needed to begin learning this skill if I were to stand a chance in landing a job outside of graphic design. So, backed all the way into the corner, I started watching tutorials and learning the basics. I knew a lot about the foundations of the industry and of the process from years of watching videos from Corridor Digital/Crew and the like. As soon as I had the drive to learn though, it seemed like nothing could stop me. I took part in “inktober,” though digitally and aptly called “blendtober,” and committed to creating and posting something every day for that month. I did the

infamous donut tutorial by the BlenderGuru, and continued to post almost daily for months afterward.

While I feel comfortable enough having broken free from the bonds of debilitating anxiety, I still hold on to that irrational fear of failure. Lately, I've had so many fun ideas that, for one reason or another, I've convinced myself not to pursue. But this essay, this project... It feels so right. It truly is a *passion* project. I believe in it and want to breathe life into it—to let it become tangible and actualized for others to consume.

I want this to be the best it can be, but with that expectation comes the many mental hurdles which have been frustrating, to say the least. It has taken me far longer to write this than I had ever previously imagined. I thought I could read a couple of source texts and squirt this puppy out in a month or two over the summer, but I couldn't even get myself to start writing until it was almost August. In the time it took to research and plan the project scope, I allowed myself to dream up this large threat of failure. What if it's not good? What if no one likes it? What if? What if? What if? But I *am* finishing it. This story has implications far greater than myself. I want to explore my values and, in so doing, tell a beautiful story of life, death, and freedom.

Talking to Myself

You & Me // Existential Dread

Anxiety, in the traditional sense, is often understood as dread for the future: I am anxious to finish this rough draft and send it to friends for review. Within the ideals of existentialism, anxiety is a tool used for understanding the meaning of *being*. The “phenomena” of being—of existing and whatever that implies—is something many existentialists have dedicated their lives to trying to understand. This piece is indeed a work of existentialism, for it aims to question who we are, why we are here, and what our lives truly mean.

For most animals on this planet, their lives are a sequence of moments unconnected to the grand conception of time and of impermanence. Humans, of course, have this “special” combination of traits and genes and other sciencey-stuff that allows us to contextualize our memories with the present in order to prepare us for our future. The primary consequence of this ability is the understanding and acknowledgment that everything that lives will one day die. We often understand this consequence far *too much*, spending most of our lives doing whatever it takes to escape its ultimate inevitability. But all things die. All things end. And endings are sad. But they are also so beautiful.

From the moment you begin to grasp the concept of death, which is usually sometime in your early life, you begin to feel a twinge of angst in your heart. This is unfair. Life is so fragile. To live and to love—that's something everyone should be owed, yes? But beings are not *owed* life—life just *happens*. Beings will cease to be, and then...they're gone.

To a lot of us, there is relief in hope. Hope that the people they love stay with them even after they're gone here on Earth. A promise of life after death, given by

the powerful men who sit upon marble thrones inherited by blood and deceit, who call themselves holy, who espouse virtue and acceptance—yet the ones who alienate and dehumanize their fellow “neighbors”—are denying the fundamental understanding of life. This understanding is, I think, what gives it any meaning at all. Death, insofar that it is known to be the inescapable eventuality of life, is simultaneously absurd and beautiful. It is absurd because it makes no sense and it is beautiful because despite this, here we are. An ultimate meaning to life is not assigned to *all* beings, for that constitutes a life of predetermined action. If you are afforded no real choices in life, how is it worth living? How is that meaningful? Is there meaning in life as a meat puppet? I think not.

BELIEF AND ACCEPTANCE

Do I believe in God? ... I believe in the idea of God. Of goodness and love. That there is—in everything—a common essence, shared and passed on. That doing good things for no other reason than to try to be good is what we all ought to strive for. Do I believe we were created, chosen? ... I think what's more beautiful is the uniqueness of the human condition. The barriers our species overcame that lead us to who we are now. We were certainly created, but not directly, I don't think. But what started everything—in the beginning? Well, that's what I want to know too.

This project isn't about God or religion, but it bumps up against the topic, so I think it appropriate to cover. While I personally am at odds with the concept of God, or of any deity for that matter, I have absolutely no problem with the belief in God, a god, or gods. I am always willing to be proven wrong—it is ever so exciting! And perhaps there is something out there. Maybe the flow of energy through time lends itself to something leaning on spirituality (in the transfer of energy through life, where the fluidity through beings becomes a current of spirit). I could see myself getting into that. It kind of reminds me of Andy Weir's story, *The Egg*. Regardless, the essential catalyst is not incompatible with faith and spirituality; they just need a little redefining. Humanity is an extraordinary product of evolution

and—while God can certainly be involved in the creation of matter in “the beginning”—any sense of divine intervention as significant as manifestations or tampering within time and space is a fundamental violation of the physical world *as we know it*. Again, I am happy to be proven wrong, but—for the moment at least—a worldview without significant contradictions in logic suggests that if God is real, it/he/she/they are an observer to us, waiting to see if we can stick this thing out.

I do however have a problem with the intentions of many institutionalized organizations who've found that they are really rather effective at getting people to do things out of pure faith. Anyone involved is/was just as human as you or me; there's *no reason* to treat any of their doctrines as infallible. No, we can't allow ourselves to attain *personal* meaning through God.

Therein lies my belief: Our personalities are constructed from a foundation of nature and nurture and are built up from lived experiences. What makes us who we are is the unbelievably complex biology and chemistry in our heads and the energy required to power most of its functions. Death means the ceasing of that energy to its outputs, which in turn means the total loss of personality, if at all recoverable. The mind of a being is not separable from the functions of the brain (insofar as any neuroscientists can tell) and so when death rears its way to the inevitability of The End, that being is no more. It ends...

It is comforting to hold on to the hope that you will one day join those whom you loved and lost, but it is also comforting to know that they are still with you. True, memories are not lossless packets of data ready to be relived at any time, but the experience is still there, stored within you. Such memories are, in essence, a part of *you*. I mean, suppose you believe in an afterlife: would anything you do or say to the people in your life right now really matter if you knew you would see them again for eternity? Would there even be any urgency in the matter of relationships like that if we were promised to be united again? To me, the knowledge that everything has its end is what makes anything really meaningful.

One day, there will come a time when you see your mother for the last time; by that, I don't mean to depress you, but wouldn't that saddening knowledge now bring meaning to the next times that you see them? Because of this, every meeting grows more and more meaningful. See, Camus wrote that "in order to exist just once in the world, it is necessary never again to exist."¹ And so I don't see a point in eternal life. Even a life tragically cut short was beautiful in its time already spent here with us—to spend your time hoping for an eternally distant reunion instead of cherishing the moments you actually had with them only serves to weaken your memory of them as they were. This burden, this angst, this suffering from death—universal to all of humanity—is what makes us truly alive.

NOTHING MATTERS

Surely, it is how we face the absurdity of *being* that defines who we are and what we believe in. Meaning is derived from our intentions, actions, and passions as we carry out our journeys into the world as individuals and as a community. Meaning, insofar as it is traditionally understood, tends to be intertwined with religious doctrine. From Christians, the 10 Commandments or the belief that God helps and guides us is considered to be the "meaning of life." Although the contemporary cultural scene seems to suggest that the "meaning of life" is a funny joke, implying that there isn't an answer/there is no meaning to life. You can see this in references like the quirky, nonsensical answer, "42," from Douglas Adam's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Ambivalence about answering this entirely human question is a relatively new development, though. "When the throne of God is overthrown," Camus explains, "the rebel realizes that it is now [their] own responsibility to create the justice, order[,] and unity that [they] sought in vain within [their] own condition and, in this way, to justify the fall of God."² It is easy to misrepresent statements like these from existentialists, for we are so far removed from the history of their times. Just remember that they are coming off the heels of the toppling of powerful monarchies where kings were believed to be divinely chosen—that God spoke through them and determined

the rules. The death of god, by ways of revolution (and decapitation), revealed to those at the time that their lives were not dictated by a higher power. In this shift of perspective, people felt like their values were stripped from them, that there was no longer a meaning to live. This was the birth of nihilism.

Nihilism is often understood as the belief that nothing matters. Most of us in the West would then go a step further, claiming that if nothing matters, then "everything is permissible and nothing is important."³ Indeed, in the absence of meaning, there is a lack of goodness on account of all the badness that accompanies it. Nihilism posits that goodness or badness are just accidents⁴—bound by nothing, anything can happen, with no apparent rhyme or reason.

This is not what we observe in the world, though. If nothing matters, then nothing is worth fighting for. The slave would not fight back against their master. Kings would not have been beheaded. So then, there is obviously something worth fighting for. Camus could see this contradiction, clarifying, "a nihilist is not someone who believes in nothing, but someone who does not believe in what [they see]."⁵ The nihilist gets swept up and overwhelmed by the absurdity of the world, oftentimes through isolation, fearing what they do not understand. They are lacking something; something that binds us all together. The nihilist cannot see beauty in the world. Perhaps they cannot see beauty in themselves. That's where I was, only a few months back. Drained, hopeless, and young, I would wake up for class and desperately fight the urge to throw myself in front of the bus outside my apartment. Escaping this mindset takes time and compassion for oneself. Yet it is never evaded for good.

We see then the emergence of a certain anxiety—an anxiety born from the knowledge and acceptance of our place in the world. Because the world is absurd, because it does not owe us any comfort in survival, it is up to *us* to find meaning in it. Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, wrote in his book, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, "as far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being."⁶ What the nihilist doesn't see in isolation is that meaning comes from within.

Spring and a Storm

Beauty & the World

The concrete ephemera of contemporary life provides a kind of paradoxical fascination within the abstraction of beauty in the world. On one hand, perhaps the most universally life-changing tools in the history of our species—being the common cell phone and subsequent infrastructure that make it possible—allow us to interface with just about anything we can think of at any given moment of a day. The development of the internet laid down a revolutionary framework of mass cultural expansion the likes of which no other Earthly animal was ever capable of achieving. With all that information accessible practically anywhere and everywhere, we've come to find ourselves inheritors and contributors of a vast and ever-changing web of content and culture alike. On the other hand though, because we have an endless supply of content—seemingly packed into a thin wafer-sized slab of metal that fits in (most of) our pockets—it is becoming increasingly hard to separate and distinguish time in and outside of this brand new digital reality.

That, and the vastness of physical capital provide an increasing amount of reasons to stay inside and interact with others, by one's self. Going on hikes has become more of a niche hobby and visiting great feats of nature are events of vacations, not of regular life. Now, I'm certainly not here to argue that we ought to drop all of our responsibilities, in digital and physical space, and "go touch some grass"—that's not my point. We've just got so much *stuff* that occupies our attention; we no longer have to bear the brutishness and angst felt by being in the world at every waking moment in our lives. Distractions are not only plentiful but highly profitable, developed specifically to take advantage of the reward systems within the brain, making you hooked. Because it

Nietzsche was a grand proponent of creating meaning for oneself (although many young Nietzsche readers fail to understand that part). God is dead. We no longer derive absolute meaning from him. The nihilist stops there, but Nietzsche keeps going, upholding that meaning is not a collective feeling—it comes *from* you, *for* you.

Sometimes, it can be hard not to blame the nihilist, for we humans can only derive meaning from experience. We are products of our environment, and the operations and values of society shape how we think and act in the world; it matters how you see yourself. An existential crisis is what happens when you finally see those larger systems influencing how you live or act—when you realize the way you lived your life was wrong. This is the true anxiety of being.

Existential anxiety is uncomfortable, leading many that become afflicted to run away from it. Denial and complacency are common responses to this kind of dread. It is easier to give in or to "play your role" than it is to face it in an attempt to gain understanding. This is the affliction of so many liberals today. They are too afraid to see that the way we live our lives is wrong and that we have to do something about it. They're too afraid to realize that the American Dream is a lie. Too afraid to admit that racist people are created not by themselves or their perceived ignorance or hatred, but by the very system itself. They're too afraid to see that they too are implicated in the proliferation of racism and misogyny in our cultures. They play by the rules because "that's just how things are." It is indeed very hard trying to escape this anxiety. And truly it can never be defeated—one must always question themselves and their thoughts—but when we take that uncomfortable stance against those injustices, we begin to weaken their grasp on our lives. In opposing the systems of oppression, we must not let fear, hatred, or envy drive us. Who are we to fight for solidarity if we don't even believe in it ourselves? If the first step is questioning why things are the way they seem to be, then the next is to maintain our connection to reality. We risk becoming detached from the lives of those around us if we come to conclusions under false pretense or because we don't like the answer we are finding. What does reality have to say to us and is it worth fighting for?

is imperative as a company to keep you interested in their platform over others, another social system emerges, fueled by capitalism itself. A system within a system, aiding and strengthening each other; social media is a beautiful thing, but it is a piece of technology and technology can be used in immoral ways. It is absurd.

As with all problems, the first step in resolving them is to realize they exist. It is imperative that we question the nature and consequences of social media so that we may begin to offer alternative solutions. Before we can do that though, we have to question what already works. But it's not like we can all be personally involved with fixing the troubled structures of society. It is not our job to care about the dirty practices of social media companies or banks, or governments for that matter.

Except, the principle of questioning one's surroundings and beliefs is a very useful tool for living an authentic life. Amy Krouse Rosenthal, an excellent author and creative, caring person, once described the importance of being in the world and finding one's place within it, saying, "for anyone trying to discern what to do w/ their life: PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU PAY ATTENTION TO. that's pretty much all the info u need."¹ It's funny to me, after reading a bunch of philosophy texts and whatnot, that a serious attempt to do the same (ish... I mean, kinda. It's sorta like that) would stress importance on something posted to Twitter. But this tweet is perfect—Rosenthal, in sharing her approach to authentically being herself among billions, captures one of the most important principles of consciously experiencing human dignity.

Like shaking an addiction, becoming aware of your actions and beliefs is a Sisyphean task. Awareness is a chronic pain, something that will always be hard to maintain. Social media is just one example of contempt or distraction from that pain. Again, I'm not saying that being on or enjoying social media makes you a mindless zombie, rather it provides reasons to stop seeing why awareness is worth it. Awareness brings with it its fair share of angst, but along with that angst is a recognition that beautiful things exist and are worth protecting. Contempt for the state in which we find ourselves gives up

on what is beautiful in the world. It claims it is not in fact worth protecting, that the world is going to shit anyway, so who cares if another beautiful thing is lost to history. The world is chaotic and sometimes that chaos stakes a claim on beauty.

But beauty occurs despite the world having any obligation to support it. The Earth very well could have ended up as a planet devoid of life. But for us? We were thrown into this world—this nonsense world—with nothing to do but to live and die in the absurdity of our own creation. We are something, out of nothing.

I'm really not interested in contrarian bullshit, feeling the need to undermine the good things in life with the massive evidence of all the bad. That gets us nowhere and I suspect you know that. Harboring a vast misunderstanding of what makes something beautiful makes me think you're submissive to a certain blind contempt for the state of the world; unable to find something worth living for, something you find beautiful, you instead wish to infect others with the same familiar nihilism that isolates you. "In upholding beauty, we prepare the way for the day of regeneration when civilization will give first place—far ahead of the formal principles and degraded values of history—to this living virtue on which is founded the common dignity of [humanity] and the world [we live] in, and which we now have to define in the face of a world which insults it."² Camus believes beauty is an essential component of what I've come to call the the essential catalyst. Compassion recognizes beauty in its most basic form, consuming and radiating it in the name of solidarity. At first, I thought I would need to heavily impose my own perception of beauty as examples to list in this chapter. Instead, I think, I'm going to ask you to find your own beautiful examples of life, and perhaps death, out in the world. If you think you can do that, put this thing down, go walk around wherever, and just observe. Don't be in your head thinking about other things, just exist in the moment and remember to pay attention to what you pay attention to. If you think you may need a little help or guidance for finding beauty, if you find yourself too focused on the chaos, I'll do my best to provide an example of how I try to see the world.

however, suffering can also be an expression of pain. Surely it isn't a leap to understand that through compassion, one has a mutual interest in diminishing all suffering?

Many of you may not like this chapter or find it the least relatable of the bunch. I completely understand and can relate to this feeling. It is common, in having a deep belief challenged, to fortify and double down even if you suspect the other party may be right after all. What I will come to lay out here is by no means meant to affix blame on any individual, but we will find that in action, it will indeed become a personal struggle to overcome. At the very least, I am asking that you attempt to challenge your beliefs—to pay attention to what you're paying attention to—even if you conclude that the way you are currently living your life is sufficient enough for you.

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

It should be our goal to eliminate or prevent the suffering of others if we believe them to be beautiful. It follows that in a goal of such momentous horizons, it is not an *actual summation of equality*, but rather the guiding principles of which we will employ when actually living our lives.¹ There is no reason we shouldn't afford equal considerations towards animals as well as human beings in these principles. I will be drawing from the late Peter Singer's famed novel, *Animal Liberation*, to argue that compassion for animals is just as necessary in forging a community of solidarity as compassion for humans.

First though, why ought we care about the feelings of animals? They cannot reason like us—surely there is a fair basis for the way we have historically treated them? I urge you to think outside the realm of your average pet, who was likely bred with the specific intention of being more kind and tolerable of human affairs. If we are to be just in this critique, we must establish the limit for considering the feelings of other beings. This limit is essential because, as Singer argues, “suffering and enjoyment” are the keystones not only for ascribing meaning to life but also in establishing that “a being has interests—at an absolute minimum, an interest in not suffering.”² We aim to diminish suffering through compassion. It matters not if an animal is

capable of contextualizing its learned experiences for the purpose of preparing it for the future as we do. Nor does it matter if an animal is able to articulate thoughts as we do. Pain and thus, suffering, is an affliction of the present. It is hardly a matter of whether or not a being will remember being in pain, for if a being feels pain and suffers, “there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration.”³ Singer is right—since our interests here are to recognize the beauty in the world and apply it to our lives, compassion for *all beings* is assumed into that grand vision.

One might think that suffering is not as easy to quantify and that something like intelligence is a more apt method of caring for those that “actually matter,” but then you introduce and invite contradictions in your ideology that need exceptions. If you believe intelligence is perfectly useful to draw this distinction, you have to contend with the inconsistencies that arise. Are you really to argue that, because a human infant is incapable of complex thought, that it is not worthy of compassion? I should think not. One may also disagree, stating that the human infant is fostered into that concern because it is human. But why should that matter? What then is the basis for the morality of the issue? Is its pain only significant because it is a member of our own species? Is the pain of a pet of less significance because it isn't human like our siblings? No, Singer says, because an “appeal to [the] difference [of species] is to reveal a bias no more defensible than racism or any other form of arbitrary discrimination.”⁴ We have to avoid making conclusions through arbitrary means if we want to apply any sense of logic to our conclusions. Clearly, the capability for a being to suffer and feel joy is the one consideration we need in justifying its rights.

THE MEAT INDUSTRY

This all leads us to Singer's obvious conclusion, pleading to “bring nonhuman animals within our sphere of moral concern and cease to treat their lives as expendable for whatever trivial purposes we have.”⁵ We apply moral concern for household pets (or so I hope) because we have the most experience with them. We've [probably] seen

them experience joy—the energized tail wagging, panting, and inability to sit still when we get home after work or school—and pain—the sharp “YIPE” from a dog whose tail has accidentally been stepped on. We likely have experience in broadening our “sphere of moral concern” for these animals, so what makes a cow or pig or chicken so much different?

It can’t be because “we eat them.” We can’t simply stop there. Does eating them mean it’s automatically ok? No. The process of meat production is so far removed from the average citizen’s life. Images of small farmer families and big red barns may fill your mind... But that’s not the reality. The agriculture business keeps their animals behind closed, metal doors. It’s like that for a reason—“animals are treated like machines that convert low-priced fodder into high-priced flesh.”⁶ Because their “yields” are purely production-based and profit-driven, the consideration for their experience is purposely avoided. “They will be dead soon, what does it matter if they live a good life?”

They will only be dead soon because we’ve asserted our control over them. It is not sufficient to say that because we have been hunting them and eating them for thousands of years, we have the right to continue doing so. This is clearly not a defensible position to take, especially for Camus, who argues that anything done on the basis of history alone is neglecting beauty itself—that absurd chaos through which *anything* is possible. Anything for history’s sake is a denial of freedom in the name of something that once was but will never be again.

If it wasn’t obvious, *Animal Liberation*, and indeed, part of the point of this entire project is to teach that, if we really truly care about the beauty of life and death—in hoping to achieve a future of human solidarity—then we too *must* care for the rest of our animal neighbors. Singer brings us to this ultimate point: “[within the structures of capitalism and the corporate incentives thereby guaranteed, then] practically and psychologically it is impossible to be consistent in one’s concern for nonhuman animals while continuing to dine on them.”⁷ Please, I ask you to hear me out.

The action of eating meat is as pervasive as capitalism itself, especially in the western world. It is a tradition baked into the lifestyles of practically every American. So much so that it is often hard to imagine a lifestyle catered to the exclusion of animal meats. I can tell ya... it is not easy to make the transition. My sister has been a vegetarian for the vast majority of her life. I had harbored a certain empathy for the treatment of farm animals for a while, but never wanted to commit to a life without meat, citing that “it’s too convenient of a food source to quit altogether.” Though I tried to pay attention to which companies were particularly torturous to their animals, staying clear of their products, that does nothing for the issue as a whole. As long as I eat meat, I am complacent with the torment and suffering that these animals are put through, including debeaking, severing tails, insufficient living space, wire cages, careless genetic engineering, and so, so much more. I implore you to give Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* a read if you are interested in learning about the animal liberation movement. It practically started with him, and there have been marginal wins here and there, particularly in product testing, but agribusiness and experimentation on the basis of scientific discovery are where the real wickedness lies.

The choice to go vegetarian or vegan is inherently individualistic—I can not force you to unearth your whole lifestyle through a single chapter in this dinky essay. So the last we will hear of Singer now will be the takeaway I want you to consider: “You must decide for yourself where you are going to draw the line, and your decision may not coincide exactly with mine.”⁸ All I ask is that you take the time to consider your actions and beliefs. If you are indeed committed to the lifestyle of equitable compassion, do your actions actually match your beliefs? Are you ok with that?

THE HUMAN ANIMAL

You may have noticed the phrase “non-human animal,” or the association of animality with humanity in this chapter. This is no mistake, and goes far beyond the implications of the animal liberation movement or of my own beliefs (insofar that I would include it here

selfishly). I've done this because it is essential to view humans as the animals that we are.

Seeing ourselves as animals is hard to understand at first; through religious ideologies and pervasive tradition, we have unfairly asserted ourselves above the other animals of the Earth on the basis that we are more special than they are. This was harder to realize in the times when kings were believed to be divinely chosen to rule, or that God himself specifically created us as we are now—before any theories of evolution cast doubt on the authenticity of these ideas.

In our contemporary setting however, it is now acceptable to challenge those beliefs. Humans are animals just like dogs, cows, fish, or crustaceans. Owen Flanagan, a renowned philosopher of the mind and human nature, published *The Problem of the Soul* explaining the problem he has with traditional images of humanity and human nature and attempting to promote an alternative way of thinking about oneself. Although I think he comes off as rather dismissive of the held beliefs of those with faith, it is genuinely a good read on modern mind science and how that conflicts with our understanding of free will and our goal(s) as a species. I recommend giving it a try if you're into philosophy books—this one isn't particularly dense and is certainly easier to read than, say, that of Kierkegaard or Heidegger. (It has diagrams! I love it when philosophers include visual aid)

Regardless, Flanagan offers us some reasoning as to why humans ought to be considered within the realm of animality. First, is the old association to religion and the doctrines that boosted our ego over other animals of the Earth—they were “God’s gift to us” to care for and utilize how we please, after all (/s). Then, with the “death of God,” the question of divine right came under fire. We can decide for ourselves. Flanagan admits that it isn't easy to rationalize ourselves as animals, given that: “The nature of any thing, a human being included, is not easy to grasp. We are animals who can know things, but our own nature is hardly transparent to us,” and; “We are story-telling animals. We make sense of things through stories, and stories, especially when bundled together, generate grand pictures. We picture ourselves and our world through stories, grand stories.”⁹ What even is the nature of animality? How exactly are we so different from them

that we can dismiss their existence or feelings just because we are capable of greater knowledge? When we don't even understand *ourselves*, we become obsessed with finding “the truth.” But we forget that we are social beings. We make sense of life and time through socializing, or telling stories. Stories are captivating and convincing to us, yet we *are* fallible beings. In the assumption that we are special because we are *more than* the other animals we interact with, we lose empathy for them. We isolate ourselves from them and suddenly it becomes easy to overlook their beauty, their suffering.

Whether or not you agree that we are part of the animal kingdom doesn't matter to me as much as the consideration for their experiences as beings. If there's any takeaway from this chapter, I want it to be that one. From here on I will be referring to “animals” in the traditional sense as “non-human animals,” and in regard to all beings, I simply default to “animals,” or just “beings.” Just know that I explicitly mean humans are included, for we all feel pain and experience joy.

IN ALL THINGS?

Lastly, I just wanted to touch on something skeptics might try and weaponize in opposition to the animal liberation movement. “Since there is beauty in all things, and we ought to recognize and respect that beauty, does this not mean that we have to take equal consideration in regard to plants, too?” “I saw a video of a plant getting yelled at...” or “I saw a video of a plant getting slapped ...”

Yes, plants respond to stimuli. Slap a plant and you can get a reading if you look in the right place, indicating some form of acknowledgment of the event. However, plants do not experience pain or joy. Reporting from answers given by notable Biologist Daniel Chamovitz to Vice for an article on the topic, Mercy For Animals published a similar article that about sums up all you need to know on the topic:

“Unlike us and other animals, plants do not have nociceptors, the specific types of receptors that are programmed to respond to pain. They also, of course, don't have brains, so they lack the machinery

the line between truth in two stories is not inherently distinguishable.

It would be wrong of me to try and argue what I believe without having read or consumed any means of comparison. Perspective is a tricky thing and, if you rely too much on your own, you will inevitably miss the point because you simply couldn't see it from where you were. This is partly why philosophy texts are so confusing to most, because they all draw from other texts of which you will probably need some context.

A primary goal of this project aims to display philosophy to be more approachable than other traditional forms—sorta like how on-line content creators like Philosophy Tube or hbombguy operate. Of course, they too reference other people's work because that's how you build a more complete picture of your own beliefs.

In this chapter, I will be reflecting on Albert Camus' essay, *The Rebel*, to try and understand the action of change, as well as Mark Fisher's book, *Capitalist Realism*, to see how we might apply such action to bring about change to our lives.

Before diving into *The Rebel*, I think a little context is needed to understand where Camus is coming from with all this. Having been born in French Algeria and working hard to oppose Nazi occupation in Europe, Camus was rightfully disgusted with the individuals that assisted the Nazi genocides.¹ After the liberation of Paris in 1944, Camus was an advocate of what was essentially a purge: "thousands of collaborators – from government officials to journalists to shaven-headed women alleged to have cavorted with German occupiers – had been treated to summary justice in courts, on French streets, sometimes by little better than lynch mobs," writes Feldman.² Shortly after, Camus had been criticized by "catholic intellectual" François Mauriac, condemning the purge.³ Camus publicly responded, claiming that the severity of the time "forces us to destroy a living part of this country in order that we may save its very soul."⁴ After having repeated his support for the purge following another plea from François Mauriac, Camus became weary as the number of deaths from the purge continued to grow, long after the battle had been won.⁵ Writing publicly in early 1945, Camus admitted he was indeed wrong for his

support of the purge, saying, "we see now that M. Mauriac was right."⁶ This realization made in him a complete transformation of heart, for Camus felt deeply for the lives that were lost, seeing that the spirit of what France had been fighting for had become corrupt. After a tragic and fatal car wreck, a quote from a piece he was working on, *La Peste* [*The Plague*], was found:

"We should serve justice because our condition is unjust, increase happiness and joy because this world is unhappy. Similarly, we should sentence no one to death, since we have been sentenced to death ourselves."⁷

L'HOMME RÉVOLTÉ

Camus published works in cycles of 3; *The Rebel* was a philosophical essay that existed along with his novel, *The Plague*, and his play, *The Misunderstanding*. Together, they center around the idea of rebellion. *The Rebel* was written after the events of the purge and the regret that Camus felt for being a part of it. What follows is the morality of rebellion in response to held beliefs. I'm going to work somewhat out of order from what Camus presents to us in *The Rebel*, with the intent to slow it down and make it more clearly relatable. Just know that the/a "rebel" is an individual—an archetype for one to insert themselves into.

So far, we've established that because life has a meaning, one ought to embrace the absurdity of the world and seek out or create one's own meaning. The affirmation that "yes, I am suffering," in turn is the realization that so too does the rest of humanity. "Therefore the first step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things," writes Camus, "is to realize that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all [of us] and that the entire human race suffers from the division between itself and the rest of the world."⁸ From there on it becomes contradictory to the very nature of oneself to deny the suffering of any being, because in doing so, one severs their connection to solidarity, leading to a life of isolation. In the assertion of a superior people, an inferior out-group is born and subsequently creates the need for a rebellion against itself for the sake of those deemed

inferior. For this reason, Camus argues that rebellion in the name of wicked principles is doomed to fail in one of two ways; either being “crushed by bloodshed, or the hideous prospect of atomic suicide.”⁹ There are *no* cases in which the established few come out on top of those they oppress. Because the instinct to rebel is human nature, oppression will always be opposed. The elite then will either be dethroned or, in their nihilistic attempt to consume everything, they wind up dethroning humanity as a whole.

Camus spends much of the essay laying out historical context to revolutions past and the examples that, in one way or another, failed because it either deserted the original values that it rebelled on, or because it was tyrannical from the onset. Tyranny, to Camus, will always end in bloodshed—humanity can be made a slave, but if pushed enough, a value will be realized in which enough is enough. In the realm of the past and in our own history, “the revolutionary is simultaneously a rebel or he is not a revolutionary, but a policeman, or a bureaucrat, who turns against the rebellion.”¹⁰ Revolution is a tricky thing—who’d’ve thought? One, if established or carried out in ways contradictory to the values it fights for (or in this case, on the basis of nihilism), will never reach the level of solidarity it so desires. To Camus, it is only the intersection of an acceptance of nihilism *and* the affirmation of a value common to *all* of humanity, that rebellion can succeed.

Action is easily enough achieved, but in the course of history, there has been so much bloodshed. For what? Which revolution succeeded in bringing about solidarity for their people? Lenin? I don’t think so. After gaining power, have any of them actually governed or led their people in the name of the values they professed? The moment they compromised their values for their cause, they lost any claim to virtue and through those they oppressed, initiated their own downfall.

Camus professes that action is historically messy. So when our time comes, when we rebel, in whatever fashion that may be, what are we to fight for? Rebellion need not be on the scales of nations—rebellion in ourselves can simply be the refusal to play by the rules. A

refusal of a request gone too far; a “refusal to be treated as an object and to be reduced to simple historical terms” because we are more than just another fleeting life in the history of humanity; “It is the affirmation of a nature common to all men, which eludes the world of power.”¹¹ There isn’t a meaning to overall life, but there is *personal meaning* in yours and in mine, and *that* is what we must fight for. We fight so that all of us have an opportunity to live a meaningful life—to flourish, together.

HOW DO YOU FIGHT A GHOST?

Way back in chapter 3, we briefly went over how capitalism is not grounded in concrete structures, but rather has become this evasive specter; it persists even in the way we think and interact. This system of value and production has melded into the exercise of government and in doing so, it converts everything it touches into an objective calculation of worth. Suddenly, *everything* becomes a part of “the market,” and *nothing* can survive without it.

The forces of capitalism elude most individuals because there never was any other alternative. This is an essential feature of capitalism—you have to rely on it to get by. Human rights like food, water, and housing were assigned a monetary value and suddenly, “Hey, we could save money by cutting this or that corner...” Because of just how much value is assigned to money and the subsequent comfort afforded by the accumulation of it, greed becomes baked into our way of living.

Democracy under capitalism allows the fatal compromise of cost versus benefit to plague its decision-making. The very act of governing becomes a perversion of ethics by allowing critical decisions to be made based on how much money it would cost. We learned from Camus that we humans aren’t very good at learning from history, nor are we particularly good at thinking outside of ourselves, of the long-term. This is partially how we’ve allowed the climate crisis to get as bad as it is.

Naturally, rebellion is born out of the very hands of the oppressors. But this time, even action seems hopeless.¹² Overthrowing the

government is not a goal most Americans believe to be achievable, so the alternative is then to force the politics to change—via protest. The aim of protesting is not to challenge the system as a whole, but to “mitigate its worst excesses.”¹³ However, the sheer complexity of capitalism as we know it today means there are built-in redundancies at every corner—bureaucracy. To hash off the worst parts, you have to work from within, slashing your way through a jungle of other bullshit that’s in the way of achieving that specific goal.

In scrambling what it means to achieve progress, opposition to capitalism is ideologically scattered. The amorphous blob that is capitalism consumes its opposition and makes it a part of its inner functions. Fisher claims that anti-capitalism can thrive within capitalist realism.¹⁴ By the way, “capitalist realism” is the acknowledgment of the underlying reality of capital and its functions, not just what it *seems like or ought to be*. The creation of anti-capitalism within capitalism seems paradoxical or oxymoronic, but Fisher’s example of this in action is the Disney film, *Wall-E*.¹⁵ In essence, the film captures the reality of capitalism in that it demonstrates the innate danger it poses to the survival and well-being of humanity, but any support of the film is not support of anti-capitalism, rather, it’s ultimately support for the Disney corporation. Supporting the film for its cute and penetratingly real message only supports the structures of reflexivity *within* the system. “Far from undermining capitalist realism, this gestural anti-capitalism actually reinforces it.”¹⁶ There is a proven incentive to appeal to anti-capitalist movements in the promise that there is a market for it. This is precisely why it is so hard to act against capitalism and why many of us have simply given up hope. So... if you can’t beat the specter into submission, what can you do?

If capitalism is invulnerable to physical attacks, then maybe a blazing condemnation of its being will work... While hurling insults at a ghost is humorous to imagine, Fisher actually claims that, more than anything else, capitalist realism only has one weakness; *it’s bad at its job*; “Capitalist realism can only be threatened if it is shown to be in some way inconsistent or untenable.”¹⁷ Easier summarized than put into action, I’m afraid... Think about a ghost—how do you go

about trying to convince people to see the damage it’s causing? It’s a ghost! Some people will see right through it and not even know it was there! This of course isn’t a perfect analogy, but people’s perspectives are scattered and it’s hard to get enough of them to realize what’s happening, especially if there are more and more factors that get involved. Fisher explains, “an ideological position can never be really successful until it is naturalized, and it cannot be naturalized while it is still thought of as a value rather than a fact.”¹⁸ Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaigns have opened people’s minds about the possibilities of better ways to handle the system, but it will never be successful unless enough people believe he’s right. And so, rebellion against capitalism, to Fisher, is not a call to arms, it’s an appeal to humanity.

The dependence on extrapolating the riches of the Earth and the resistance to do anything about the consequences it poses is something that angers my generation tremendously. Fisher poses 3 realities that expose the critical weaknesses of capitalism: environmental catastrophe, mental health, and bureaucracy.¹⁹ Environmental catastrophe is being realized in slow motion to us here on the ground. Especially in affluent countries, we have the potential to deal with changes in infrastructure and in prevention, so we don’t see the worst of what is already happening. Climate change exposes the greed at the base of our vast system of exchange. We can already see that “being green” has become a valuable marketing strategy and while more and more “responsible” companies are being born, the reliance on over-production still remains. Certainly, a great number of my generation are already aware that compromises will have to be made to our lifestyles since capitalism is perfectly willing to destroy the planet in order to please the market.²⁰ You might argue that this is the fault of the government, but what exactly has the government been doing about this? Their interest is always and will forever be concerned with maintaining the stability of the market. Since the operations of capital have been absorbed into the functions of government, democratic services will always side with making sure that, however we respond, the primary goal is making sure that the health of “the economy” is

not impeded—even as countless innocent people die day after day.

As the extent of the damage posed by environmental catastrophe grows, more and more of our youth are losing hope in their futures. The prophecy of societal collapse has been foretold and now all we can do is sit and wait for it to happen. This is one of many ways in which capitalist realism impacts mental health—in “treating [it] as if it were a natural fact, like weather.”²¹ Mental illnesses are an epidemic of systemic pressures and are fueled by the absurdity of our times. Fisher explains that by treating mental illness on a case-by-case basis, or “treating them as if they were caused only by chemical imbalances in the individuals’ neurology and/or by their family background,” the underlying root of “social systemic causation is ruled out.”²² Depression, anxiety, ADHD, etc. have been painted to seem like unfortunate toils of individual minds, but no one seems to be ready to challenge the assumption that the environment they’ve been forced to rely on has nothing to do with their ailment. We have become complacent with the gross system of neglect that ultimately forms and shapes our personalities and in allowing that, we essentially grant it access to untold future generations as well. The significant challenges our generation faces now is not a farce located in increased awareness and diagnoses—there is increasing evidence that social conditions may very well be the leading cause for mental illness.²³ We are born into a world in which we are no more than a means to someone else’s end. Our happiness is supposedly guaranteed after a life of productivity and social usefulness, but actively dismissed until we get there... Yet we grow increasingly worried if retirement is even an option for our futures.

In the refusal to treat mental illness as a problem of systemic pressures, we forgo dealing with the root of the problem and instead have chosen to be complacent in the continuation of inflicting generations of damage. Mental health reveals the core tenant of capitalist realism, in abstracting the individual from the whole and insisting on individual points of origin for adverse behavior. In shifting focus away from itself, capitalist realism aims to condemn persons for faults they had no agency in developing.

Passion is pushed to the wayside as social pressures convince us to chase after the abstract idea of “power,” providing ourselves stability in making other men fear what you could achieve with the power you’ve fought for. This is baked into our lifestyles and our learned desires along the perversion of education in a world of increasing accessibility to a boundless source of knowledge. Education is a major factor in the early development of people’s lives and yet we allow it to abuse our children year after year. Nothing is more responsible to the poisoning of education in capitalist realism than through bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy, along with being infuriating to spell, is infuriating to deal with. The insistence upon the strict and non-negotiable categorization of anything and everything it touches has become an effective method of warding off authentic displays of individualism. Whether it be a technical support call center, redundant paperwork, or credit scores, bureaucracy is poised to present evidence of efficiency through the production of busy work designed to postpone and deter creativity or systemic change. The decentralization of bureaucracy has footed the bill away from the inefficiencies of the system itself onto the shoulders of innocent people so that wherever you look, there’s always a manager up the ranks to speak to instead.²⁴ In the US, school curriculum is entirely based upon preparing students for an antiquated, ineffectual set of tests that determine a significant portion of your later life.²⁵ This is bureaucratic bullshit at its finest, giving an illusory goal to fill an illusory need. Students know their test scores do not matter, teachers know their curriculums are whitewashed and unable to affect critical thinking. The bureaucracy of contemporary education leads students to become inattentive, uninspired, and uncritical of their surroundings. It reinforces the structures of capitalist realism, yet it remains such a glaring example of its inefficiencies to really get anything done. It is inefficient insofar that it educates simply on the basis of repetition and obedience. Action in its contemporary form has been made almost impossible to succeed. So what exactly are we acting for? On what principles and why?

Chinese Translation

Principle: Values, Beliefs, & Our Limit

At the heart of every revolution lies a cause—a bubbling-over point where enough is enough. Some are slow burns while others snap like a tree branch under duress. Whether or not the revolution is fought on the basis of a just cause is of no concern to history. What matters now is that we find a common decency from which we can lead our own rebellions. But how do you establish values in the face of such a divisive atmosphere as our own? Getting swept up in the heat of things is bound to justify cruelty to some degree. Our aim is to come to a just conclusion before a purge forces us to look upon our past with regret as Camus did.

A consistent theme I find even among my leftist comrades is the confusion of cause and effect. The point of the ACAB movement is to demonstrate the creation of blind complacency in a system of continuous oppression, not a condemnation of individuals—a purge. The police, as a whole, is an elitist gang of domestic terrorists—a state-sanctioned lynch mob.^{1,2,3,4} But that does not make the police officer, an individual, deserving of the death sentence. Yes, they were unable to comprehend a perspective outside of their own. Yes, they aided the system of oppression of which we condemn. Yes, they probably took part in heinous acts... But have we really determined that this person had reasoned with themselves, grasped the full depth of their involvement, and chose a life deprived of love? Even still, are we, in right mind, to convict a living being to death? Regardless of the cause? Might it be the case that they too are victims of the greater system at hand?

This is the importance of principle. Without knowing what we stand for and why, we are doomed to repeat the sad history of revolutions past. We cannot afford to

betray those beliefs in the name of “progress.” In doing so, we create yet another oppressed out-group and assert ourselves as the ‘correct’ and ‘just’ in-group. Rebellion, insofar that it is just, can only succeed when there is a solidarity of peoples under values we believe. *No exceptions.*

But how do we find these values? How can we find grounds to agree upon with people that are so stripped of reason from years of exposure to attacks within Facebook and the proliferation of propaganda online? Again, this is beyond established ideas—“on the basis of history,” as Camus sees it. To appeal to the likes of religion or legislature is to ignore the point of what it is we are trying to achieve. Examples from each could stand as a basis for further exploration, but more often than not, these ideals are grounded in values corrupted by blood.

Values and beliefs are an amalgamation of time and perspective. The lived experiences of your life shape what you believe and value. In this sense, you ought not to have concrete values decided on one day, then taken as fact for the rest of your life. What then is the point thereafter? What good is a value if you can’t be bothered to challenge it? What if something exposes a contradiction within it? How can you grow and change if you so strongly cling to this idea of the past?

No, the dedication of “being a good person” is a duty you take with you to the grave. It can not end until you do; You cannot be deemed a “good person” until the impact of your life is left to history to determine. Now, and for the rest of your life, you can only *try* to be good. Much like expertise, “goodness” is by definition an entirely unreachable and unattainable goal infinitely far from grasp. Truly doing good things requires admitting that there will be times of double binds, where no matter what you do, you’re faced with a choice, the repercussions of which cannot appease everyone. In asserting oneself “a better person” than all others, you effectively dismiss those around you of their unique experience and encyclopedic knowledge of the intimate, niche throughways of any particular deed. This is not to say that you must spend the rest of your life in angst and turmoil over what is right and what is wrong, but rather that you have to take that extra step and question yourself—your actions and your beliefs.

Pervasive ideologies like capitalism and patriarchy do not show themselves in the open. Their symptoms are rooted in our beliefs and actions and can only be countered through the inner awareness and curiosity of self.

THIS MOMENT

There is a great philosophical device that will help us better understand this duty to care. Widely credited to Friedrich Nietzsche (although certainly not the first time something like this has entered human history), the concept of the *eternal recurrence* or *eternal return* was first posited in his book, *The Gay Science*—though I want to draw from a small section in Nietzsche’s novel, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The *eternal return* is, in short, the idea that time is cyclical and everything that ever was will once again return, ad infinitum.

Nietzsche uses this philosophical device to demonstrate the importance of questioning one’s actions in the world, so that one may strive to create meaning in their own life. To Nietzsche, human flourishing is only achievable by creating your own potential and in seeking what it is calls out to you. There is no inherent meaning in the world, so humanity must find it in themselves. We’ve seen this echoed in the likes of other existentialists, and certainly in Camus’ work as well. The eternal return, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is a central theme throughout the piece but is visualized once in the form of a physical structure.

Zarathustra, telling a story to fellow shipmates, recounts his encounter with this structure in the *Third Part - XLVI: The Vision and the Enigma*. Curiously, he encounters a dwarf on a wooded path, antagonizing him as he continues. The dwarf isn’t really all that important, but it does talk a bit, providing some good quotes, so I thought I might as well include them. Anyway, Zarathustra and the dwarf stop before a gateway in the path, noting its two diverging pathways.⁵ Both pathways extend backward, seemingly forever; “They are antithetical to one another, these roads,” spoke Zarathustra, “they directly abut on one another:—and it is here, at this gateway, that they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above: ‘This Moment.’”⁶

We see that, through both paths, each end up converging back at the start of the gateway. This paradox confuses Zarathustra, as he tries to reason with the nature of This Moment.

In standing before This Moment, a choice is to be made—what path do you take? Though, in looking beyond the gateway, it is evident that the paths will terminate right back where he stands now, before This Moment. “All truth is crooked;” the dwarf cracks, “time itself is a circle.”⁷ This Moment, therefore, represents our experience in the present—the lived experience of humanity, and the nature of meaning to our lives. In the face of the gateway, hope seems futile; is this an affirmation of determinism? In knowing anything of Nietzschean philosophy, this seems unlikely.

Instead, This Moment presents us with a clear idea of consequence and the brevity of life within the eternity of history. In positing this question—“must we not eternally return?”⁸—Nietzsche calls us to consider more carefully the actions of our present. If we are truly to return to This Moment, shouldn’t we want to choose what is best for us? Shouldn’t we want to follow the path that lends us the most joy? The most beauty? The most good? For what is the point of choosing a path that will lead us to regret if we are to wind up coming back to live that choice over and over again?

This is the ultimate point of the *eternal return*—to truly think about the way we act and the decisions we make. More simply put, what we are doing is paying attention to what we pay attention to, or *thinking about thinking*. This is something Martin Heidegger gets into more in *Being and Time*, but This Moment is such an effective way of visualizing the concept, I felt it more appropriate to use in this case (also I haven’t read all of *Being and Time* yet). This Moment sets us up for the basis of challenging our thoughts and asking ourselves, “Well wait a minute, why do I think that? What good is that really going to do?” This has application not only in everyday social situations but indeed in each and every pervasive thought we encounter.

Thinking about thinking is often a strategy employed by those that are trying to reason with their anxious brains, for when it becomes so loud, oftentimes it is just easier to believe what it tells you

and do what is easiest. The brain, in trying to rationalize a situation, will come to any number of conclusions to fill that need for an explanation. But in hindsight, we see that the assumptions it comes up with are simply not grounded in reality. To fight this, one has to stop and ask themselves, “Ok wait... But why do we think this or that happened? Maybe it’s because it’s what we want to happen, or maybe some trauma has conditioned us to interpret it this way or that...” The point is if we just go along with whatever comes to mind, without challenging where that belief or action comes from, can we really ever claim to be living an authentic life?

This is not to say that avoiding action without rational reasoning becomes easy—far from it. I can tell you from experience, the hardest part about trying to employ this in your life is actually remembering to do it. At first, you have to constantly remind yourself to approach things with this in mind. Otherwise, you will likely forget and just continue living life as you have been. *Only until it becomes integrated into the automatic processes of thought will it become a part of who you are and how you act.*

THE DOCTOR ARCHETYPE

Due to the nature of systems and how they operate, the easiest paths in life are those that are most visible. It is easy to do what everyone else does because there are no social pressures exerted from complacency. It is only in opposition to these standards that these pressures are felt. Imagine traversing a river—it is but a simple endeavor to wade, letting the current take you downstream. But the moment you want to go upstream, enormous pressures are realized as you try to push yourself through the current.

Bad analogies aside, the values of society *do* matter. It matters what people learn to believe as they grow older. Capitalism and patriarchy shape who we become and how we think. Thus, it is important to question the underlying nature of things as they are (apply the *eternal return*). People don’t often naturally come to this realization, for it is often others that bring them into the greater understanding of meaning and beauty—that is the goal of this project, after all.

Great works of art challenge our views of the world in an attempt to tell a story greater than itself. To me, art is a very broad and forgiving descriptor of creation. Art can be something intentionally created, something accidentally brought into the world, or something found naturally. Beauty, as we have come to know, is found all throughout the world. In seeking to become better people, we strive to apply compassion in our thoughts and actions in the hopes that the beauty of the world is realized within each and every one of us. In my (*very biased*) opinion, there is no greater example of this belief than the greater philosophy and stories of the BBC television show, *Doctor Who* (2005–present).

Hear me out! I swear this is such a perfect allegory to the values and beliefs of the world I’ve since written about. Going into this project, I had no intention of talking about *Doctor Who* in any capacity quite like this, but as I got through most of my research I realized that so much of what makes this show so special is its affirmations of beauty and compassion. Before I explain, I think it’s probably best that I fill you in about my relationship with this show—because we should all know by now that context is important, especially in the formation of beliefs and perspectives.

During the great Tumblr era of the early 2010s (/s), I was first introduced to the show as a naive high schooler. Due to the highly goofy nature of the show, especially during Matt Smith’s period playing the Doctor, I became infatuated. So much so that my friends from that point in my life will probably cringe at the mention of *Doctor Who* if they ever read this. And I for one don’t blame them at all. I was so hopelessly obsessed with the show—buying the toys and dressing up just so that I could wear a bowtie... But I was a sheltered high school kid; that’s just what we did.

I still wasn’t mentally mature enough to really understand what all was going on (not that it’s that deep at all), but I was able to see the basic principles of the show. Regardless, that’s when I started to absorb a cosmic perspective of life and meaning of and beyond myself. Of course, I had no foundation to apply it to, but it has hung out in the back of my mind ever since. It was only in the formation of this

project that I realized that the character of the Doctor is a perfect allegory for life, beauty, and the solidarity of humankind. Because of its intimate relationship to my personal growth and because it can be applied so effortlessly, you will now have to bear my case throughout the rest of this chapter. Enjoy :)

For the purposes of this comparison, I will only be drawing from series 1–10, for the new showrunner has unfortunately diverged from the original intentions and principles. I don't really want to get into it too much because this is more of a philosophical project and not a critical review of some goofy-ass British TV show, but to summarize my reasoning: Chris Chibnall (the current head showrunner) retconned the essential backstory of the character, making them into yet another “chosen one” story—something no one can aspire to be or relate to. It's such a damn shame too because Jodie Whittaker deserves better. She's *kicked ass* with what she was given, but unfortunately for everyone, she wasn't given nearly enough. Ok, shit—I'm getting distracted again... Let's get into it then, shall we?

This show really is quite goofy, but at its core, there is a real, virtuous story being told. The Doctor is from a species of humanoid people, the most powerful of all the universe—apparently—called “Timelords” (yeah, it's a bit cringe, but this lore was established in the '60s). The way their species is crafted is really quite genius for almost any adaptation of media you can think of, but especially for TV. See, a “timelord” doesn't die, at least not in the way we know it. Instead, their bodies are overcome with terrific energy, and all of their cells are transformed until they seem like a completely different person—and, in a way, they kind of are. In fact, the only thing they retain from their original self is their lived experiences—their memories. This prevents the character from drastically changing their motivations and interests, for they still remember their past and how they came to be who they were. The genius of this process, called “regeneration,” allows the character to shed its skin, so to speak, and become something new. A new actor is brought in and they have their own personality that doesn't conflict with the previous regenerations' history. If it serves the story though, they can be contradictory, but

only at the cost of changing their values for whatever just reason. To give an example, David Tennant's character was driven by regret for his role in the “time war” (explanation in a bit), while Matt Smith's character was more goofy and aloof, choosing to mask the hurt he felt with humor.⁹ Over their life, the Doctor has had many different faces and many different personalities. In the beginning, he was a rebel of sorts, stealing a time machine and running away from the bigotry of his people.

Hardened by fire, the Doctor is motivated by the spectacular beauty of the universe, traveling around and creating meaning in their life by virtue of the great people they meet and the countless lives they are able to save. In their travels, they are faced with constant engagements that challenge their beliefs of goodness and fairness. In isolation, like anyone else, they pose a threat to themselves, becoming cold and bitter. This is why they prefer to travel with friends. Those that travel with the Doctor know it will be perilous, but the Doctor shows them the greater potential in life and ultimately gives them the opportunity to grow and learn—to become better people.

The Doctor does not carry weapons, seeing meaning and importance in every life they encounter, despite intimately knowing just how big and old the universe will get. In fact, they have an implied conflict-mitigation hierarchy of sorts, founded on the idea of compassion and respect, even in the face of pure hatred. They will always approach the baddie first with reason, attempting to simply “talk it out,” knowing that everyone is motivated by something. Usually, this first step is also an attempt to gather information about what it is they want or wish to do—a backup plan. If they are unable to resolve issues here, which is almost always the case, they then try to out-wit the baddies. After that, they resort to sabotaging their plan(s) to either fail or work in their favor. Ultimately, some baddies pose a threat far beyond the scope of the skirmish—a time when the Doctor has no other choice to stop them before they kill a mass amount of people. In this ultimate case, the Doctor always approaches the baddies, telling them of their intentions and giving them a chance to stop and go home or lose their lives. We can never prevent death outright, but we

can do everything we can to mitigate it, as long as its principles are founded on solidarity. It is never an easy decision for the Doctor and ultimately, they are driven by grief of great loss in such an event. For the Doctor, it is not a choice they ever want to make, let alone enjoy being the one to do it. The “time war” is one such instance, where a threat so large puts the entirety of time and the universe in jeopardy. They have to end the war, ultimately resulting in the deaths of both sides (kinda—there’s some lore stuff going on here, but it’s not entirely important). This decision weighs heavily on their conscience and is a major driving force behind their beliefs and how they conduct themselves.

However, this is more so a matter of lore, whereas I want to extract the key elements of what makes this character so spectacular. In doing so, I shall call it the “*Doctor Archetype*.” Regeneration in this case becomes the moment when one changes their mind. People conduct themselves based on the principles they believe and hold close to their hearts. When they change their beliefs, whether immediately or over a period of time, they essentially become a new person, leaving their old ways in the past and conducting themselves anew. The *Doctor Archetype* need not be someone forged in flame and regret, but that certainly provides some urgency to their motivation to do good. The *Doctor Archetype* acts out of love and admiration of the great and bountiful beauty of the universe and of the miracle of life and death. They are not swayed by the temptations of wealth or fame and always stand up for what is right, even in the face of great opposition. The *Doctor Archetype* is in tune with their emotions, trying their best not to let them affect their actions. Truly, the *Doctor Archetype* is one who lives their life on the foundation of compassion and respect.

When we first meet the Doctor (in the 2005 series), he’s just this silly older man trying to stop some living plastic from killing everybody. ...Yeah, the first episode is bonkers. A better introduction to the show is probably S3 E11, *Blink*, or S10 E1, *The Pilot*.... Anyways, after Rose, a human girl that he saves earlier in the episode, asks him who he “really is,” we get a good idea of his unique perspective and

experience in the world;

“It’s like when you’re a kid. The first time they tell you the world’s turning and you can’t believe it ‘cos it looks like everything’s standing still,” he pauses, then looks to Rose, an intrigued human that witnessed the unbelievable with him earlier in the episode. “I can feel it.” He takes her hand, hoping she will feel it through him, “The turn of the Earth. The ground beneath our feet is spinning at 1,000 miles an hour. And the entire planet is hurtling around the sun at 67,000 miles an hour. And I can feel it; we’re falling through space, you and me. Clinging to the skin of this tiny world, and if we let go,” he pauses, then lets go of Rose’s hand. “That’s who I am. Now forget me, Rose Tyler. Go home.”¹⁰

He illustrates the system of balance between the Earth, the Sun, and our galaxy holding together all that we know. He feels the forces at play—the macro-perspective of the universe—while to Rose, the micro-perspective she holds relative to him is all she knows; that’s just how things are. We can replace the “turn of the Earth” with any complicated system we want—say, Capitalism. When we do this, suddenly we can start to see the effects the system has from Rose’s perspective. Because “that’s just how things are” acts as a deflection or denial of reality and the underlying nature of life is hidden and hastily explained away as “just a few bad apples” causing all the bad things. Meanwhile, the system that gives us those ideas remains *unseen* and *unchallenged*. The Doctor knows that to fight the system is hard and dangerous work, because of the attention it brings by opposing it. So to protect this human he just met (who he thinks he will never see again), he just tells her to forget him and return to the bliss and ease of denial or deflection.

But when Rose returns to the memory of that moment with the Doctor, she finds that she doesn’t want to forget. She isn’t willing to return to a life of bliss because she saw the beauty of the world undivided by that great big invisible system. It made no sense at all, but in spite of that, it was beautiful. We see this manifested when, after joining the Doctor, Rose returns to Earth without him;

“What do I do every day, Mum? What do I do? Get up, catch the

bus, go to work, come back home, eat chips and go to bed, is that it?"

Her friend replies, "That's what the rest of us do."

But Rose can't stand a life so devoid of meaning, dissolved within an oppressive system obsessed with production, submission, and greed, "It was a better life. I don't mean all the traveling and... seeing aliens and spaceships and things, that don't matter. The Doctor showed me a better way of living your life." She pleads with her mother and her friend, "you know he showed you, too. That you don't just give up. You don't just let things happen. You make a stand. You say no. You have the guts to do what's right when everyone else just runs away! And I just can't," she mutters, running out of the shop as she is overcome with dread.¹¹

Opposition to oppression isn't only applicable to great feats of heroism—far from it. Any act, no matter how small, that fights the norms presented by "the system" is a small victory in the progress of its undoing. By taking up against it and asserting that "no, I won't play by these rules," you demonstrate its weakness(es). The more people become unwilling to participate, the less power it wields over our lives. You can't expect that to happen if you are unwilling to "make a stand. [To] say no." The Doctor here is no longer a character, but an idea—the allegory of a meaningful life, of beauty.

The *Doctor* Archetype certainly doesn't call to take up arms. Instead, it calls to lead by example. It shows that good people can exist in the midst of a bad system. Badness is not a symptom of individual negligence—it is a symptom of their environment. To change the system, you must demonstrate its disastrous effects.

The last thing I want to note about the *Doctor* Archetype is the fallible nature of their being. Some may confuse the *Doctor* Archetype as some enlightened and all-powerful being, but that is a far cry from its reality. The show allows for certain liberties because (1) it's a sci-fi TV show, and (2) it's not trying to be some ultimate metaphor for 'the perfect human' or whatever. The *Doctor* Archetype, however, is meant to be entirely relatable—for anyone to place themselves into, given they believe in the spirit of the thing.

A rebel is fallible just as this allegory is, for that is the reason for the concept of the eternal return. To rebel is to be in that state of being, where one makes sure they are doing things for the right reasons, or you know—they try to. With the era of Matt Smith ended, Peter Capaldi's character invites an interesting display of inner struggle, allowing the audience to see more clearly the process of This Moment in the actions the Doctor has to make. The Doctor still holds the ultimate values of his character, but struggles with the consequences of making harder decisions. Capaldi's Doctor is concerned that he is losing grasp of his values and asks his friend whether or not he is a "good man." After the resolution of the episode, his friend has had time to think and brings it up before she leaves, "You asked me if you were a good man and the answer is, I don't know. But I think you try to be and I think that's probably the point."¹² All we can ask is that we each *try* to be good people. One can only really know if they were a "good person" on the eve of their death. Goodness is a continuous process. The *Doctor* Archetype will always struggle to be good. Constantly fighting against the current is draining. *You cannot win every battle*. Everyone needs breaks. What matters is you get back up and keep going. Because after all, you're fighting for the good and the beauty of everything and everyone.

All in all, the *Doctor* Archetype subscribes to a basic set of values. But a shared agreement of values and beliefs cannot be a manifesto-length appeal to every aspect of one's personal philosophy. It has to be broken down to its most basic form(s). Capaldi confirms this; "Human progress isn't measured by industry. It's measured by the value you place on a life, an unimportant life. A life without privilege. That's what defines an age. That's what defines a species."¹³ Peter Singer established that "if a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration."¹⁴ With the goal of ending and preventing suffering for all beings, "compassion," truly, is the value from which we ought to act and react. Compassion sets the basis for the limit we assert onto the world.

limit. It is the essential catalyst.

Camus' rebel sees violence as a necessary element in revolution. He believes it is an extreme limit³ employed only in the case of rebellion, though after which, it has no justification. "Authentic acts of rebellion will only consent to take up arms for institutions which limit violence, not for those which codify it," he writes; "A revolution is not worth dying for unless it assures the immediate suppression of the death penalty."⁴ We see here his regret for the lives lost during the purge, but also maybe the limitations of his time. Perhaps in those days, violence was the only legitimate way to end their oppression. But today, with social systems controlling nations across the globe, I think such a task is impossible. Contemporary conflict is primarily waged through a router. Murder need not be a strategic tactic when simply outsmarting the enemy allows for such a tactical advantage.

The ultimate goal of this project is not to inspire you, the reader, that overthrowing the government is the supreme act of compassion—that's ridiculous. We are all participants in these systems and, like it or not, we all have a part to play in its continued existence. The more people experience *unwarranted* compassion in their communities, the more they begin to appreciate it. The more they appreciate it, the more likely they are to deliver it unto others.

This means standing up. Saying no. The consequence of inaction is far too great a tragedy against the beauty of life and the world. With rebellion driven by compassion and dignity owed to all beings, we must lead by example. When you consider the vastness of perspective and experience in the world, you come to better understand your own place within it. In the creation of meaning for ourselves, we simultaneously affirm a meaning for all lives.

Rainforest

Reality of Rebellion Under Capitalism

I often dream of a future devoid of redlining; of gentrification and obscene education disparities; of an equitable society with no sexual, racial, or economic hierarchy; where control and fear are not the tools of the successful, but those of cowards; I dream of a future where growing your own food is a standard of every housing; where work is driven by passion and not merely a necessity of survival; and communities flourish under the liberation of meaning and acceptance. But to think that we can topple the systematic oppression of the workforce, of racial segregation, and of gender discrimination from an essay written by a privileged, white art student is not only dishonest, it's deplorable. *The reality of rebellion under capitalism lends itself to a certain abstract, metaphysical sensibility.* Independent responsibility toward change fosters the hope of disabling the overwhelming grip capitalism has on our lives. If we challenge the reality of the people—of the workers and the consumers—by demonstrating that capitalism works against us and that it *can* be opposed, we have a chance at standing our ground and having a say in what the next system looks and operates like. With compassion at the reins, rebellion gives a newfound meaning to life. There becomes meaning in what we say and do and meaning in work and of passion.

But we have to be careful how we proceed from here. With the redundancies presented by bureaucracy to protect the most important parts holding the whole thing together, *we need to understand what battles are worth fighting for and which are deflections*. Fisher restates that if “the structure remains, the vices will reproduce themselves.”¹ The reality of dismantling the broken parts of society remains elusive, for to get it right

means exercising precision in regards to cause and effect. We cannot remain distracted by “supposedly pathological individuals, those ‘abusing the system’,”² when it is the system that created them in the first place. Dealing strictly with individuals ignores how they came to be and allows more to be placed right back in positions poised to deal the most damage. This does not mean that individuals can’t be held accountable for their complacency, but maybe that is for their communities to decide?

The workforce is the strongest body of political power we have. Boycotting has very real implications insofar that the people are aware of the consequences. Until we can pose a threat to their legal right to operate inhumanely, our money is (((unfortunately))) our greatest strength. It is not that veganism is categorically opposed to eating the meat of animals, but the way they are treated now is abhorrently torturous—and the only way to oppose that is to stop contributing to its continuation in the market. The disconnected and halfhearted populace today lacks the foundational compassion asserted by rebellion and wields no useful power against the system of oppression they too find themselves entangled in. In our particular government, protesting and unionizing have become vilified and in some cases, outlawed.³ People are discouraged from participating in the necessary show of solidarity which has the power to enact change. But we have an individual responsibility to wake up from the temptations of social pressure and assert our humanity upon the world so that for the benefit of tomorrow, we can all prosper. Only then can we affect real change.

This will invariably have many forms within contemporary life. Many of which will be small, simple things but absolutely monumental in their own right. When you open up to the world and to the others around you, you invite the tickle of euphoria whisking around you like a pleasant breeze. When you afford yourself the terrifying brilliance of the absurd, the external banalities of a naked milieu are, at a second glance, budding with curiosities about the world and your place in it. You can have an impact in your community and an obsession with the allure and grandeur of celebrity is a distraction from the realities

of your ability to matter here, now. It all starts when you embrace the world with compassion and a curiosity to learn and to question.

There will be small things we can do, like not pretending to find something funny just because others are laughing; questioning internal reasoning in regards to profiling or judging others; making strides to understand the driving forces of segregation of all kinds and in making these pervasive systems more visible to others. There are also more practical adoptions that can be made within our lifestyles such as using fewer plastics and opting for glass or recycled woven materials instead; understanding that debt is, in essence, a greedy and ultimately divisive strategy of control; managing our contributions to food waste; going thrifting instead of buying new products; growing our own food when possible; and supporting one another despite outward appearances or judgment of character. Bigger life decisions have the greatest impact on affecting social change. *A specific challenge us white leftists will face is knowing when to shut up and let others speak.* We cannot control the dialogue over problems we don’t face. Likewise, we have to be conscious of the way in which segregation works in regard to housing. If we perpetuate white-dominated housing districts, we serve only to strengthen racial segregation and oppression. Pornography in its current form is plaguing the minds of men and boys the world ‘round, redefining sex and intimacy in the shape of dominance, greed, and cruelty...

Which all comes crashing down at the realization that there simply is no ethical consumption under capitalism. Our everyday lives are entangled within the injustices of the system at large. We rely on services like Amazon, Google, Facebook, and *shudders* Spectrum because we have little other choice. We buy from brands like Nestlé, Tesla, Coca-Cola, and Nike. The complications of globalism are realized in the seemingly fruitless pursuit to be ethical consumers. We still need to lead our own lives; we still deserve to have fun and live meaningfully. How do we do that while also doing our best to oppose capitalism?

All of these things will be hard to keep in mind, especially at first. Bringing compassion into our immediate worldview loosens the

constrictions we learned while growing up in these such environments. An assertion of a limit dictates how we act in the world and keeps the dedication of compassion at the forefront of our minds. *The reality of rebellion speaks to the magnitude of the problems at hand; we are going to struggle swimming against the current. But it is in doing so that gives anything meaning.*

ART AND CREATION

A society that values the beauty of creation so little is a clear symptom of a society arranged on principles misaligned with life itself. We need look no further than the proliferation of homelessness in the US to see the true worth of human life under capitalism. Art for art's sake is of little use to capitalism except maybe to provide an illusory form of individuality to satisfy the efficient operation of bureaucracy in "control societies" such as our own.⁴ Art certainly has its place in capitalist realism, whether in the form of propaganda in more authoritarian, fascist societies or through corporate identification strategies employed by negligent graphic design in neoliberal societies.

Art is powerful, and the more it is restricted, the more restricted are the freedoms of the people. "The society based on production is only productive, not creative," Camus argues.⁵ But are we even that? We are the richest nation in the world, but for what? We outsource most of our production to eastern countries where labor is cheaper, if not free, while funding and supplying weapons to countries we know will only use them in the name of fascism. Fisher demonstrates that our societal obsession with production—because it has no particular aim or goal—effects "stagnation and conservatism," "fear and cynicism," but not innovation.⁶ With the economic need for work, most of us are forced to slave away at jobs either ripe for automation or dull to the mind.

I think what people get wrong most often when trying to understand the perspective of anarchists, or even socialists for that matter, is that almost all of them aren't advocating for the abolition of work. Society as a whole would not be able to give up that much commercial freedom, especially when a good chunk of it helps people feel

like themselves—whether it be in finding a personal clothing style or simply having niche interests. Most of us agree that the vast amount of production work can be automated (and some argue that the state should handle such production entirely) and that the work of a just society looks more like individuals chasing after their own passions than just doing what they can because they need to. "Industrial society will only open the way to a new civilization by restoring to the worker the dignity of a creator," writes Camus in section IV, *Rebellion & Art*. "In other words, by making him apply his interest and his intelligence as much to the work itself as to what it produces."⁷ Work, for the rebel, is as much a passion project as it is productive. If we have the privilege to do so, we ought to think about who it is we are benefiting through our work. Modern graphic design is plagued by the studio zombie, reinforcing positive brand identities for corporations that use slave labor and union busting to make more and more of a profit.

Now more than ever, our work has the potential to uplift the spirits of the working class and revolutionize what it means to do work in the first place. Beside making ends meet, work should serve oneself. Work, insofar that it is fulfilling, is ultimately creative at heart. Everyone has the potential to be an artist in their own right, through the pursuit of passion and the expression of compassion in solidarity.

But capitalism bogs us down. It holds our creativity captive and condemns the individual to derive meaning from the proliferation of others, not of themselves. Art becomes something secondary; either invisible to the public or undervalued by limitation of objective worth. What matters then is the drive of the individual. Perhaps they hear a calling deep within their heart, reaching through the mist of a demotivated society. The artist rebels against time, rejecting its complete subjection of their being in the hopes of a greater world. The rebel, by invoking reality, exposes to the world a weakness in the foundation of their lives. Others, through exposure to this reality, begin to dream of a better world like the artist and provide strength in solidarity against the norm. On the basis of values, the artist "makes destiny to measure,"⁸ transposing the suffering of their absurd life for the beauty of

their world. Art is the great liberator—the liberator of self.

The reality of rebellion under capitalism is grim; there are so many forces at play. No one person can influence the tides of revolution. Yet, the sum of individual persons is more powerful than any force yet known. Compassion guides us to founding a better life for everyone by demonstrating a common respect for all beings. No matter what.

10/10

Outro

I have this weird, almost stupid hope that I've left you underwhelmed by the concluding chapters after having built up this great sense of impending dread... There really isn't a game plan or strategy guide for replacing patriarchy, capitalism, and the like and it certainly isn't anything I'm capable of definitively speaking upon. No, the singular most important bit of information I hope to have relayed to you is the importance of thinking for oneself—in paying attention to what you pay attention to. In affording others the basic compassion that they deserve. Only then can you begin to challenge what it is you live for and how you want to go about achieving it. It's like a room that's suddenly gone dark—sure, you can sit there and wait for your eyes to adjust only to be able to make out the faintest of outlines here and there. Or you could get up and feel around. Look, it's the sentiment that matters, not my shitty analogies.

And so we've made it thus far—the concluding chapter. I'm still quite amazed I was able to pull this off. You know, this project initially started as the brain child of a philosophy final I was writing last semester. I had entertained the idea of actually reading the texts and writing a real essay during my summer, but never did I think that it was going to become this. At first I was just calling it a zine, because I didn't expect it to be all too long, but as I was reading I began to realize a certain passion to create was being cultivated deep within my chest. Before this summer, I had barely done anything outside of coursework; nothing motivated me to create for myself. An artist, struggling to create something, out of nothing. Yet something in *The Rebel* harpooned my thoughts and convictions and ever since then, I've felt... alive? I don't know, I definitely didn't feel like I belonged in the world

I was experiencing, but I also felt as if I was just droning on, hazily aspiring for nothing in particular. I still don't really know what it is I want to do or where I feel I most belong, but I've picked up this scent way off in the distance and I can't wait to see where it leads me.

At this point, I feel as if this project—the writing at least—is at an acceptable level of polish. With more than six months of collective labor, I certainly feel good about the state it's in, if it had to be published with no more revisions. But I have this grand perception of a thing so shiny and complete that no additions or subtractions could ever make it any better. This is occasionally a helpful motivator for an artist—to envelop passion and encourage oneself to create something totally beyond what they previously felt capable of producing. Yet this grand ideal is nothing but a farce... Is there more that I want to include in this project? Absolutely! I have pages upon pages of additional sources that I hoped to weave into the inner narrative of the piece. But this thing is long enough as it is. Perhaps too long, even. This certainly won't be my last passion project and it certainly isn't all I want to put out into the world, but it is all that this singular project has to say for now. Not that there won't be eventual editions published ;)

I've posited that the lack of compassion evident in our daily lives is perhaps the most glaring, alarming evidence we have as to why things are as fucked as they seem, but I also challenged you to help reassert the empathy that society lacks. *Humanity has a choice: either remain complacent in this great perversion of life and death; or stand up, say no, and assert that there is beauty and meaning in a life of solidarity.* If we truly believe this and indeed, the goal it proposes, we have to contend with the challenges we will face because of our commitment to *trying* to be good. It will not be easy, but it will always be worth it. Pick your battles, know your limits, and love. Love always.

Compassion is not a tolerance for hatred, nor an abstract prophecy for “peace on earth.” It's not submissive to the intoxicating gravitas of power and fear yet still holds its ground when a line gets crossed. Compassion is an insistence of meaning, of hope and love, of passion and acceptance. Compassion is the essential catalyst through which human solidarity is achievable.

Footnotes

Chapter 1—fever dream

1. *Emery, 2018.*

Chapter 2—Buried Alive

1. *Camus, p11.*

Chapter 3—Talking to Myself

1. *Camus, p229.*
2. *Camus, p31.*
- 3-4. *Camus, p13.*
5. *Camus, p61.*
6. *Jung, p326.*

Chapter 4—Spring and a Storm

1. *Krouse Rosenthal, 2013.*
2. *Camus, p245.*

Chapter 5—Purge The Poison

1. *Singer, p5.*
- 2-3. *Singer, p8.*
4. *Singer, p83.*
5. *Singer, p20.*
6. *Singer, p97.*
7. *Singer, p159.*
8. *Singer, p170.*
9. *Flanagan, p8.*
10. *Loria, 2018.*

Chapter 6—I Want to Conquer the World

- 1-7. *Feldman, 2013.*
8. *Camus, p28.*
9. *Camus, p189.*
10. *Camus, p218.*
11. *Camus, p219.*
12. *Fisher, p3.*
13. *Fisher, p14.*
- 14-16. *Fisher, p12.*
- 17-18. *Fisher, p16.*
19. *Fisher, p18-19.*
20. *Fisher, p18.*
21. *Fisher, p19.*
22. *Fisher, p21.*
23. *Link & Phelan, 1995.*
24. *Fisher, p20.*
25. *Streetman, 2012.*

Chapter 7—Chinese Translation

1. *Muhammad, 2018.*
2. *National Geographic, 2020.*
3. *Williams & Romer, 2020.*
4. *McLaughlin, 2020.*
- 5-8. *Nietzsche, Third Part—XLVI.*
9. *Doctor Who, The Day of the Doctor, 2013.*
10. *Doctor Who, S1E1, Rose.*
11. *Doctor Who, S1E13, The Parting of the Ways.*

12. *Doctor Who, S8E2, Into the Dalek.*
13. *Doctor Who, S10E3, Thin Ice.*
14. *Singer, p8.*

Chapter 8—Bridge Over Troubled Water

1. *Camus, p220.*
2. *Camus, p259.*
3. *Camus, p258.*
4. *Camus, p259.*

Chapter 9—Rainforest

1. *Fisher, p68.*
2. *Fisher, p69.*
3. *ACLU, 2017.*
4. *Fisher, p39.*
5. *Camus, p240.*
6. *Fisher, p76.*
7. *Camus, p241.*
8. *Camus, 232.*

Chapter 10—10/10

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The Essential Catalyst is an essay I wrote during the latter half of 2021, endeavoring to question the lack of compassion evident in our busy modern lives and, if we truly want to live better lives, what can be done about it? In taking heavy inspiration from Albert Camus in his essay on human nature and rebellion, sufficiently titled *The Rebel*, I attempt to argue that our lives, though inherently absurd, are each individually meaningful and that, if our goal is truly to work towards human solidarity—peace, in whatever form that happens to take—then an equal consideration into the lives of all beings is to be made. The ultimate contingency here is indeed the point of question though. Where is the limit and how can we address its practicality in our own lives? If capitalism is so subsuming, how can we possibly elicit change when it seems as if nothing we do is capable of impacting real, positive change in our communities? If these are questions you'd like to explore, give this essay a chance and reflect on where your limit is drawn in the inevitably eroding sands of time.

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