

# **Before the Collapse: Optimism and Pessimism**

**No more desperate pessimism, no more blind optimism.**

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## INTRODUCTION

There is a subject which is of utmost concern among many of the more conscious Socialists, Communists and Anarchists within the contemporary Political Scenario. A creeping ghost around the corner, a devouring, approaching beast that threatens our individual existences, of the others around us, and of humans and other species around the entire world. It is the logical conclusion and the greatest consequence of the unchecked, careless hunger ever-growth of capitalist industrialization. This ghost which approaches us is ecological collapse.

Ecological collapse is an event that is believed to be close and imminent by many of the scientific community, the climatologists and researchers around the world. This idea of ecological collapse is also not necessarily only scientific, but logical; by looking at the consequences of rampant production one can plainly see the problem. Ecological collapse is a climate crisis, a series of events and happenings characterized by such events as the melting of ice caps and rising sea levels, the rising of temperatures worldwide, and the destruction of natural ecosystems, this time a climatic consequence, a consequence of the fact that we have so strongly changed the natural balance that the planet won't be able to maintain the ecosystems of before.

## ALEA IACTA EST

*“The die has been cast”*

## OUR PATH TOWARDS COLLAPSE

With Capitalism's inability — or just plain unwillingness — to deal with this set of planet-changing, extinction-level events, it can only be seen as something inevitable. Although many environmentalist movements and politicians put forward proposals and projects, ideas for change, they fail (perhaps even consciously!) to see that small changes and local projects of “carbon neutrality” won't stop the issue, and that petroleum and coal aren't the only offenders. Furthermore, even if we stopped right this minute to produce any form of pollution, and continued doing so, it would not stop what's already to come<sup>1</sup>. We've already built, paved and inaugurated the road on which drives the catastrophe that is to come. Our governmental constructs and economical institutions could minimize the effects, should production of pollutants stop immediately, but that is not possible nor imaginable.

We live in a system based on growth. Capitalism cannot live without growing, expanding, becoming a massive system on a diet of natural and human exploitation. We cannot wait to be saved by Capitalism, because it is not in the interest of the system itself to do so. Saving us would mean resources and workforce, yes. Saving us would mean continued existence of the human race, yes. And saving the planet would mean saving the thousands other species that coexist with us. But that is not in the interests of the system, because the system is an unsalvageable monstrosity with one objective: To grow. And to grow. And to never stop growing, even if it leads to its own demise.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://climate.nasa.gov/faq/16/is-it-too-late-to-prevent-climate-change/>

Even projects to remediate the situation superficially are abandoned or neglected. Green New Deal! screamed the Democrats, and now even that is off the table. Though the agreed points of no return are generally around 2030<sup>2</sup> (although climate collapse is really an ongoing reality we all experience), and many of the scientists have warned us about the collapse of climate and of human civilization<sup>3</sup>, the countries of the world still make empty promises! “Carbon-neutrality by 2050!”<sup>4</sup> says the European Union, and so does China as well<sup>5</sup>! But need I to remind you that by 2050, we will be deep into the events of the forthcoming collapse?

## DURING THE COLLAPSE

This collapse would set into motion many interconnected events within the social structure of humanity. In addition to rising temperatures and sea levels, melting permafrost would release methane and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere<sup>6</sup>— compounding the situation, and collapsing global ecosystems, political tensions would be stretched to their limits

What could happen? Although I cannot give you a perfect and exact prediction of the future, I do have some thoughts. Climate refugees are already existent, and numerous, and they are already being denied shelter in many of the so-called “developed” countries. With the ecological collapse, the global south would come to be scrambled and disorganised, with the national constructs of the region fighting for dominance, resources and stability. Civil wars would ensue, because the one who is hungry and thirsty does not care about the laws in place, only about their survival; and one will try to ensure their survival even if they are risking death. The refugees generated by local climatic catastrophe and the many others generated by civil wars, successive coups, and inter-state widespread wars for resource and maintenance of “order” — even if the many others are coming from the still livable regions — would exacerbate the aforementioned political tension.

We are well aware that the countries of the global north, the “developed” national constructs, the imperialist exploitative scum employ xenophobic and nationalistic policies to disallow mass migration, mass migration caused by realities that they deliberately created through decades of genocide, colonialism and parasitism. They operate on a basis of “us above them”, and are and will consistently refuse to shelter those suffering from the consequences of their actions. But they cannot stop hundreds of thousands of migrants seeking shelter from the conditions they created. The immigrants already in the “developed” countries would express discontent and backlash, as many of the people trying to escape the collapse would be their families, or simply out of empathy for those who also seek refuge as they did. With tension at the borders, and tension at the core, it is possible that the global north would either collapse onto itself, or that it would devolve into dictatorial police states made simply to maintain the order.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gaef3500.doc.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://voiceofaction.org/collapse-of-civilisation-is-the-most-likely-outcome-top-climate-scientists/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50778001>

<sup>5</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/22/energy/china-2050-climate-crisis-report/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/08/arctic-permafrost-is-thawing-it-could-speed-up-climate-change-feature/>

Furthermore, much of the capitalist ability to produce is based on the exploitation of natural resources such as arable land and workable conditions. The ecological collapse would desertify the areas in the global south that are used by the global north to maintain itself afloat, which would mean that although fairly untouched by the direct consequences of ecological collapse, the global north would still be subject to feeling its effects. It would ensue a crisis. No mass civilization would be able to survive such a catastrophe.

But how does the socialist, the communist, or the anarchist see this? What has now taken the so-called “leftist movements”?

## **BLIND OPTIMISM**

Many within the anti-capitalist political wing will, then, turn to blind optimism. Due to naivety, fear or a dangerously positive view of the world they will turn to such arguments and ideas such as “the abolition of capitalism will stop this from happening”, and relying on the inevitability of a so-called proletarian revolution to destroy this exploitative and murderous system.

I am not here to discuss whether or not it is inevitable that capitalism will fall, or whether or not a mass international proletarian movement will form in opposition to capitalism. The point is that the optimism of the socialist, the communist, or the anarchist relies on the idea that this is an issue that can be easily fixed through a “revolution”, or an “insurrection”, as if a simple system change would be able to create the conditions to prevent this coming catastrophe. They could be no further from the truth.

This blind optimism is no more than willing ignorance. It is not something to be ashamed of, it’s not an insult, and I’m not here to say “You cowards! You refuse to recognize the doom that approaches! Embrace nothingness!”. Willing ignorance is the most understandable reaction, because we are accustomed with our current worldview, our comfortable position which we need to cling to in order to have something familiar in this world. Blind optimism is the aspirin of the revolutionary, it’s the way to get through the day, to believe in miracles and cosmic justice. The global south has been oppressed for so long — surely it is just right that they won’t anymore? The working class has been trampled on for so long — surely it is just right that they will claim their humanity in front of Capitalism?

Blind Optimism is dangerous. It encourages acting in a way that is misaligned with the events and the qualities of reality. Blind Optimism causes people to stray from what’s real and what’s actual, what’s current and what’s relevant. Although it can be a personally satisfying position, it is dangerous for any form of material action or thought, because it promotes an idealized view of reality.

To believe this can be fixed with the coming of the maybe inevitable proletarian revolution is foolish. Although you can reduce the damage, you cannot fix what has been ruined, you cannot go back hundreds of years in but a few. Blind Optimism is an agent of inaction; it proposes a solution that is non-related, a solution that has no ties to the problem and that is not developed to deal with it. Yes, the proletarian revolution is desirable! Yes, the proletariat must be freed from the grasp and the claws and the growth-hungry leviathan of Capitalism! Yes, to destroy Capitalism is freedom! But we cannot have freedom if there’s no one to be free.

To tackle this problem is a must. If you’re committed to the cause of the workers, you will see that this affects the quality of life of the prole, of the oppressed third worlder, of the South

American peasant, the African miner, the Asian factory worker! You will see that the threat of ecological collapse and mass human death is as much the problem of the proletariat as Capitalism is. The bourgeois class, the exploiting scum, the leeches and parasites given to us will not be affected, they will sit on their thrones of gold upon the bodies of the dead by the collapse they led us to, by the collapse they enabled, the collapse they allowed with the perpetuation of Capitalism, the leviathan of history, the world devourer.

It must be understood: There is no way out. We cannot prevent this. We cannot stop this. It's coming towards us, each time faster and faster, and action is not to revel in the pure idea of a system against Capitalism, of a system that will fix and mend everything that was done wrong, everything that put us in the path we are towards. We cannot stop this, we can only remediate. And to believe that ecological collapse can be prevented simply with the fall of Capitalism, that, that is Blind Optimism.

## **INDUCED OPTIMISM**

Often, the induced optimism comes not out simply from naivety relating to your own conceptions of the world, but informed, induced optimism. Induced optimism is done through the propagation of ideas that say we are still able to pull ourselves out of the hole we're into. Even though it's generally agreed that we can't save ourselves anymore, there's still widespread belief on the idea that with enough projects and promises, with enough goals and ideas we can solve all of this. This differs from the optimism for a revolution, because it also relies on the information given by the propaganda vehicles of the system.

It is known and seen that we are going to suffer from these events. The idea that we can stop or "diminish the effects" may be true, but they would never be applied. Induced optimism is, instead of willing inaction, created inaction. It's the aggregate of processes and institutions reacting to the fact we are going to experience a slow, but sudden change in the status quo, and trying to protect itself against the conscientization of the populace. Between the climate denier and the induced optimism, they both serve the purpose of the system in believing that either it can stop these climatic changes, or that these climate changes are an exaggeration.

To the induced optimists, we must say: "Maybe you are right. Maybe we can stop this. But will we? And what if we don't?". To stimulate the thought of "what if" is the most important thing for the conscientization of the induced optimist.

## **DESPERATE PESSIMISM**

Those who recognize the inevitability of ecological collapse might sink in total despair. Abandoning their political identity, they might dabble in representing themselves through pure aesthetic, detaching themselves from the practical and theoretical part of their politics and adopting their visual and social characteristics, or they might become "doomers", the spokespeople of the collapse, the informers of the apocalypse. These people have fully taken in the level of their situation, and they know there is no way out. But they suffer from the same as the Blind Optimists.

The Desperate Pessimist is the figure of abandonment. While the Blind Optimist tries to fight, tries to keep on fighting for the same old cause without looking towards problems that are material and global, the Desperate Pessimist lets the knowledge they hold take hold of them. They

become frozen, static, because they know that it is something inevitable and we are slowly but surely marching towards the moment of our absolute collapse as the society we know right now.

The Desperate Pessimist then becomes another figure of inaction. With the inevitability of this event, we might as well just give up and wither away, becoming part of the accumulating mass of living corpses that refuse the idea that it is still useful to exist. The Capitalist system, to the Desperate Pessimist, is inescapable, and the ecological collapse is an approaching reality which is nothing more than an uncontrolled wildfire that will wreck everything we know, everything we love, everything we consider we have.

The Desperate Pessimist reacts towards the future in many distinct ways, but through the trend of the internet and real life, I've observed that they can most often be classified among the Hedonistic Pessimist, the Pure Pessimist and the Active Pessimist.

## **HEDONISTIC DESPAIR**

The Hedonistic Pessimist sees in this an opportunity. They see that, since we are marching towards our annihilation, this is the time to feast and bask, the time to profit from what we have left before we collapse. The Hedonist Desperate believe they are living life to its fullest, enjoying the completeness and the totality.

Fairly, it is a common and understandable reaction to have. If nothing matters (not that it mattered before), then what gives? Why do we comply with societal expectations, or why do we seek some form of end goal? Why, since the societal expectations are from the society that is about to collapse, and why, when the end goal can not be reached?

It is a perfectly logical and understandable position to take. You don't even need to be a Desperate Pessimist to take it. Who gives half a damn about societal expectations, these made up oppressive standards? Why search for an end goal?

But here, the Desperate Pessimist who becomes the Desperate Hedonist is not motivated by his desire of hedonism, but for despair. The Desperate Pessimist who chooses Hedonism is the Pessimist who cannot do what the Blind Optimist does, the Pessimist who cannot reduce or ignore our march towards destruction. The Desperate Hedonist masks his pain and suffering with infinite pleasure, pleasure they cannot enjoy for they are constantly remembered and feeling the despair of knowledge.

The Desperate Hedonist must recognize that they are not living in their true pleasure. Some might, who am I to say?, but all must question if their pleasure is real and felt, or if it's just a velvet lie imposed on oneself.

The Hedonist should have no shame in seeking pleasure. They can search for happiness and enjoyment, but whilst doing so, they need to recognize their position as Desperate Pessimists and shed themselves of it. The Hedonist can be hedonistic and active, but it's despair that drives them to inaction.

## **PURE DESPAIR**

The Pure Desperate sees this as what it is: Unstoppable, ever growing, a threatening shadow over the lifeforms inhabiting the Earth. The Pure Desperate recognizes the magnitude of this situation, but instead of contemplating it, they cower in fear before it. They are in a way fairer and more honest than the Hedonist, because instead of hiding themselves behind a facade of

enjoyment and entertainment, the Pure Desperate can recognize the magnitude of the situation as it already is.

The Pure Desperate, though, is the most honest expression of Desperate Pessimism. Instead of masking themselves behind Hedonism or the quest to spread the truth, the Pure Desperate cannot help but feel overwhelmed by what the future holds. The Pure Desperate will base themselves around their identity of doom and loss, around the thought of knowing and recognizing the imminent catastrophe that is to come.

The Pure Desperate feels lost and feels the lack of meaning. Contemplating everything that's going to be lost, every person that is going to die, every being that is going to suffer, every diverse and exquisite ecosystem that's going to be burned away, the Pure Desperate cannot see a future.

The major problem of the Pure Desperate is ignoring that life goes on. Life finds a way. We'll lose a lot, and it'll be catastrophic, but we cannot hide under our sadness and anguish, we cannot let it freeze us. The Pure Desperate sees the future as the end, the last sigh of an expired world. But death won't come to all of us, nor all of the other beings and living matter around us.

What comes often seems bleak and hopeless. We do not know what is coming, but we know it's going to shake the status quo, destroy what is known and forever alter the environment in which we live in. But life finds a way. The major problem of the Pure Desperate then becomes deeper than ignoring that life goes on, but that the Pure Desperate has ingrained in his head that there is no alternative. They see the world as it is and the only way it can be, and the thought of drastic change immobilises them. The fear is, then, less of the pain, suffering and hardship, and more of escaping the usual, the known, the normal.

## **ACTIVE DESPAIR**

The Active Desperate is the closest to the Pessimist-Optimist (which we're going to see later). They work towards a goal, they act on a whim of "betterment" of the future. The main difference that creates a dichotomy between the pessimist-optimist and the Active Desperate is that the latter, although preparing for the future and seeing it as opportunity, does it without immeasurable doubt.

I am all for doubt. Doubt is what creates philosophy, doubt is what makes us think and develop on ideas and conceptions. It breaks prejudice and the structure of socially taught "common sense", and it rejects the Hegemony of thought. Doubt has, for the most part, a positive effect on the intellectual and spiritual development of an individual.

The problem with the Active Desperate's doubt is that it neuters action. The Active Desperate, as opposed to the Blind Optimist, the Hedonist and the Pure Desperate, is not affected by inaction, but their action is sterilized from any meaning. While they do things, they do things without any will or belief in it, resulting in ineffective actions that are not much more than meaningless gestures.

This is not supposed to attack the Active Desperate. This is supposed to make them confront their reality: They do things without any spirit, without any soul, actions without intent that are just done with the objective of either appearing active or convincing their own self of their activity. Surely, these actions might have effect, but they're done without any meaning, they're thrown in the stream and washed away.

The Active Desperate is close, though. They recognize the inevitable, and instead of rejecting it or letting themselves be frozen by it, they embrace it and incorporate it. They're not immobilized



and they still try to give purpose to their actions. They are still a figure of plain pessimism though, because they practice void actions. The Active Desperate is prone to inaction because the line between Active Despair and the other two Despairs is thin. The Active Desperate might either abandon their action, letting themselves be taken over by Pure Despair, or they might start acting on the solely self-pleasuring actions that, although not “bad” by themselves, hold no meaning.

The Desperate Pessimist and the Blind Optimist are both figures of inaction, and, in their own ways, denial. But what is the alternative?

## **PESSIMISM OF THE MIND, OPTIMISM OF THE WILL**

### **OF PESSIMISM**

We must be pessimists, pessimists of the knowledge, of the mind, of the intellect. We must recognize that the worst can happen, and at this rate, the worst will happen. We must recognize that the end of the status quo is near, and we must recognize that we are already past the entrance of the collapse. Understanding that there is no way back is paramount, it is sobering, it is liberating.

But we must not let our pessimism take us over. We are the only people in our path, and we have our own agency. To think that what is impeding us is the knowledge of the collapse, or Capitalism exercising its existence, is foolish. It is to deny our own freedom and the fact that through our own volition we are stopped. It is to give up, and wither. We, in fewer words, must recognize that the only thing immobilizing us is our own pessimistic view of the world.

We must be pessimists, yes. We must see that the worst can come, and imagine what is this “worst”, and try to understand, analyze, and dissect this “worst”. What does it entail? How will it exist? In what forms will it alter the world and change the status quo, in what ways will it transform what we know and what we experience? We must have critical pessimism, that is, our pessimism should not be arresting but analytical. We must transform the eternal, freezing force of pessimism into a tool of analysis. We must look at the bad, the worst, the unimaginably heinous, and prepare for it. Should that not happen, well, we will be prepared. Should it happen, we will as well.

The pessimism of the mind, the pessimism of the intellect, is then not letting your actions be defined through the lenses of pure pessimism but using the perception of reality created by pessimism to shape our goals. The practical difference is, then, that while Pure Pessimism is based on instinctive and impulsive reaction towards superficial knowledge, the “Intellectual” Pessimism is based on a sober analysis of the future to come through the lenses of pessimism. It is, then, the development and breakdown of knowledge that goes beyond the scope of what is immediately known. The intellectual pessimism is recognizing reality as a complex, deep structure of facts and characteristics that lead to certain materially possible conclusions at their most unfavorable rather than instantaneous, desperate judgement.

### **OF OPTIMISM**

Optimism of the will entails an opposed but complementing attitude as pessimism of the mind. While pessimism of the intellect is having a sobering analysis of what is to come at its possible

worst, optimism of the will is to act in a manner as to counteract the conclusions to which we have arrived through pessimism. Optimism of the will is acting on the belief that although the worst might be coming we still have the time and capability to prepare and minimize the damage of the break in the status quo.

Optimism of the will is seeing what can be done about the pessimistic future. It can only be created through careful and sober analysis through intellectual pessimism, and it is simply what we do in the timeframe where we can still prepare ourselves. Optimism of the will is the expression of the intellectual pessimist recognizing that the situation to come is no “end of history”, no apocalyptical event, but a break in status quo that will upset the set and known status quo. The pessimist-optimist sees that the future reserves change and, in some ways, even opportunity. The pessimist-optimist understands that there is no fixing the problem, but that the problem is not world-wrecking.

Optimism of the will is necessary. It is created by an intense belief in one’s abilities and power, and it needs to be nurtured and developed even if it works through the lenses of Pessimism. The pessimist-optimist is not fueled and directed by their optimism, but by their pessimism, and it is an integral part in what moves them. Optimism is what some would like to call the “praxis”, it is the way by which the understanding of pessimistic analysis acts in the world.

Some might not believe in the oh-so-waited revolution, or uprising, and some may not believe that we can fight by insurrecting — I know I, for the most part, believe in its possibility — , but should we achieve this stage, we could do innumerable things. We could help and support those most affected by the collapse, making an effort to aid climate refugees in their effort to migrate, minimize the damage we already have on the Earth, and slowly but surely lead our way into adaptation with our brave new world.

Should you not believe such a thing, that’s alright as well. I cannot possibly offer any complete listing of ways the pessimist-optimist can act and express themselves in the world, because only through the understanding and dissection of the conditions of our future through pessimism can they understand what is to be done. The task of the pessimist-optimist is not to be told what to believe in or what to do, but instead to understand the pessimistic analysis of our future and act optimistically in order to minimize the harm of what comes.

The pessimist-optimist must fight both individually and collectively. They must fight for their own continuation, for what they believe is necessary, but also support the struggle of their fellow pessimist-optimists and actively seek to sober up the Blind Optimist and the Desperate Pessimist. The task of the pessimist-optimist here is not to tell them what they should believe in either; but rather stimulate their reflected and critical view of what’s impending. As pessimist-optimists, we must not “convert” anyone to any specific view of pessimism-optimism, because that risks creating Blind Optimism through the adoration of the ideals, views and beliefs of a pessimist-optimist, or also create Desperate Pessimism through a misconception and a deconstruction of the said values of the pessimist-optimist.

## **BETWEEN INTELLECTUAL PESSIMISM AND PURE DESPAIR**

The pessimist-optimist might often find themselves in doubt of their own ideals. As retained before, doubt can be good. Although the Intellectual Pessimist cannot let the doubt take them over and turn them to Pure Despair, doubt is good. But what to do when you’re doubting?

Doubt is a force of change. By doubting, you can understand where you were wrong, and you can develop where you were right. By doubting, you can progress in your understanding of the future through your pessimist lens, while all the same discovering new perspectives or ways to act through your Optimism of the Will. The only reaction before the advent of doubt is to embrace and use it, instead of trying to dispose of it.

The pessimist-optimist has to have some level of principled thought to not fall in Pure Despair, of course. That does not mean I am encouraging the pessimist-optimist to see their own view as the unchangeable, that is the opposite of what should be done, but instead the pessimist-optimist should explore the doubt and the new perspective of pessimism not only by itself isolated but through the lenses of their old understanding of their pessimism.

The relationship between the new pessimism and the old pessimism of the pessimist-optimist needs to be complementing – as much as the old pessimism and the new pessimism are opposed, they must be understood both as valid views of the pessimist future by the pessimist-optimist and both adopted, understood and synthesized. Since they are both pessimist views, but formed under different circumstances, they both contribute to the formative pessimist thought of Intellectual Pessimism. An old view of pessimism is not to be discarded, but to be analyzed and integrated. After all, there's always a given reason why it was formed.

Before doubt, the pessimist-optimist must stand their ground. The principled thought must be upheld, but not dogmatically. It must be flexible, adaptable, so the pessimist can avoid falling in their own version of Blind Optimism, but existent, so the pessimist can avoid falling in Pure Despair. The pessimist must know their values and beliefs, and hold tightly to them, but be able to recognize when they must be challenged and changed, without letting it devolve into despair.

## **CREATE BONDS AND CREATE THOUGHT**

The pessimist-optimist cannot act alone. Although they might push for their continued existence, and for the betterment and preparing for the inevitable future, none prepares alone. Creating bonds, either through conglomeration with other pessimist-optimists, or by establishing them through the conscientization and sobering of people is paramount for the pessimist-optimist.

To create bonds is necessary because it allows for organized, effective optimism. Not only that, but the relationship of intellect between pessimist-optimists is invariably an evolutive force. Through the perspective of other pessimists, and through the understanding of their optimist praxis, the pessimist-optimist can profit from the evolutive qualities of thought exchange.

The pessimist-optimist must recognize and understand that not everyone is in their position. The Blind Optimists and the Desperate Pessimists are most times not acting out of a willing desire to be inactive before the collapse. The pessimist-optimist must try to nudge and suggest a more varied, more critical view of the pessimism or the optimism held by those two. They must not “indoctrinate”, but stimulate Intellectual and Critical Pessimism.

## **CONCLUSION**

The bleakest future, the darkest night, the engulfing despair of consciousness and sobriety about what the future holds can be hard to fight. But as you do so, you must remember that

you are not alone in fighting it. The goal of the pessimist-optimist is surely, through a pessimist worldview, achieve an optimist praxis. But the pessimist-optimist does much more than that. They fight against the forces of inactivity, the blinding and paralyzing grasp of the utter optimism, the capturing and freezing hand of the supreme pessimism. The pessimist-optimist fights for the recognition, dissection and understanding of the problem, and the application of measures meant to remediate its worst effects.

The pessimist-optimist might not believe in a final, ultimate answer. They will see and understand that whatever they do, it can never be enough. And this can be hard to endure, this can be hard to power through. To understand that every effort cannot be enough can be weakening. But the pessimist- must approach this through the other way — it cannot be enough, but it is something. Without this something, there is nothing. Every effort is important. Every effort is world-changing.

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