# Preface

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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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)

# Ch 1 - fever dream

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 these words other than gestural hot-button descriptors of how I live my life? 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 at DC in 2017, but there was no reason for me to claim to be an activist when I’m sat at home doing nothing all day. Sure, these causes—ecofeminism and the like—are great things to anchor on to, but something never felt right to me. Moreso, it felt like a display of intelligence; “Ooo, look at these big words and complex ideologies and political movements! Aren't I clever?” That certainly isn't the case for everyone, but for me, something was missing. A big something, it turns out. It need not be that complicated. Compassion checks all those boxes. Compassion is easily understood. Compassion is universal.

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, because although one thing may be *technically* more moral than another, you also have to consider its full impact. If, for example, it’s 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. But compassion does the same thing. Compassion understands power differences and the intoxicating whispers of wealth and greed.

It has given me great discomfort, in wanting a peaceful submission of social change, hoping I am in the right on this while *fully and completely* understanding why violence may be the harbinger of change that we need. But how do we know? Is a certain degree of violence required to bring about the changes we need for our world? Globalization has made it hard to see the power dynamics at play, especially here in the US. We are meant to believe that while things aren’t perfect, they’re preferable to 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 things change and evolve so quickly. 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, assert that there is beauty and meaning in each and every one of our lives. We cannot deny this in any other beings, for then what does that make us? Just yet another failed revolution in the toils of history.

In this essay, I draw from a number of texts to argue that the best way forward, to rebelling against the pervasive submissions of social structures the likes of capitalism, patriarchy, 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 revolution is doomed to fail 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 murder for this cause and presents his case as to why or why not. We’ll soon question this conclusion, asking ourselves if this presents a confounding contradiction to our newfound beliefs... *The Rebel* is an amazing essay, written beautifully, of course, of 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 structures at play. These things raise us to act and think according to its own values and norms. Capitalism changed how we interact with the world and this text is an appropriate piece for this project, especially since Camus had no idea how bad things were going to get within it. *Capitalist Realism* is a short but easy-to-understand book and does a good job preparing you to see how it operates and engaging you in questioning its efficacy—highly recommended as well.

The other texts such as Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, Owen Flanagan’s *The Problem of the Soul*, and various other shorter entries will aid us in finding a more complete foundation from which we can construct an argument.

I do hope you enjoy!

# Ch 2 - Buried Alive

In the introductory section of Camus’ *The Rebel*, he presents the subject of the essay, prefacing it by saying that the entirety of his endeavor to explore it is, in essence, his way of making sense of his own time.1 Similarly, I am approaching this project in the hopes that I can better understand my own values and to try and find a place that I feel at home. I suppose in that regard, this project is inherently selfish in nature, 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. The first to experience taxes, the first to experience junior high, high school, and college… My parents tried their hardest to shield us from the absurdities of the world, particularly the harsher realities of the times with which we found ourselves. A noble endeavor—for which I cannot assign blame—but once the veil of bliss started to wash away, I was exposed to the raw happenstance of the world; I 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 create new boundaries in my head. As a consequence, I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere, for I spent most of my 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.

At first, I didn't quite understand the process of making art. Admittedly, it took me until my last year to realize that the process of creation is not one of simply getting it done, of 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 you actually believed in it and willed 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. 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 to stand out or inspire. That doesn’t mean yours will be bad, but it is evident that others that apply themselves to their art are the ones most likely to make something beautiful.

To apply any coherent amount of creativity to a project, I have to be personally and passionately compelled to do so. I suspect there is universal truth to this, but the nature of compelling oneself to get into that mindset is something that eludes me. I know not the degree to which I am neurodivergent, but it makes sense to me that I would find something boring and not worth the time if I didn't care about the subject at hand. It takes so much effort for me to apply myself, traveling to the core of my creative mind and asking it for guidance. I was struggling to understand myself, 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 myself.

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, interesting. I seem to be very good at retaining information about climate change and philosophy. Moreso than any other subject given equal effort to learn and absorb it. 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 significantly, every minute in class drained me. I felt empty when I got out of class and taught myself that learning is strictly for the time spent inside the classroom. But if you're truly passionate about something, you ought to be excited to learn and grow outside the classroom. 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 to fail. I became catatonic even to the best of my ideas. In the event that I stumbled upon a great idea in class, my execution was always lacking due to that anxiety to jump in head-first.

When I was considering switching majors, I felt it obvious to at least 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. In fact, before I had taken a programming class, I wanted to apply as a graphic design major. Art was my favorite class in high school, up until a group of my friends had taken programming one or whatever the class was called, where we learned basic HTML. I basically fell in love with the control I felt in creating and designing shitty websites. Little did I know that experience wasn’t universal to computer science. After a year and a half of that at UD, I recognized I didn’t have the discipline to basically teach myself how to code from a textbook and minimally helpful lectures. I looked back to graphic design, in the hopes of continuing to work creatively within software.

I had spent years romanticising 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; 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 just put off teaching myself Blender. 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, 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 the future. The constant reminders of needing a job and needing work for a portfolio... as if I wasn’t already terrified of failing in such prospects. Each time it was brought up it felt like they were adding an extra bag of sand on my shoulders. They had good intentions, for they were just 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 start learning this skill if I wanted to stand a chance in landing a job outside of graphic design. So I started to watch tutorials and learn the basics. I knew a lot about the foundations of the industry and of the process from years of watching stuff from Corridor Digital/Crew and the like. As soon as I had the drive to learn, it seemed like nothing could stop me. I took part in “inktober,” though digitally, 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 somewhat daily for months afterward.

While I feel comfortable enough having broken free of the bonds of debilitating anxiety, I still hold on to some of that irrational fear of screwing something up. Lately, I've had so many fun ideas that, for one reason or another, I've convinced myself not to pursue. But this thing, this project… It feels so right. It truly is a *passion* project. I believe in it and want to bring it to existence—tangible and actualized for others to consume.

I want this thing to be the best it can be, but with that expectation, the mental hurdles I've created to just getting work done have been frustrating, to say the least. It has taken me far longer to write this than I had ever previously imagined. I previously 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 summer was almost up. In the time I had taken between then, I was expanding the list of sources and realizing the scope of the project, but in doing so 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 need to explore my values and, in doing so, tell a beautiful story of life, death, and freedom.

# Ch 3 - Talking to Myself

Anxiety, in the traditional sense, is often understood along the lines of a dread for the future: I am anxious to finish this rough draft and to send it to friends for review. Within the ideals of existentialism, anxiety is a tool 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 try 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, or will live, will one day cease doing so. 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 start to really understand death, which is usually sometime in your early life, you begin to feel a twinge of disgust 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. Beings can cease 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 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 what gives it any meaning at all. Death, insofar that it is known to be the inescapable eventuality of all life, is simultaneously absurd and beautiful. 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.

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 to lead us to who we are now. We were certainly created, but not directly, I don't think. But what started everything—the beginning? Well, that's what I want to know too.

While I personally am at odds with the concept of God, or of any deity for that matter, I have no problem with the belief in God, a god, or gods. I am always willing to be proven wrong—it's ever so exciting! And perhaps there is something out there. Maybe the flow of energy through time (in the transfer of energy through life, where the fluidity through beings becomes that of a current of spirit) lends itself to something leaning on spirituality. I could see myself getting into that. Regardless, the theory of compassion is not incompatible with faith and spirituality; it just needs 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 we find ourselves in. 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 are/were 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.

This is my belief: Our personalities are constructed on 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 pleasing to hope that those you loved will be preserved for you to join eventually, but it is also pleasing 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. It is, 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 were to see them again? Would there even be any urgency in the matter of connections 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; it isn't meant to depress the spirit, but to bring meaning to the times that you see them. Every meeting grows more and more meaningful. Camus wrote that “in order to exist just once in the world, it is necessary never again to exist.”1 I don't see a point in eternal life. Even a life tragically cut short is beautiful in its time already spent here with us—to spend your time hoping for a distant reunion is to weaken the only existing connections you have to the person; your memories of them as they were. This burden, this angst, this suffering from death—universal to all 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. “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, revealed to them 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 life itself. 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, implying that if nothing matters, then “everything is permissible and nothing is important.”3 In the absence of meaning, there is a lack of goodness on account of all the badness that accompanies it. Nihilism means 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 a value worth fighting for. Camus could see this contradiction, writing, “a nihilist is not someone who believes in nothing, but someone who does not believe in what [they see].”4 The nihilist gets swept up and overwhelmed by the absurdity of the world, oftentimes in isolation, they fear what they don’t understand. They are lacking something; something that binds us with each other. They cannot see beauty in the world. Perhaps they cannot see beauty in themselves. That’s where I was, only a few months back. (Although crawling out of that pit certainly takes time. I know I have not safely escaped it yet.)

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, 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. 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, espousing that meaning is not a collective feeling—it comes *from* you.

Sometimes, it can be hard to blame the nihilist, for we humans can only derive meaning from experience. We are products of our environment and the pervasive systems that dictate the operations and values of society shape how we think and act in the world. It matters how you see the world. 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. Too afraid to see that they too are implicated in the proliferation of that very system. They play by the rules because “that's just how things are.” It is hard trying to escape this anxiety. And truly it can never be defeated—one must always question themselves and their thoughts—but with the addition of an equal admiration of beauty in the world and in others, it can be overcome, overpowered.

# Ch 4 - Spring and a Storm

The concrete ephemera of contemporary life lends itself to the troubles of finding beauty in the abstraction of life and death. We’ve just got so much *stuff* to occupy our attention so that we do not have to face the brutishness of angst felt by being in the world. This is a contradiction of morals brought on by the conflict of mind versus subordination. When one is restrained by the invisible, oppressive social structures at large, one can either rebel or submit. Submission is easy and safe but allows the social structures to remain, grow even. Amy Krouse Rosenthal, an excellent author and all-around 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 is with this tweet, this timeless advice, that one can only begin to appreciate the life and beauty of this absurd world. You have to pay attention to what you pay attention to. You have to ask questions and be observant. Try to see the world outside of your own perspective.

Chaos. It too very much stakes a claim on beauty. 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 us? We were thrown into this world—this nonsense world—with nothing to do but to live and flourish in the beauty of our own creation. We are something, out of nothing.

Finding beauty means acting; it means Being in the world, right now. Our history influences how we grow and behave. But as we pass through a gateway in this moment, we are asserting ourselves in the face of history itself. We act on behalf of ourselves and on behalf of the absurd. We say to history that we are not objects of its unfurrowing, that by freedom of self we impose a “limit to history,” as Camus puts it.2 All of this is to say that no one wants to just be another statistic. We want our time alive on this planet to mean something—to matter. And the point of the limit is to put your foot down and assert that you do matter.

# Ch 5 - Purge The Poison

In the absence of freedom, compassion is dissolved, along with beauty, in the wastes of life. There is no longer a need for solidarity and thus, because nothing matters, nothing is beautiful—a grey void of all that ever was or will be.

A tremendous consequence of contemporary life is the insistence that productivity is essential to our health and that boredom should be countered through every disposable means. From sunrise to sunset, what often happens is the fatal acceptance of a life on autopilot. No stopping to think, no stopping to observe; one must always be moving ahead, no matter what.

When I worked in a warehouse over the summer, I observed a gross system of neglect based on productivity benefiting not the workers, but those over at corporate—states away. By enforcing a strict pick rate and monitoring idle time by the minute, workers are forced to fend for themselves, shoving solidarity aside so that they may keep their jobs. In the aisles, compassion for others around oneself is neglected because if one fails to meet their numbers, it is hardly ever their own fault; you spend a lot of time behind another picker or waiting for a forklift to be done placing a palette atop an aisle. Because solidarity was discouraged, compassion was thrown aside and the need for bureaucratic systems of enforcement was created to stand in its place.

Compassion as an expression of beauty is essential to the goal of peace and solidarity. One cannot expect to progress in society if there is an overall lack of compassion in regards to how one lives their life. In chapter 3, we learned of existential dread and suffering in relation to being. That is mostly a metaphysical symptom; however, suffering can also be an expression of pain. Surely it is understood that through compassion, one has a mutual interest to diminish all suffering?

Many of you will not like this chapter or find it the least relatable of the bunch. I completely understand and can even relate to this feeling. It is common, in having a deep belief challenged, to believe oneself explicitly targeted by whoever is preaching at them. What I will come to lay out here is by no means meant to affix blame on any individual, but in action, it will indeed become a personal struggle to overcome. At the very least, I am asking that you 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 all beings 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 What I am getting at here is that there is no reason we shouldn’t afford equal considerations towards animals as well. I will be drawing from the late Peter Singer’s famed novel, *Animal Liberation*, to argue that compassion for animals is just as necessary 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 consideration into the feelings of a being. Because, as Singer argues, “suffering and enjoyment” are the keystones not only for ascribing meaning to life, but also to establish that “a being has interests—at an absolute minimum, an interest in not suffering.”2 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? Its pain is 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 your siblings? No, 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.

This all leads us to Singer’s obvious conclusion, pleading that we must “bring nonhuman animals within our sphere of moral concern and cease to treat their lives as expendable for whatever trivial purposes we have.”5 You apply moral concern for household pets (or so I hope) because you have the most experience with them. You’ve [probably] seen them experience joy—the energized tail wagging, panting, and inability to sit still when their owner gets home after work or school—and pain—the sharp “YIPE” from a dog whose tail has accidentally been stepped on. You likely have experience in broadening your “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. Is it because 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 forgotten or 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 the beauty of life—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 never will be again.

If it wasn't obvious, *Animal Liberation*, and indeed, part of the point of this entire project is to teach people that, if we really truly care for the lives of all humans on Earth, then we too *must* care for the rest of our animal brothers and sisters. Singer brings us to this ultimate point: “... 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 on the 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 a dinky zine. 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 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. 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 fight against in the times when kings were believed to be divinely chosen to rule, or that God created us in his image—before any theories of evolution cast doubt on the authenticity of these ideas.

In our contemporary setting, 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. (It has diagrams! I love it when philosophers include visual aid)

Regardless, Flanagan offers us a clearer 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 the other animals of Earth—they were “God’s gift to us” to care for and utilize how we please, after all. 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: (1) “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; (2) “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

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 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 necessary to turn those stimuli into an actual experience. This is why plants are incapable of feeling pain.”10

With no brain for interpretation and no nervous system for transmission of feelings, plants rely on automated responses that they have evolved to deal with various stimuli. A venus fly trap, for example, does not chomp down on prey because it is told there's something in its ‘mouth’ and then *decides* to trap it. A venus fly trap captures prey through complex automatic processes. There is no cognition involved in its response.

For the time being, and until more research is done, I am confident in the worldview presented thus far and stand by the virtues they work towards. This does not mean that my mind cannot be changed, given new information, though I suspect that won’t happen in our lifetimes, if at all.

To eliminate all suffering, one must affirm the beauty of the world and, in return, respond with compassion. Compassion, as an expression of beauty, is the foundation from which this worldview is built upon. And one cannot proceed any further if they willingly deny empathy toward non-human animals. Once understood, the only other thing in the way is the system that competes to dominate the values of life, of freedom.

# Ch 6 - I Want to Conquer the World

There really is no easy way of telling you this, but I am extremely doubtful that I or anyone else can point to concrete plans of action to go about changing the mindset of a whole nation, let alone the global attitude towards solidarity. That’s just not how this works—capitalism now stretches beyond the atmosphere of the planet; bringing about a change in the system is not something that’s going to happen overnight. It could happen relatively faster if violence were the key to its initiative, but I suspect it will be slowly chipped away by decades of realization that it just doesn't work.

No, the actions I’m referring to for the purposes of this essay are mostly metaphysical in nature—the kind that you have to internalize and exude with your held values and beliefs. I will talk a bit about some of the collective actions we can and might take in chapters 8 & 9, but these references to action imply actions you can take to become a better person.

A lot of contemporary ideologies are an awesome amalgamation of different values and beliefs from all over the world and among many different periods in history. The tools we invented to make life more efficient allowed for us to be doing more in a given day—this has eventually led to a rapid increase in the amount of content we are able to consume in any given day. Because of this great complexity of groups and subgroups, no one really aspires to a single person’s projected worldview. People draw their ideologies from what they experience, whether that be in the real world or the world of fiction.

Fiction is a tricky business for, now more than ever, it is easy to be consumed by negative ideologies centered around alienation and dissent. Proper fiction is used to parody or ironize a specific value or belief, but the line between the 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 my philosophy to be more approachable than other traditional forms—sorta like how online content creators like Philosophy Tube or hbomberguy 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 action to social change.

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 would aid those awful genocides.1 Camus’ ideological development was really quite remarkable, being able to do something that most of us lack the courage to do—change our minds, admit fault. 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.1 Shortly after, Camus had been criticized by “catholic intellectual” François Mauriac, condemning the purge.1 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.”1 After having repeated his support for the purge following another plea from François Mauriac, Camus became weary of the growing number of deaths well after the battle had been won.1 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.”1 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 they 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.”1

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; I believe the idea is that in response to the plague, one must rebel, for the plague itself is the meaninglessness of life. Regardless, *The Rebel* was written after Camus had realized the err of his ways. What follows is the basis 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 their 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.”2 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; being “crushed by bloodshed, or the hideous prospect of atomic suicide.”3 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 them for 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.”4 Here, we find that 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. 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.”5 There isn’t a meaning to overall life, but meaning 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.

The value established upon all rebellions is for each to decide for themselves. So long as it is true to human nature—which, to Camus, means that everyone deserves to live a meaningful life—it has the chance to succeed. Before we get to that value, which we will address in the next chapter, I want to see what others have to say about action in the face of oppression. It is not enough to draw from only one account; the world is chaotic and no one person has all the wisdom to proceed fully and faithfully.

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.6 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.”7 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 even claims that anti-capitalism can thrive within capitalist realism.8 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 oxymoronic, but Fisher’s example of this in action is the Disney film, *Wall-E*.9 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.”10 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.”11 Easier summarized than put into action, I'm afraid... Think back to the 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.”12 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.13 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 prevention, so we don’t see the worst of what is already happening.

Climate change exposes the greed at the base of this great 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.14 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.”15 Mental illnesses are an epidemic of systemic pressures and 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.”16 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 in which 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. 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.

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 those that lack the patience or energy to deal with the root of any problem. Whether it be a technical support call center, redundant paperwork, or credit scores, bureaucracy is poised to present evidence of efficacy through the production of busywork 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.17 There’s more to be said about bureaucracy, but it mainly has to do with the education system, particularly here in the US. I will get into more of that later...

So there you have it—action in its contemporary form has been made almost impossible to succeed. So what exactly are we acting for? On what principles and why?

# Ch 7 - Chinese Translation

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 too much weight. 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. 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. But have we really determined that this person had reasoned with themselves, grasped the full depth of their involvement, and chose such a life deprived of love? 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 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. 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 and taken as fact for the rest of your life. What then is the rest of your life for? 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. 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 more 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 Nietzche, human flourishing is only achievable by creating your own potential and in seeking what it is calls 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 illustrated 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 eventually terminate right back 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 eternity. 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 *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. 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.

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 it says you should do. The brain, in trying to rationalize a situation, will come to any number of conclusions to fill that need for an explanation. But oftentimes 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 present themselves to you as you try to push yourself through the current.

Analogies aside, the values of society do matter. It matters what people learn to believe as they grow. 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, or 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 pick up the basic principles of the show. Regardless, that’s when I started to absorb a cosmic perspective of life and meaning 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.

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 new head showrunner) essentially retconned the essential backstory of the character, making them 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. Shit—I'm getting distracted again. OK! Let’s get into it then, shall we?

This show is really 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, 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 regeneration’s history. If it serves the story though, they can be contradictory, but only at the cost of changing their values for whatever 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 he meets 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. They know their travels with the Doctor 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 he encounters, despite knowing just how big and old the universe will get. 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. 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 sabotage their plan(s) to either fail or work in his favor. Ultimately, some baddies pose a threat far beyond the scope of the skirmish—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. 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 of the war (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 moreso 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 conduct 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. 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 that 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), they're 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. “I can feel it.” He takes her hand, hoping she feels 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 describes the system of balance between the Earth, the Sun, and the Milky Way holding our world as we know it together. He feels the forces at play, while to Rose, 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, the underlying nature of life is hidden and hastily explained away as “just a few bad apples” causing all 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 acting against the norm, 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 Rose returns to Earth without the Doctor;

“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 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 musters, running out of the shop as she is overcome with desperation.11

This isn’t only applicable to great feats of heroism—far from it. Any act, no matter how small, that fights the norms presented by this great system before us is a small victory in the progress of uprooting it. By taking up against it and asserting that “No, I won’t play by these rules,” you demonstrate its weakness. 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 change the minds of the people.

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. 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 beating the baddies 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 an 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). “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 Looking back to the animal liberation movement brings us closer to the ideals we are looking to exemplify as a just and kind species. 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 with which we ought to act and react. Compassion sets the basis for the limit we assert onto the world.

# Ch 8 - Bridge Over Troubled Water

Considering the consequence of action is a necessary stage when standing before This Moment. Our beliefs shape who we are and how we ought to act or react. The consequence of compassion is a greater tolerance for ignorance, though it also allows for a more impactful insight into the creation and cultivation of such worldviews. In asserting a common decency for all beings, we allow ourselves to see a fuller picture of life. Us humans are so susceptible to external influence that we oftentimes have a hard time constituting any other reality. In the case of such greater, disembodied social systems like racism, capitalism, and patriarchy, its imperceptibility is its greatest strength. Without knowing how it works, we can’t fight it, and without compassion, we can’t begin to understand how it impacts the people subjected to it.

Conflict is tricky—one finds themselves easily swept up in the heat of things, when you have less time to think about your actions. Without a limit secured by compassion, one may end up doing or saying something they do not believe. “The affirmation of a limit, a dignity, and a beauty common to all [people] only entails the necessity of extending this value to embrace everything and everyone and of advancing towards unity without denying the origins of rebellion,” Camus writes.1 This limit extends to all beings, regardless of belief or individual action. You have compassion, therefore you see that even though they may be wicked, they are still alive—they still deserve at least that much.

To me, that limit is *murder and cruelty*. All beings, no matter the circumstance, are owed at least that much consideration. Compassion shows us this much is true, for if we recognize the absurd beauty of life within ourselves and others, how can it be permissible to deny it in others?

This chapter has been the hardest for me to write. All my life I have had this innate belief that there is no greater betrayal to our existence than murder. Is it not bad enough to die let alone to kill? We spend our whole lives escaping death, yet we somehow believe it is within our rights to ignore that struggle in others? On what grounds? How is that just? I’ve struggled with the rationalization of murder for just causes and, even in imagining our own renaissance, I do not want to be a part of a resistance that justifies it as necessary in achieving solidarity. Camus believes that violence for the sake of authentic rebellion is provisional,2 but I still struggle to agree. Surely we are intelligent enough—all of us, together—to disarm and overrun the system of exchange which binds us to our cubicles and dictates our thoughts without the spilling of blood? Yes, we will likely be met with violence, but that does not justify retaliating as such.

I’m sorry, but I will not take up arms if a time comes to fight the regime. I cannot justify that within me. I am in no position to decide whether someone lives or dies by my hands. Even with the justification of murder for social progress, I cannot know who is on the other end of the barrel and as such I will not pull the trigger. How are we to know who is an innocent victim driven to extremes by the system and who has truly and rationally chosen tyranny? I will not make that decision. I will gladly help the effort in any way I can, but I cannot go that far. *That is my limit.* It may not be yours. Surely I cannot assert my own limit over anyone else's, but I do believe compassion is needed as the foundational concept of the (authentic) limit.

Camus’ rebel sees violence a necessary element in revolution. Camus believes it is an extreme limit3 employed only in the case of rebellion, 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 the limitations of his time. Perhaps in those days, violence was the only legitimate way to end their system of oppression. But today, with social systems controlling nations across the globe, I think such a task impossible. Contemporary conflict is primarily waged through a router. And as we’ve seen from Hong Kong, 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 all are participants in these systems and, like it or not, we all have a part to play in weakening its grasp on our communities.

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 a 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.

# Ch 9 - Rainforest

Fantasies of living in a commune, untouched by systemic segregation and patriarchal hierarchy, growing your own food, and flourishing via the work that makes you feel whole are all well and good and certainly have their place within our culture. But to think that we can topple the systematic oppression of the workforce, of racial segregation, and of gender descrimination from a zine written by a privileged, white art student is not only dishonest, its 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 change the attitudes of the people—of the workers and the consumers—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 to fight and which are deflections. Fisher reminds us 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 with individuals ignores how they came to be and allows more to be placed right back where we started. This does not mean that individuals can’t be held accountable for their complacency, but maybe that is for society 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. 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. People are discouraged from participating in the show of solidarity with which has the power necessary 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 effect real change.

This will invariably have many forms within contemporary life. 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 judgment; 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 less and less 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 judgement of character. Bigger life decisions have the greatest impact on effecting 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 areas, we serve only to perpetuate racial segregation and oppression.

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 common to all beings 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 in 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.3 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 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.4 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 goes as far to say that our societal obsession with production—because it has no particular aim or goal—effects “stagnation and conservatism,” “fear and cynicism,” but not innovation.5 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 the most when trying to understand the perspective of anarchists, or even socialists for that matter, is that most 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. “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.”6 Work, for the rebel, is as much a passion project as it is productive.

But capitalism boggs 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. But art is so bold and so broad—everyone is an artist in some way or another. 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 the Real, exposes to the world a weakness in the foundation of peoples’ lives. Others, through exposure to the Real, begin to dream of a better world like the artist and provide strength in solidarity against the current one. On the basis of values, the artist “makes destiny to measure,”7 transposing the suffering of their life for the betterment of their people. 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 are 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.

# Ch 10 - 10/10

Here at last—the end of our journey together. It may have been an interesting read to you, it may have been an intelligible mess. While I'm hoping the latter is not the case, I’m happy you stuck it out. Sincerely, that means a lot to me. This project has been eye-opening for me. Passion projects were not a thing I would have pursued even a year ago. I’ve come so far yet I still have oh so much to go. As do you. I hope you’ll join me, out in the world, in living your life not because you have to, but because it is beautiful, and meaningful. I certainly don’t know where I’ll be next, but I believe it's all a part of my journey to finding meaning in my life. It’s ok to not know what you're doing, as long as you try to be good—that's all anyone can ask for.

I've had this twinge in my chest for a little while now—this feeling of progression trapped inside of me. I was frustrated with the world and the pointless violence, struggling to put together some semblance of self in the midst of my various mental hurdles. After I had realized my dreams of software engineering were not feasible, I had nowhere to call home—fading into the unknown as I wiped the sleep out of my eyes. My childhood home felt wrong, like I was not the kid that was raised there. And while I wasn’t that kid *anymore*, I couldn't confide in myself the hurt of an isolated heart. While I was never alone, I was so lonely. It didn't feel like I belonged anywhere. Like there was no meaning to the progression of time I so blindly submitted to. Isolation destroys compassion—especially compassion for oneself.

I’ve come so far. Drained, hopeless, and young, I would wake up in the mornings for class and desperately fight the urge to throw myself in front of the next bus to pass me. Then I opened myself up to the world, to beauty and compassion. For the first time, I feel a direction that I must follow, like a bloodhound picking up the scent of its next meal. That twinge in my chest has been manifested into the effort and spirit of this project. While I do not yet see my place in the world, I know that to get there, I’m going to need to be the best me there ever was. Always. And I hope the same for you too, friend.

Compassion is the root of all good.