# Ch 1 - fever dream

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 contempt 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 naïvety 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.