

CAVES OF COMFORT

—♦ PART ONE ♦—

How Technology Reshaped Our
Bodies and Minds Over 300 Years

From the Harshness of Survival
to the Comfort Epidemic:
A Personal Survival Guide

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Caves of Comfort: Part One

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Caves of Comfort: Part One is the beginning of a symbolic journey into a world where comfort seems like a safe refuge, but can slowly become a cave that is difficult to leave. Through a simple human narrative, this part follows the first moment of awareness: when does a habit become a chain? When does too much safety turn into isolation? And how does a person begin to see the door that was there all along? This is not a direct sermon, but a symbolic story about fear, habit, hesitation, and the first movement toward the outside.

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Caves of Comfort: Part One

Caves of Comfort Part One English

Caves of Comfort — Part One

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Opening Quote

We are not returning to the past in search of a life we wish to restore. We return to it to understand the road that brought us here.

The First Movement

6:23 a.m.

Before your feet touch the floor, before you hear your own voice, before the light has fully reached your eyes — your hand reaches for the phone.

It is not entirely a conscious habit. No one sat down one evening and decided that a screen should become their first encounter with a new day.

And yet, that is what it has become.

Before water, before prayer, before feeling the body.

Before you know whether you slept well, whether your back feels rested, or whether your mind needs a moment of quiet, you have already entered a world of notifications, images, news, demands, and noise.

This is not a judgment against the person holding the phone. Nor is it an accusation against an entire generation.

It is a description of an environment in which the screen has become closer, easier, and faster than many of the things with which human beings once began their days.

The Comfort We Longed For

Human beings never dreamed of exhaustion.

The farmer worn down by the land did not wish for more hardship. The mother who lost a child to an infection that could be treated today did not dream of a world with less medicine. The worker forced to carry more than his body could bear did not wish for everything to remain heavy, slow, and dangerous.

The dream was understandable and simple:

Food closer at hand. A warmer home. Stronger treatment. Faster travel. Work that was less cruel.

And humanity achieved an extraordinary part of that dream.

The problem was not that comfort arrived. The problem was that, at some point, comfort stopped being a reward after effort and became the environment in which we live almost all the time.

We sit to work. We sit to eat. We sit to recover from sitting. And we carry with us a screen capable of filling every silent minute before we have the chance to ask ourselves: what would we once have done with that minute?

The Cage That Never Ran Out of Food

Decades ago, the American researcher John Calhoun created a colony of laboratory mice inside a closed environment where essential resources were available and many of the ordinary threats to survival were absent. As time passed, profound behavioural and reproductive disturbances appeared within the colony. [Source]

At first, the scene may sound tempting:

A safe place. Food available. Water available. No predators. No visible hunger.

But the question left behind by the experiment is not only: what happened to the mice?

It is also this:

Is abundance alone enough to make life good?

Here we must be precise.

A human being is not a mouse in a cage. Human societies cannot be explained by a single laboratory experiment. And Universe 25 must not be used as a prophecy claiming that civilisation will collapse simply because we have become more comfortable.

But it can be used as a small intellectual mirror held up to a much larger question:

What happens to a living being when comfort is abundant, while movement declines, relationships are disrupted, and meaning gradually disappears from daily life?

This is not an answer.

It is the beginning of the question.

We Are Not Against Civilization

This book does not ask you to hate the age in which you live.

The past was not a paradise of health. It contained hunger, infection, pain without treatment, early death, and work that sometimes consumed the body before a person had the chance to use their mind or enjoy their life.

Nor is medicine the enemy in this story.

A drug that controls blood pressure is not a deception. An operation that saves a heart is not a sign of moral failure. And a patient who needs long-term treatment is not guilty of anything, nor can their illness be reduced to the claim that they simply “did not try hard enough.”

Medicine is one of humanity’s greatest achievements.

Yet respecting treatment does not prevent us from asking another question:

Has our daily environment begun to push growing numbers of people toward illnesses whose risks can, in part, be reduced — and then make long-term treatment seem so normal that the conditions leading to it no longer deserve examination?

The enemy here is not medicine.

The enemy is forgetting how the problem was shaped in the first place.

More Years... or More Life?

Second Section The Answer Is Not to Die Younger, but to Live Longer — and Better
Between 2000 and 2019, global life expectancy rose from 66.8 to 73.1 years.

That is a genuine human achievement.

During the same period, global healthy life expectancy rose only from 58.1 to 63.5 years. In other words, the years we can expect to live in full health did not increase by the same amount as total years of life. [Source]

Here lies the distinction on which this entire book is built:

Living for more years is a remarkable achievement. But living those years able to move, think clearly, sleep, work, and share life with the people you love matters no less.

We are not choosing between a short, strong life and a long, exhausted one.

The answer is not to die younger, but to live longer — and better.

When Danger Changes Shape

Three centuries ago, many of the dangers facing human beings were visible in front of them. Bitter cold. Food that was not enough. An infection for which no effective medicine was available. Daily labour that gave the body little permission to stop.

Today, much of the danger enters our lives in a more comfortable form:

A chair that never asks you to rise. Food that does not ask you to wait or exert effort. A screen that leaves the mind no empty moment. A night that can slip later and later, hour after hour, without making you feel that anything dangerous is happening now.

The truth is that none of these things, on its own, explains a person's illness or determines their fate.

But when total comfort becomes a lasting way of life, it becomes reasonable to ask:

Are our bodies beginning to pay the price of a world designed to protect us from effort?

No Return to the Past

This book will not tell you that you should live as people lived before electricity, antibiotics, or modern transport.

It will not ask you to leave your desk job simply because the human body was not made for an office. Nor will it ask you to reject the phone, medical treatment, available food, or everything that has made life safer and more dignified.

The question is more realistic — and more difficult:

How do we use the gains of civilisation without surrendering our bodies and minds entirely to them?

How do we keep medicine when we need it, without treating preventable or reducible illness as our only possible fate?

How do we live inside the digital world without allowing our attention to become its permanent property?

How do we benefit from comfort without allowing comfort to become a trap?

The Journey Begins

To understand what happened, we will not begin with the phone alone. We will not begin with one chronic illness. And we will not begin with a quick formula for changing a life.

We will go back.

To a world that was not perfectly healthy, and not necessarily more just or more merciful, but one in which danger stood more clearly before the eye.

We will begin in 1726.

Not because history began there. Not because the whole world looked the same in that year. But because it stands three hundred years before our present, before the accelerating transformation that would change the way human beings worked, ate, moved, fell ill, and rested.

That is where the story begins:

1726 — When Danger Was Visible

Why Begin in 1726?

Three hundred years.

A distance that seems short when measured against the age of history, and extraordinarily long when measured by what has changed inside a single human day.

We do not begin in 1726 because the world was one uniform place. People's lives were not identical across village and city, continent and continent, rich and poor.

Nor do we begin there because human beings before that year were healthier, happier, or wiser. The past was not a golden age; it was filled with hunger, illness, fear, hard labour, and early loss.

And we do not begin there because industry suddenly started in that year.

Industrial transformation was not a button pressed on a single day, nor did it reach every society at the same speed. The common historical account places the start of the Industrial Revolution in Britain during the eighteenth century, while more recent historical research suggests that some shifts in the organisation of work and production in England began much earlier. [Source]

We begin in 1726 for a simpler and clearer reason:

It stands three hundred years away from our present.

From this point, we can watch the journey slowly take shape:

How the body moved because daily life required movement. How the machine entered work, then the home, then time itself. How medicine saved us from dangers that once killed millions, while other dangers began to slip in quietly. And how, in the end, we reached a world in which much of the danger has become comfortable, bright, and easy to use.

We are not returning to 1726 in search of a life we wish to restore.

We return to it to understand the road that brought us here.

A Morning That Begins with the Body

In a home somewhere in the world of 1726, morning opens its eyes before the human being has fully opened his own.

No sound of a phone. No blue light across a sleeping face. No urgent message arriving before its recipient rises from bed.

The absence of a screen does not mean that the day is quieter.

There is water that must be brought. A fire that must be lit or kept alive. Food that will not appear on the table until it has passed through hands, shoulders, and feet. And there is work waiting, without asking whether the body is ready for it.

This is not one documented household, nor an image claiming to represent the entire world. It is an entrance into a wider truth: in many societies before industrial acceleration, movement was not a healthy option added to the day; it was part of how the day itself got done.

In that world, danger was not hidden inside comfort.

It was visible. It could arrive as cold, hunger, infection, a long road, a birth the family feared, or a season that failed to deliver what it promised.

Movement Was Not Exercise

No one left home because they had read that walking was good for the heart.

They walked because distance did not disappear by itself. They carried because things did not move at the press of a button. They bent, lifted, ground, gathered, pushed, cut, and transported because much of what the home, market, or field required was not being performed on the body's behalf by a silent machine.

Before engines, fossil fuels, and electricity became widespread, many societies depended, to varying degrees and in varying places, on human and animal muscle and on the energy of wind, water, and biomass. [Source]

It would be a mistake to read this scene as a perfect prescription for health.

A body that moves all the time is not necessarily a happy body. Movement may be a strength when a person chooses it, and exhaustion when they have no right to stop.

In 1726, people were not practising a “healthy lifestyle” in the modern sense.

Many of them moved because life did not permit stillness.

The Price of Compelled Movement

The body worked in order for life to remain possible.

Its hands did not work only within set job hours and then return to their owner when a shift ended. The body itself might be transport, lifting equipment, the route by which water reached the home, and part of the work of preparing food, producing heat, and making a living.

Even rest was not a guaranteed right.

A person might rest because the task was finished. Or stop because darkness had fallen. Or stop only because the body could no longer continue.

And this movement carried an obvious price.

An injury to the hand could mean losing the means of earning a living. Pain in the back could remain without effective treatment. The fatigue of the season did not disappear because the body needed a slower day. Hard labour could consume years of a person's life before it gave them time to feel they had lived them.

We do not look at this world as one long course of healthy training.

We look at it as a world in which the body was intensely present because it directly bore a large part of the burden of life.

Food That Did Not Arrive at the Door

In our world, hunger can appear inside a house full of food: a sudden desire, an open app, a few minutes, and everything arrives at the door.

Across large parts of the older world, food was tied to clearer limits:

The season. Water. Stored supplies. Work. The ability to buy or exchange. The safety of the road and the market, and the authority governing people's lives.

Not every weak season became a famine, and not all societies were equally able to protect themselves from shortage. Historical research on food crises before industrialisation shows that harvest failure was an important factor, while outcomes were also shaped by markets, institutions, support networks, and people's ability to reach food. [Source]

Here, the body understood the danger.

When food grew scarce, a person felt danger. When the house grew cold, a person felt danger. When rain was delayed or prices rose, people knew that something threatened their survival.

Modern danger would be more ambiguous: Abundant food, but perhaps in a form that drives the body toward what it does not need. Complete comfort, but perhaps one that withdraws what once protected it.

We have not reached that point yet.

In 1726, the first question in many lives was simpler and harsher:

Will what we have be enough to continue?

When a Family Knew How Fragile Life Was

A child might be born, carrying joy and fear into the home at the same time.

The family watches the child's breathing. Waits for the fever to pass. Clings to every sign that says this child will grow, run, and one day sit among them with a clear voice in the house.

Not because mothers and fathers in the past loved their children less. But because survival through the first years of life was not as assured as it has become in many societies today.

Childbirth itself carried a fear that needs little explanation. A mother waiting to cross that moment safely. A child beginning life in a world that did not yet possess many of the protections we now regard as ordinary or self-evident.

We do not have precise figures for every place in the world in 1726, and we must not lay a single percentage over the lives of people who inhabited profoundly different environments. Yet the available historical data from nearby and later periods show that childhood mortality was extremely high before the major transformations in nutrition, clean water, sanitation, medical care, and prevention. [Source]

The household knew that joy could turn quickly into grief.

The fragility of life was not an idea discussed from a distance.

It lived with them.

The Illness That Crossed the Threshold

Childhood was not the only part of life exposed to danger.

In that world, infection was not an abstract idea or a health item in the news.

It could pass through a village, a city, or a trading route and alter the faces inside homes and the number of people seated around a meal. A person might be struck by an illness that we now know how to prevent or make less dangerous, while the means we possess were not then in their hands.

Smallpox is a clear example — not because it was the only disease, nor because it stands for the whole world, but because it reveals the difference between two eras. In 1726, the modern smallpox vaccine had not yet appeared; the experiment associated with Edward Jenner's vaccine came in 1796, and later became part of a long path that ended with the global eradication of the disease in the modern age. [Source]

This is the face of the past we must not forget.

The older human body did not possess a lost secret that protected it from disease. Nature alone was not a sufficient doctor. And the harshness of life did not grant people magical immunity.

Sometimes the harshness of life simply killed them.

So as this book moves forward in its journey, medicine will not appear as an enemy that entered the story to corrupt human beings.

It will appear as a genuine rescue.

The danger that once crossed the threshold with too little resistance would one day begin to retreat before things that did not yet exist.

They Were Not Stronger Than Us... They Were More Exposed

Looking back, it is easy to build a comforting myth:

That people in the past were tougher than we are. That their bodies were purer. That they did not know the illnesses of our age because they lived the right way.

The truth is more human and less poetic.

Many people moved more because there were fewer alternatives. They endured more fatigue because work did not always offer a gentler path. They lived with illness and loss using weaker means than those available to us today.

Daily movement may protect against some of what prolonged inactivity creates. But it does not erase hunger, prevent infection, make exhausting labour merciful, or guarantee a long life.

Available historical estimates indicate that life expectancy in regions of the world before the modern health transformation was very low by comparison with our age, while the accuracy of older data outside certain regions remains clearly limited. [Source]

So there is no simple contest between a “strong ancient human” and a “spoiled modern human.”

There is a human being who was more exposed to visible dangers, then a new world that came to rescue them from some of those dangers while placing before them other risks they had not yet learned to see.

Visible Danger

In 1726, danger often announced itself.

The exhausted body knew it was exhausted. The empty stomach knew it was hungry. The cold house did not pretend to be warm. And infection, when it struck, did not arrive as a small pleasure repeated willingly every night.

This does not make old danger gentler.

It makes it clearer.

What would come later would not always enter with a frightening face.

The machine would first enter as a rescue from some effort. Treatment would enter as a rescue from death. Abundant food would enter as a rescue from shortage. And the screen would enter as a window onto the world.

All of that is real. All of that would give human beings extraordinary things.

The story we are following is not a story of evil defeating good.

It is the story of gains changing the environment so deeply that the body begins to pay a price that does not appear at once.

Before the Machine Entered

The year 1726 was not a still moment before a sudden explosion.

There were cities, trade, crafts, simple machines, mills, ships, and many forms of organised work long before it. Nor were all societies moving along one line or at one pace.

Even so, across wide parts of the world, life still remained closer to the direct body:

A muscle that carried. A foot that crossed the road. A hand that made. An animal that pulled. Water or wind that assisted where they could.

Then a phase would begin in which something new started to expand:

Hardship would not disappear immediately. Humanity would not suddenly sit down all at once. But the body would enter a different place, a different rhythm, and a different relationship with time.

It would stand before a machine that did not tire as it tired. Then it would be asked to live by the machine's rhythm.

The Next Door

We do not leave 1726 wishing to return to it.

We do not wish for birth to be more dangerous. Or for illness without adequate protection. Or for threatened food. Or for a body without the right to rest when it needs to.

We leave it carrying a necessary question:

What did human beings lose as they freed themselves, step by step, from the daily need to move?

The answer will not appear all at once.

It will begin in the following century, when the machine is no longer merely a tool that assists the hand, but becomes a place the body itself enters, working according to its timing and reorganising the day around it.

The next station:

1826 — When the Body Entered the Factory

The Bell

In 1826, inside a British industrial town, the day does not begin with a rooster's call, with a family's decision, or with sleep ending naturally.

It begins with another sound.

A bell.

Feet move along wet roads, and bodies enter a large building behind whose windows one motion, one sound, and one rhythm repeat themselves.

This scene is not a record of one particular worker's life, nor a claim that the whole world entered the factory at the same moment.

It is an entrance into a place where one of the most important transformations in the modern history of the human body began: the factory.

In the previous chapter, the body moved because life did not allow it to remain still.

Here, movement will not stop.

But it will begin to submit to something new:

To the machine. To the bell. To the clock.

The Story Did Not Begin Everywhere

The year 1826 does not mean that the world had become industrial.

Vast numbers of people still lived beyond the factory, in fields, homes, small workshops, markets, roads, and along rivers and seas.

Even in Britain, where industrial transformation began earlier and more visibly, not all work had moved into machinery or large buildings. Hand industries, domestic work, and handlooms remained present, while the new system gradually expanded in sectors such as cotton, spinning, and weaving. [Source]

We begin with Britain here not because it represents all humanity, but because it reveals early what would later become a wider experience:

Work shifting from a task carried out by a person with tools, to a place a person enters to work alongside a machine, under a time that is no longer entirely their own.

When It Was No Longer the Task That Ended

Before the factory, work was not easy or merciful.

A farmer might remain in the field until the body was spent. A craftsperson might work long hours to earn enough. A woman inside or outside the home might carry a day that did not end when one task was complete.

There is no perfect romantic freedom behind us.

But the factory added something different.

In many older forms of work, the task itself shaped the rhythm of the day: this field must be finished, this cloth must be woven, this crop must be gathered.

Inside the factory, time itself became a disciplined commodity:

Attendance at a set hour. A start at the signal. Continuation while the machine continued. A stop only when the system allowed stopping.

The historian E. P. Thompson offered an influential historical interpretation of this transformation: sectors of work moved, to varying degrees, from a rhythm connected to the task toward one more forcefully regulated by the clock and industrial discipline. [Source]

The body did not merely enter a new building.

It entered a new relationship with the clock.

The Machine Did Not Abolish Fatigue

When we hear the word “machine,” we may imagine that human beings were immediately freed from effort.

But the first machine did not enter the worker’s life in order to give them sitting and rest.

It entered to demand another kind of movement:

Faster. More repetitive. Less responsive to the body’s own state. More tightly tied to the speed of what turned in front of it.

The worker might no longer carry the crop on their back as in the countryside, but could stand for long hours before a motion that did not stop. They might no longer weave the whole piece to the rhythm of their own hands, but instead become responsible for watching the thread, tying what broke, feeding what the machine needed, and keeping up with the speed it imposed.

Comfort had not arrived yet.

What changed first was that fatigue no longer came only from hard labour, but from work in which the body repeated itself under an external rhythm.

A profound shift begins here:

The machine was no longer merely a tool in the human hand.

At times, the human being became the hand required to keep pace with the machine.

A Child Before a Day Longer Than Their Years

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