



# **PAINLESS CIVILIZATION 1**

**Masahiro Morioka**



# Painless Civilization 1

Masahiro Morioka

Translated by Robert Chapeskie

Tokyo Philosophy Project

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## Foreword to *Painless Civilization 1*

This is the English translation of Chapter One of *Mutsu Bunmei Ron*, which was published in Japanese in 2003. Since this book's publication I have received many requests for an English translation from people around the world. I decided to begin by publishing this first chapter under the title *Painless Civilization 1* and make it available to readers who have a keen interest in this topic.

The original text of this chapter was written in 1998, more than twenty years ago, but I believe what I argued there is becoming increasingly important today. Painless civilization is a pathology of contemporary society. We will be pulled much deeper into a painless stream in the future. What is needed is the wisdom to see through the fundamental structure of our painless civilization and its relationship with the meaning of life.



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Afterword—2021





# Preface

Modern society seems on the verge of being swallowed up by the pathology of “painless civilization.” I have written this book for people who, in the midst of anxiety studded with pleasure, joyless repetition, and a maze from which they cannot escape no matter how far they walk, nevertheless retain in some corner of their hearts a desire to live life fully and without regrets.

Chapters One through Six are the result of extensively rewriting a series of articles, originally published between 1998 and 2000, that elicited a strong response among readers with an interest in contemporary thought.

Chapters Seven and Eight, in which conclusions are drawn on the basis of the earlier chapters, were written for this book. In Chapter Eight the secret of “painless civilization” is at last revealed.

When we feel a vague anxiety, like being bound in gossamer cords, in the midst of modern society, we are perhaps intuitively sensing the existence of “painless civilization.” This book is an attempt to give words to this feeling that the reader has, I am sure, already experienced at least once in their life.



# Chapter One

## What Is “Painless Civilization”?

### 1. Painless Civilization

Living in a civilization without suffering or hardship may seem like humanity’s ideal state of being. But in a society packed with pleasure and surrounded by systems to keep away suffering, will people not on the contrary lose sight of joy and forget the meaning of life?

The phrase “painless civilization” first came to me when I was listening to a nurse talk about her job. At the time she was working at one of the biggest hospitals in Japan.

One day an elderly female patient was brought into this nurse’s intensive care unit. Her brain had been damaged. She was attached to a monitor, given nutrients and medicine through an intravenous drip, and carefully looked after in a temperature-controlled room. She entered a stable state in which her symptoms did not get any worse. But the nurse said that while caring for this patient she began to feel something indescribable. While giving her patient a sponge bath or repositioning her body, the nurse began to wonder, “What exactly am I doing?”

The patient had no lucid awareness, but it wasn’t as though she were dead; her state was one of “sleeping peacefully.” She was receiving appropriate treatment and care,

so she seemed perfectly happy, resting peacefully in an endless slumber. It was unlikely that she would ever again open her eyes and wake up. She would presumably just go on sleeping pleasantly in her temperature-controlled room, her body sustained by intravenously administered nutrients and medicine and kept clean by the careful ministrations of the nurses.

A human being who sleeps with a peaceful expression, her body enveloped in a perfectly controlled environment. She need neither work nor study. There is nothing for her to worry about. She is untroubled by the tiresome task of looking after herself. She has neither pain, nor worry, nor fear. Protected from all of these things, she need only go on existing in the midst of a pleasant, comfortable sleep.

The nurse said, “In the end, isn’t this the form of human existence modern civilization is trying to create?”

Is modern civilization not indeed an attempt to create this kind of person sleeping soundly in an intensive care unit on a society-wide scale? Are people who seem to be working vigorously and happily enjoying themselves not in fact soundly asleep somewhere in the depths of their being? And are such people not being systematically created within the intensive care units we call “cities”? If so, who was it that laid this kind of trap? Why has civilization proceeded in this direction?

## 2. The “Self-Domestication” of Humanity

While it may be a bit of a digression, in order to better grasp the nature of “painless civilization” I will begin by considering the relationship between human beings and

domestication. I do so because the closest thing to a person in an intensive care unit is in fact a domesticated animal in a “domesticated animal factory.” Picture a chicken shut in a small cage, whose life is nothing more than eating and sleeping; the light and temperature around it are artificially controlled, and it is brought all the food it needs on a conveyor belt.

Have human beings not indeed come to treat themselves the way they do domestic animals, and to call this “civilization”?

This process has been referred to as “self-domestication,” an expression of the idea that human beings are making themselves into domesticated animals. The term was first coined in the 1930s by Egon von Eickstedt, who believed that by living in artificial environments human beings were consigning themselves to the state of a domesticated animal. As evidence of this he pointed to the fact that precisely the same sorts of changes were now occurring in the shape of the human body that had previously occurred in domesticated animals. This approach was later taken up by others such as Konrad Lorenz and Hideo Obara.

In order to think deeply about painless civilization, we must first examine the theory of self-domestication developed by such thinkers. I would like to briefly survey this approach while drawing on the writings of Hideo Obara, who developed the theory of self-domestication in his own idiosyncratic direction.<sup>1</sup> I will then return to questions of human beings and

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<sup>1</sup> Obara, Hideo. *Modern People Who Become Pets*, NHK Books, 1995 (小原秀雄『ペット化する現代人』NHK ブックス); *Can Education Create Human Beings?*, Nobunkyo, 1989 (『教育は人間を作れるか』農文協); *The Theory of Self-Domestication*, Gunyosha, 1984 (『自己家畜化論』群羊社).

modern society.

Human beings first tamed and domesticated wild sheep and goats around seven thousand years ago. Putting sheep and goats to pasture is quite different from keeping chickens in cages, but Obara lays out the defining characteristics he sees in both types of domestication as follows.

First, domesticated animals are placed in an artificial environment. These animals live out their lives within a space that is to a greater or lesser extent controlled by human beings. They are not allowed to step outside of the systems put in place by their human keepers.

Second, food is automatically provided. Domesticated animals need not look for food, because their keepers bring it to them. There is no need for these animals to make use of their own ability to find food.

Third, domesticated animals are removed from natural threats. They are protected from things such as attack by their natural enemies, drought, and fluctuations in the climate. The death of a domesticated animal is a great loss for the people who keep them, so human beings try to protect them as much as possible. Various techniques have been devised with this end in mind.

Fourth, the breeding of domesticated animals is controlled. Human beings artificially pair males and females to produce offspring, and the number and space between births of these offspring are controlled to suit human interests. This control over breeding can be described as the essence of domestication.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Yutaka Tani has convincingly argued that it was interventions in breeding and suckling that gave rise to domestication. See *God, Man, and Domesticated Animals*, Heibonsha, 1997 (谷泰『神・人・家畜』平凡社).

Fifth, breeds of domesticated animals are improved by human beings. For example, wild wolves were domesticated by human beings and became dogs. Wolves were remade as a new species that is easily trained to obey human beings. It is the fate of domesticated animals to be constantly transformed into animals more useful to their human keepers.

Sixth, when an animal is domesticated the shape of its body changes. The domesticated version of a boar is a pig, for example, and the shape of pigs changed when they were domesticated. Their snouts became shorter, their bodies came to have less hair and more fat, their tusks disappeared, and their reproductive cycle also underwent changes.

These are the aspects of domestication identified by Obara, but I would like to add two more.

Seventh, the deaths of domesticated animals are controlled. In other words, we do our best to ensure profitable domesticated animals stay alive, and when it is time for them to die we forcibly end their lives. We do our best to keep pigs alive until they have grown large with delicious meat, and once they have been sold as food they are killed. When it comes to domesticated animals, “unexpected death” is completely rejected. Their deaths are always supposed to conform to human expectations.

Eighth, domesticated animals sometimes adopt an attitude of “voluntary subordination” in regard to human beings. As is evident if we consider the feeding of domesticated animals, in exchange for receiving food these animals learn to perform labor, behave obediently, refrain from escaping, and perform tricks. Once they have accepted this state of affairs, it is presumably very difficult for them to break out of it.

“Self-domestication,” then, is what occurs when human beings put themselves into this kind of state. Let us consider each point in order.

The first characteristic of self-domestication is “living in an artificial environment,” and we have indeed built cities and turned the spaces in which we live into highly artificial environments. We live our lives surrounded by things like houses, roads, sewers, cars, trains, and electricity. In this sense a person who gets up early, commutes by train, and works in an air-conditioned office is very similar to a chicken in a “domesticated animal factory.”

Second is “automatic provision of food,” and this too perfectly describes the circumstances in which people living in major cities have been placed. How many residents of large cities gather their own food in the forest or fish for it in the sea? Almost all of us buy ingredients or products at shops or supermarkets and eat food we have prepared using only a small amount of time. As long as a person has money, this is something very close to an automatic provision of food.

Regarding the third point, “natural threats,” these too have been overcome by human beings as we have become more and more civilized. We have succeeded in preparing for the flooding of rivers, inventing homes that will not be destroyed even when a typhoon hits, and stabilizing our food supply by producing and stockpiling the things we eat in large quantities.

Modern science and technology have also proven effective when it comes to the fourth point, “control over breeding.” In recent years interventions in reproduction through technologies such as artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and sterilization surgery have raised serious



bioethical questions. These techniques were first developed for domesticated animals and then applied to human beings. They have now come to constitute a major industry referred to as “fertility treatment.”

Regarding the fifth point, throughout our history we have also applied some aspects of the practice of “the improvement of breeds” on ourselves. Eugenics emerged at the end of the 19th century, and policies and laws designed to prevent the birth of “defective human beings” were implemented in most advanced countries. Modern medicine is attempting to carry out something like the managing of the “quality of life” of domesticated animals on human beings. Obara does not touch on this, but nowhere is there a more direct manifestation of self-domestication than in modern reproductive technologies such as selective abortion and genetic testing.

The sixth characteristic is “a change in the shape of the body,” and according to Obara we can see the same kinds of changes in human beings as those found in domesticated animals. For example, phenomena such as the appearance of curly or frizzy hair, changes in the number of vertebrae or limb bones, and the increase or decrease in the amount of pigment in the skin are changes in form that are only notably seen in human beings and domesticated animals.

What about the two characteristics I added?

The seventh characteristic is “control over death,” and modern society is clearly proceeding down a path toward this kind of control. We do our best to heal a person’s diseases until they are weakened by old age and to extend their lifespan as long as possible, but the view that they should be given a peaceful death with little pain once we are certain their life cannot be extended any further is gaining strength. Our

civilization seems to be progressing toward the thorough eradication of “unexpected death.” The idea of a “right to self-determination concerning death” is also part of this trend.

The eighth characteristic is “voluntary subordination,” and human beings appear to have formed a relationship of voluntary subordination with the social systems that provide us with food, stability and comfort. No matter how much we talk about global environmental problems, for example, only policies that would not involve reducing economic growth are proposed to solve them, because in our heart of hearts we do not want to give up the systems that ensure our current standard of living and comfort, and want to go on living under them even if to some extent they constrain us.

In this way, nearly all of the characteristics of domestication apply to human beings living in the midst of modern civilization. We have created civilization by domesticating ourselves. We have therefore made both the comfort and misery of domesticated animals our own.

The theory of self-domestication is very interesting. Obara, however, has not seen what awaits us at the end of this process; he only gets as far as pointing out the similarity between human beings living in modern civilization and domesticated animals living in pens and stables, and has not thought deeply about the relationship between the “body” and “life” of human beings rushing headlong toward self-domestication. When we think about this seriously, we are inevitably led toward “painless civilization” theory.

### 3. Desire of the Body

The theory of self-domestication asserts that civilization is the domestication of human beings by human beings. I believe that by thinking in this way we will be able to explain the indescribable sense of incompleteness or frustration we feel in this society. We are human beings, and at the same time we are domesticated animals. Picture a sad-looking pig unable to move about in its tiny pen, or a pig that is given all the food it can eat but has nevertheless been robbed of the spark of life. Human beings living in modern society are pigs that have had the spark of life taken away in exchange for being given food and security within the domesticated animal pen of large cities.

The theory of self-domestication teaches us this way of looking at civilization. Now I want to investigate what kind of vision of modern civilization is revealed when we go beyond Hideo Obara's analysis and take this theory to its logical conclusion. To begin with I will consider our own "desire" that pushes civilization forward. I will then focus on our "joy" that is on the verge of being crushed by this desire. Having reached that point, only one step will remain to arrive at a fully-fledged theory of painless civilization.

Let us begin, then, by thinking about "desire."

We have always desired a life with little pain and much pleasure. There should be as little pain and suffering as possible. Life should be full of pleasure, comfort, and stimulation. We do not necessarily seek intense stimulation; we seek a life in which we can obtain the pleasure or stimulation that best suits our mood or situation.

We want a stable life that proceeds as we expect it to. A

life in which we do not run into unexpected incidents that upend our plans. A life in which we do not lose people important to us part way through. A life in which we succeed in taking step after step down a course laid out from the beginning. A life which, while various things may happen along the way, arrives at a “happy ending” where we can give a sigh of relief that everything turned out well. A stable life in which we save our money responsibly, plan for our old age, and carry out the plan of action we have chosen in small increments every day.

We also desire a life in which we can do many things we want to do, get many things we want to have, and avoid doing things we don’t want to do to the greatest extent possible. To be able to do more of the things we want to do is one of the most powerful desires human beings possess. When fully automated washing machines entered our homes, for example, the time we had been spending on washing our clothes could now be used doing whatever we liked. With the appearance of bullet trains and airplanes we became able to travel greater distances in a shorter amount of time. We think it is better to keep as much time as we can for things like sports and hobbies, and to do as few chores and errands as possible.

It is these kinds of desires that have pushed our civilization forward.

Of course, our desires include a wide range of wants. Among these diverse longings, however, the ones described above can be seen as a cluster of fundamental desires. This stems from the fact that human beings possess a “body.”

I would like to give the name “desire of the body” to this cluster of fundamental desires. “Desire of the body” can be thought of in terms of the following five aspects.

1) Seek pleasure and avoid pain

Within us there is a desire to seek pleasure, comfort, and ease, and to avoid pain, suffering, and hardship as much as possible. This is so deeply rooted it is often described as the “instinctive desire” of human beings. No matter how hard we try to control ourselves through reason, we are pulled along by what feels good and puts us at ease.

2) Maintain the current state of affairs and plan for stability

Once a pleasurable state has been obtained, we seek to maintain it for as long as possible. We do whatever we can to prevent an external obstacle from intruding and destroying our pleasant state of affairs. We cling to our established interests and do our best to protect them.

3) Expand and increase itself if there is an opening

While protecting a pleasurable state that has been obtained, if there is an opening we try to further expand this pleasure and increase our established interests. This desire supports capitalism and a competitive society, and also drives our desire for power and control over other people.

4) Sacrifice other people

When we try to maintain a pleasant state of affairs or increase our own pleasure, we inevitably come into conflict with other people, and this desire is one that

makes us think sacrificing other people is not so bad if the harm caused is not serious. This too is a desire rooted deeply within us. It is this desire that ceaselessly reproduces social inequality.

#### 5) Control lives, life, and nature

This is a desire to control our lives so that they unfold within preconceived boundaries. It is also a desire to manage the qualities of future lives and to control the natural environment to suit human convenience. This is one form of “desire of the body.”

These five aspects of the “desire of the body” determine human behavioral patterns at their deepest foundations, and this “desire of the body” is also a driving force that profoundly affects our civilization.

Postmodern philosophy has approached “desire” with a focus on an expansionist drive of “wanting more and more.” This is because postmodern philosophy maintains that it is capitalism, endlessly seeking to expand its frontiers one after another in pursuit of infinite growth, that drives modern society at its roots. Keishi Saeki says, “Desire is always seeking what is new, what is rich in stimulation, what is uncultivated. In this way it expands without limit. Desire is nothing other than the drive to expand infinitely, broadening our frontiers.”<sup>3</sup>

What drives modern civilization, however, is not merely a “wanting more and more” desire for expansion. It is a more comprehensive current of desire that includes this as one of

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<sup>3</sup> Keishi Saeki. *“Desire” and Capitalism*, Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, 1993, pp. 92-93 (佐伯啓思『「欲望」と資本主義』講談社現代新書).

its elements. Namely, it is the “desire of the body” described above that involves seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, not letting go of what has been obtained, looking to expand when the opportunity arises, thinking it is not so bad to sacrifice other people, and attempting to make our lives, life in general, and nature fit within preconceived boundaries.

“Desire of the body” leads us to seek pleasure, avoid pain, and acquire more and more things while preserving our current comfortable “framework.” Because under this desire we acquire things while preserving our “framework,” its content increases endlessly and it becomes infinitely enlarged. And when we come up against another person, because we do not attempt to change our own “framework,” we expand ourselves outward even to the point of pushing the other person aside without engaging in genuine dialogue. It is this kind of desire that operates at the root of modern society.

So why do I describe this kind of desire as being “of the body”?

To begin with, “the body” has a natural disposition toward avoiding pain and seeking pleasure. When you touch something hot your hand pulls away, and your body seeks to remain in a pleasant environment as long as possible. “The body” rejects foreign objects that invade it from the outside, maintains itself through its immune system, and rapidly develops while absorbing nutrients. Here there is a desire to preserve the current state of affairs and maintain stability, while at the same time looking to expand the territory of the self when an opening arises.

“The body” is a concept constructed with this kind of physicality at its core, and at the same time a concept that broadly encompasses the workings of the human mind that

always wants to grab hold of whatever feels good and cling to it. Inexorable impulses and desires well up from within the body. Desire we cannot fully suppress no matter how hard we try to control it through rational thought or morality emerges from the body, dominating our emotions and incapacitating our reason and conscience. Worse still, in order to realize this desire we attempt to construct rationales that suit our own interests and use them to deceive ourselves. We sacrifice others to obtain physical pleasure. As noted above, it is this kind of desire submerged within us that has manifested itself as the desire that drives modern civilization.

Even if these characteristics exist within “the body,” however, doesn’t focusing exclusively on them lead us to an overly negative image of it?

I am well aware, of course, that within “the body” there are also positive elements that can awaken us from our slumber. There is what has been described from ancient times as the “wisdom of the body,” “awareness brought about by the body,” and “the workings of the body that dismantle a human being’s armor from within.” There is no doubt that through this kind of positive capacity human beings effect significant changes from within.

I would prefer, however, to express these aspects with the term “life” [*seimei*] rather than “the body.” That is, within the range of meanings the word “body” evokes in us, I would like to single out seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, maintaining a pleasant state of affairs, and expanding our domain when an opening arises, and refer to these aspects in particular as “the body.” By doing so, I want to extricate the power to transform a human being from within and to overcome one’s own constraints from among the various meanings that have been



ascribed to “the body” and give it a new word: “life.” I want to clearly distinguish between “the aspects of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, maintaining a pleasant state of affairs, and expanding when an opening arises” and “the power to change a human being from within and overcome one’s own constraints,” referring to the former as “the body” and the latter with the new term, “life.” In my theory of painless civilization I use the phrase “the body” with this special added meaning. I want the reader to pay particular attention to this definition.<sup>4</sup>

Human beings are driven by the desire of the body, and have created social devices to allow it to blossom in all of its aspects. What we have employed in doing so is a “controlling reason” that manages both human beings and the outside world.

“Controlling reason” is a faculty that produces the knowledge and technology to manage the operation of various elements within a preconceived framework. Human beings possess a special kind of reason, the purpose of which is to control both the natural environment and human beings ourselves, and this reason has been used to satisfy the desire of the body. Max Horkheimer points to the functioning of this “reason” as “the instrument for domination of human and extra-human nature by man” and refers to this as

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<sup>4</sup> In my earlier book *Reconsidering the View of Life* (Chikuma Shinsho, 1994 森岡正博『生命観を問いなおす』ちくま新書) I used the phrase “desire of life.” For the time being, however, I would like to withdraw that definition. I give this term a new meaning in Chapter Five. To understand desire as being connected to an abstracted body is actually not so strange. I would like the reader to bear in mind, for example, how Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari understood desire as desire in the dimension of an “organless body” before its division into parts. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Robert Hurley trans., Penguin, 1977.

“instrumental reason.”<sup>5</sup> “Controlling reason” is deeply connected to this “instrumental reason.” Controlling reason, and the desire of the body that orders it around as its servant, were the two most powerful factors in the formation of civilization.

Modern civilization has already begun to move from a point where “human beings dominate nature” toward a point where “human beings manage nature.” “Sustainable development” implies the thorough managing of the Earth’s environment, and the term “planet management” has even been coined as an extension of this idea. Environmental preservation is also a kind of management or control. When this approach is directed toward the management of human beings ourselves, it takes the form of “medicine” and “education.” I will consider the management of both the internal aspects of human beings and external nature in detail in later chapters.

#### 4. What Is the “Joy of Life”?

I have been using the terms “management” and “domestication,” but what exactly is the difference? I want to think about this question carefully, because considering the subtle differences between them will lead us to the core of painless civilization.

To begin with, “management” is taking care of how things operate within a preconceived framework.

In comparison, the word “domestication” has a stronger

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<sup>5</sup> Max Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason*, Oxford University Press, 1947, p.125. / Cf. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, 2002.

meaning.

Domesticated animals are managed by human beings. But that is not all. Domesticated animals are not permitted to have the kind of lives they themselves would most like to live.

They might prefer to leave their small enclosures and run as fast as their legs will carry them. They were born with strong legs and powerful muscles, so surely even domesticated animals would like to live a life of using them to run freely, breathing fresh air and concentrating all of their attention on finding food. But this is prohibited, because the lives of domesticated animals do not exist for the sake of domesticated animals themselves. The lives of domesticated animals exist for the sake of the human beings who keep them. Domesticated animals are not permitted to use their own bodies purely for the sake of their own lives.

The lives of domesticated animals exist for the sake of human beings. Domesticated animals are made to live, for example, in order to be killed once their meat is delicious and become food for human beings. Or so that human beings can use their fur or skin. This is evinced by the fact that domesticated animals who are no longer of any use are killed by human beings; there is no longer any value in having them go on living.

The lives of domesticated animals are appropriated by human beings.

“To domesticate” animals is to take “living their lives fully for their own sake” away from them, and unilaterally make use of their existence for human ends.

In other words, the essence of domestication is “depriving.” Domestication is not merely managing animals, but human beings taking away animals’ potential to live their

own lives fully for themselves.

Someone takes something away.

Such is the nature of domestication.

Now let's try thinking about human beings in the same way. In the case of self-domesticated human beings, who exactly is taking what away from whom?

This is how I see it.

In our civilization, our own "desire of the body" is taking the "joy of life" away from us.

The desire of the body is taking away the joy of life.

This is the most profound meaning of self-domestication, and it is the most fundamental problem unfolding in our civilization.

"The body" takes away "life." "Desire" takes away "joy." This is the deep structure of civilization. The various problems assailing today's society must be reinterpreted and understood at this profound level.

What is the "joy of life"?

There are cases in which I face unavoidable suffering, and as I am writhing in it, my self that has existed until now is broken down from the inside and transformed into a completely unforeseen new self. The unforeseeable joy that comes to me when this happens is the "joy of life." This is the "it's good to be alive" sense of joy that comes when a new self of which I had been completely unaware emerges from within me, breaking through the husk of my old self with newborn vitality – the revitalizing, bracing sense of joy that comes when I know I am capable of being reborn in this way. It is also a sense of being able to wholeheartedly affirm the fact that I exist in the form of a life whose essence is growth, transformation and death. This is completely different from a

psychological “rationalization” created to console myself after I have failed at something. After feeling “the joy of life” I never want to return to my previous state.

This joy of life will not come if I attempt to change only my external circumstances without changing my own framework when facing a difficulty. This is a very important point. The joy of life only comes to me when, in the face of suffering or anguish, I dismantle my self, transform it, and cause it to be reborn without attempting to run away from this suffering. If through some capacity or manipulation I manage to make the external cause disappear, the suffering right in front of me vanishes but there is no change in my own framework. All that comes to me then is security and relief.

By eliminating one external cause of suffering after another we are given an endless supply of security and relief. And this is precisely what the desire of the body is aiming at. The desire of the body minimizes suffering, seeks pleasure, and conspires to preserve the current state of affairs and maintain stability. The desire of the body that exists inside us deprives us of the joy of life that comes when we attempt to transform ourselves in the midst of suffering. As a result, we become “frigid” or unable to feel the joy of life. This is the true meaning of self-domestication.

Satisfying the desire of the body does not bring about any change in the subject in question. Let us begin by considering a simple example. A person starts smoking cigarettes because they want to smoke cigarettes. This does not bring any radical change to this subject themselves. There is no change in this subject before and after this desire is satisfied. The thirst is gone, and that is all. When for some reason they cannot smoke, however, this person runs into their first major obstacle.

Rather than satisfy their desire by smoking cigarettes, they must instead change their own way of being and confront their new circumstances. While suffering from nicotine withdrawal and being plagued by doubt over whether they can survive without smoking, they have no choice but to find a new self that can live with the psychological swings and physical cravings they are experiencing. An unexpected, indescribable joy emerges when they succeed in stopping smoking, the self as it has existed until now is destroyed, and in this way a new self is reborn.

This is an unforeseen joy. The person in question does not even consider such a self to be possible. When they are in the midst of their suffering, they can't imagine that such a fresh, revitalizing state will come at its end. Life develops in this way.

Taking work as an example, "the joy of life" emerges straightforwardly in the following scenario.

By working in an organization, I maintain a stable lifestyle. Since I don't want to lose this stability, I cannot leave my job right now. Wanting desperately to defend the income and stability my current job brings me is a manifestation of the "desire of the body." But various contradictions caused by keeping this job accumulate both inside and outside of me, and I find myself facing inescapable anxiety and frustration. In order to fend off these unpleasant emotions, I do things like increase my workload, drown myself in alcohol, conduct extramarital affairs, or repeatedly engage in self-harming behavior. Even if my suffering temporarily withdraws, it always returns to assail me once more. Painless civilization tries to prepare an infinite number of options for me to distract myself from the suffering caused by my job while

allowing me to keep the income and stability it brings me.

But let's say that one day I give up constantly running away from my own contradictions and make a firm decision to quit my job. Or I lose my job involuntarily. I had believed that if I lost my job it would be the end of me, and while immediately after losing my job I am indeed beset by crushing despair and feelings of emptiness, after a bit of time has passed something huge and unexpected occurs. As a result of losing my job, my self that had existed up until that point is dismantled, a self I had not foreseen emerges from inside me, and a world I had not imagined opens up before my eyes. The unexpected joy that comes to me when this happens, the joy of a new self I had known nothing about blossoming from inside me without warning, leaving me reborn as a fresh, unencumbered being as a cleansing breeze washes over me, is the "joy of life." Life develops in this way.

The desire of the body does not attend transformations of the self. The joy of life, on the other hand, is born out of the self undergoing unforeseen changes. The desire of the body tries to force suffering and hardship out of view. The joy of life comes in the midst of the process of the self taking on suffering and hardship. This is where the defining difference between them lies.

"Life" is a drive that dismantles the "framework" supporting your current self and attempts to transcend it. When you try to step outside this framework you experience the fundamental anxiety that comes from throwing away what has been supporting you. This is an anxiety that threatens to scare you out of your wits and leave you at a loss for what to do, a pitch-black anxiety that makes you feel as though your knees will buckle if you don't divert your attention somewhere

else or blind yourself to it. But alongside this kind of anxiety shines life.

Life is something that, while existing within the body, tries to transcend it. Life can never separate itself from the body, and in this sense is a part of it. But it still attempts to fly beyond the framework of the body and soar into the night sky. Life is a body that tries to transcend the body. When it does so, its power transforms the framework of the body from within, and an unforeseen joy of life comes to me. The new body will then presumably start trying to maintain the new framework. But life will once again attempt to transcend it. Life, indeed, is this very sequence of ceaseless, reckless attempts at transcendence. As long as we embrace life, we can never cut ourselves off from this kind of striving. Even in the midst of a modern society that pursues painlessness, we can never divorce ourselves from such undertakings.

Here I would like to make a few additional points before moving on.

The joy of life is not something I can acquire by trying to obtain it. It is something that comes to me *in an unforeseen form* in the midst of my engaging with suffering and transforming myself. It is not something I can get by trying to seek it out, but rather something that comes to me at a completely unexpected time in a completely unexpected form. This is a very important point. A feeling of satisfaction obtained by seeking it out is a “sense of achievement,” not “joy.”

Someone who takes on a challenge and overcomes it while preserving their existing framework may indeed experience a visceral sense of satisfaction they might describe as “joy,” but this is not the “joy of life” I have been talking



about. This is nothing more than invigoration and elation brought on by a sense of achievement. The “joy of life” is something that comes to you in an unforeseen form when you face suffering and hardship head on and pass through the dismantling and rebirth of the self. From before the “joy of life” arrives to afterwards, the self must transform its way of being from the ground up. The “joy of life” is frequently mistaken for a sense of achievement or elation, but a clear distinction must be made on this point. The feeling of excitement or elation that washes over me when I accomplish something, when something completely unexpected happens, when I win something, or when I savor the pleasures of immorality, for example, is not the “joy of life.”

In a similar vein, there is a way of thinking which maintains that fulfillment in life comes when we reform or transform the self. But we must carefully consider whether this is the same thing as the joy of life I have been talking about. If this is a feeling of fulfillment brought on by self-transformation in the form of enlarging the current self while fundamentally preserving its framework as it is, then it is not the “joy of life.” The “joy of self-realization” understood in this context is not the “joy of life.” The attainment achieved by the self’s simply growing and changing, or by meditating, feeling the breath of the universe, and reforming oneself, is not the “joy of life.” It is dangerous to understand the “joy of life” I am describing through a naive acceptance of the New Age notion that “if I change the world will change.”

I said that the joy of life comes from the dismantling and rebirth of the self, and this may seem similar to the brainwashing process that occurs in religious cults. It also bears a strong resemblance to self-improvement seminars

that emphasize things like “self-transformation,” “the meaning of life,” and “a reason for living.” In these cases, however, someone is intentionally guiding the dismantling and rebirth of your self from the outside, and because after they have made you destroy your self they inject you with a new set of values and program you from the outside, the sense of relief you then experience cannot be said to be the “joy of life.”

The joy of life, when it comes, arrives not through guidance or instruction from someone on the outside, but rather when you yourself transform and are reborn through a force that wells up from inside you. This is what I mean by “from the inside” in my description of the “joy of life.” The “joy of life” is something that comes to you in an unforeseen form, not from external guidance or instruction but from sincerely transforming yourself through your own will out of necessity.

## 5. Evolution Toward “Painless Civilization”

Let us consider self-domestication once more.

Self-domestication is the “desire of the body” taking the “joy of life” away from us. The civilization in which we live is overflowing with self-domestication in this sense. We can find instances of this here and there all over our society.

In modern society we are tightly bound by the “desire of the body” to seek pleasure, avoid suffering, and cling to what we have obtained, and as a result it is extremely difficult for us to experience the “joy of life” that comes in an unforeseen form when we pass through suffering and dismantle, transform, and recreate ourselves.

But there is yet another stage toward which a self-domesticating civilization then develops. This is “painless civilization.” A painless civilization is a civilization in which the mechanism by which the “desire of the body” takes away the “joy of life” has been slotted neatly into social systems and extended to every corner of society. Here the social devices that create pleasure, stimulation, and comfort are set up like the mesh of a net, and by being caught up in this net we completely lose sight of the “joy of life.” Genuinely unexpected events and genuine suffering that terrifies us from the core of our beings are indeed almost non-existent. A painless civilization is a civilization in which these genuinely foreign objects are painstakingly excluded from our lives, and the path on which we “cause ourselves to be reborn by colliding with such foreign objects” is cleverly closed off. Self-domesticating civilization progresses toward “painless civilization.” Here there is a qualitative jump. Painless civilization is an alluring trap that lies waiting in our future.

Let us consider “painless civilization” in an even stricter sense.

I have said that in a painless civilization genuine suffering, genuinely unexpected events, and things you don’t want to do are thoroughly excluded. But it isn’t quite that simple.

As is immediately apparent with a bit of imagination, living in a world from which suffering, unexpected events, and things you don’t want to do have been completely excluded would probably not be very much fun. What would happen to people living in a world where everything proceeds as expected without any suffering and they need only do what they want? They would surely get sick of being alive. In a

world where everything went perfectly according to plan, at first the feeling of omnipotence might be enjoyable, but life would no doubt grow increasingly boring with the passage of time, and the meaning of life would be lost.

The foundation of painless civilization is the banishment of suffering, unexpected events, and things you don't want to do, but there is another ingenious mechanism that is also put in place: in a painless civilization, "suffering," "unexpected events," and "things you don't want to do" that have been watered down to the point they do not actually destroy the foundation of the civilization or our own beings are made available for us to choose by ourselves.

For example, we hate to writhe in suffering for no reason, but a scenario in which we "savor the joy of victory after gritting our teeth and enduring suffering" is on the contrary welcomed in a painless civilization. Painless civilization encourages the voluntary experiencing of suffering now for the sake of experiencing the joy of success later, and seeks to actively facilitate it within society.

The same can be said of "unexpected events" and "things you don't want to do." What is widespread in a painless civilization is not genuine adventure but contrived or constructed adventure. We come up against things we had not expected or foreseen, but it is not the kind of adventure in which we may suddenly die as a result. Like attractions in a giant amusement park, however unexpected the floodwaters may be, at worst they only splash us, and something like the boat we are in going down with all hands never happens; our adventures are contrived to be this way in advance. These sorts of adventures are constantly being set up in all corners of society as choices of products, fashions, and behaviors. Go-

kart races in a supervised space in which no accidents can occur and adultery games premised on the marriage system – such things can be found in abundance everywhere you look, and form the background landscape of a painless civilization.

In a painless civilization, suffering and hardship exist only as options we choose for ourselves. We are never beset by suffering that is too much for us to handle. Suffering is always presented to us by society as “stimulation” or a “hobby” in a form sufficiently diluted to ensure it cannot destroy the foundation of civilization. Painless civilization endlessly internalizes “genuine suffering and hardship” as “suffering and hardship as a choice.”

When it comes to death, for example, movements demanding “euthanasia” and “death with dignity” are growing, and this is one of the routes to painless civilization. “All’s well that ends well” is the slogan of painless civilization, whose goal is pre-established harmony. The mentality of people who aim to control a river so that it only floods once every thousand years and then paddle around on it in canoes in the name of “adventure” advances painless civilization.

Painless civilization has “eradicating existence,” “blindfolding,” “detoxifying,” and the maintenance of “pre-established harmony” as methods of internalizing and annihilating genuine suffering. By employing these means, painless civilization gets rid of genuine suffering.

“Eradicating existence” is the simplest of these techniques. When something is painful or difficult, you can choose to eradicate the factors that cause it. If the day-to-day care of a bothersome old person is difficult, for example, you can choose to surreptitiously kill them, that is, eliminate them in such a way no one finds out. If you do this the cause of your

suffering will be gone.

To take another example, when a prenatal test has shown your fetus has a serious disability, if it is very painful to think about your child's future or your own life going forward you can choose to have an abortion and erase the fetus' existence. The foundation of eliminating suffering is eradicating the existence of whatever is causing it.

In this way, a system of "preventive pain elimination" is highly developed in a painless civilization. This is a system that not only eliminates suffering that already exists but carefully predicts suffering that could arise to threaten us in the future and preventatively eradicates here and now whatever seems likely to be a cause of this future suffering. As long as we are riding along in this system, we never encounter the "outside." What we see in front of us is always clean and harmonious. In this way every corner of society is preventatively made painless. "Preventative pain elimination" becomes the fundamental policy of this kind of society. "Preventative pain elimination" is one of the most important concepts in painless civilization theory.

As another form of eradicating existence, there is also the method of driving a cause of suffering away to a place you can no longer see it. For example, bothersome old people can be shipped off to a nursing home in the countryside. When this is done these people disappear from the world of daily life, and there is no longer any suffering caused by the burden of care for the elderly. Before we know it, the homeless people who had been found in the center of Tokyo have been taken away and put somewhere else.

Of course, whether we have eradicated people's existence or sent them far away, if a memory remains of what we have

done it will trouble us. And this memory may indeed cause mental suffering far into the future. In order to avoid this, after we have eradicated someone's existence or sent them far away, we must then eradicate this fact itself from our memories. We often erase such memories under our own power. This is the start of "blindfolding." If I can blindfold myself, I can forget that I have driven elderly people to the countryside and go out and have a good time with my friends. By doing so, the suffering in front of me disappears.

In my book *How to Live in a Post-Religious Age*, I call this a "blindfolding structure."<sup>6</sup> A "blindfolding structure" is one in which I drape a curtain over my surroundings in order to blindfold myself and avoid the suffering in front of my eyes, and then walk straight into this trap of my own design and become ensnared. We are already surrounded by blindfolding structures, and in a painless civilization they will presumably be further refined and expanded.

When blindfolding progresses even further, it reaches the point of "deciding not to see something even though I am looking at it." For example, in *How to Live in a Post-Religious Age*, I describe someone who threw his cigarette butt in the gutter while talking about how to solve global environmental problems. In this person's case, he himself was throwing a cigarette butt into the street and polluting the environment, and although he could see himself engaging in this behavior he could not see the contradiction between this act and the ecological viewpoint he was advocating.

In *Trauma And Recovery*, Judith Herman talks about a

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<sup>6</sup> Masahiro Morioka, *How to Live in a Post-Religious Age*, Hōzōkan, 1996 (森岡正博『宗教なき時代を生きるために』法蔵館).

mental process called “doublethink” in which you know something but decide not to know it, and this too is a good example of a blindfolding structure.<sup>7</sup>

I suspect that at some point almost everyone has experienced a situation in which they “decide not to see something even though it is visible.” Even though something is right in front of your eyes, you keep telling yourself there’s nothing like that here. If you continue doing this long enough, eventually it actually seems as if the thing in question is not there. As this process progresses, eventually you reach a mental state in which you cannot see something even though you are looking right at it. This is completely different from actually not being able to see something. It’s a state in which you will confidently reply, “No, there’s nothing like that here” if you are asked whether it is there in front of you, but somewhere in your consciousness you know that this response is in fact a lie.

When this state of affairs gets even worse, a particular behavioral pattern emerges: you repeatedly make trial and error attempts to solve a problem, while always missing the core of the problem that can only be solved by your actually experiencing pain. This is indeed the most sophisticated “blindfolding structure.” It is also the “blindfolding structure” from which it is most difficult to escape. A painless civilization is a civilization in which this kind of blindfolding structure has been extended to every corner of society.

I’d like you to try thinking about this carefully while reflecting on your own experiences. Don’t you in fact do this

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<sup>7</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma And Recovery*, Basic Books, 1992, 1997, p.87. The word “doublethink” was coined by George Orwell in his book *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949).



kind of thing yourself? Don't you have at least one issue or event you can only deal with by denying it in this way? The more vehemently you want to say that you don't, the more likely it is that you do. We must dismantle these blindfolding structures with our own hands.

When someone is suffering in front of you, there are cases in which you are drawn into their pain without intending to be and end up suffering yourself. And when you see someone who is suffering, there are cases in which it is painful to discover a self that is completely unable to help them. There are also instances in which it is painful to be confronted by an egotistical self that does not try to extend a hand to the person in question. Even if the eradicating of existence and blindfolding are undertaken to completion, these forms of suffering remain. The mechanisms that make them go away are "detoxification" and "pre-established harmony."

When someone is suffering in front of me, I myself will not suffer if I am able to simply note, "Oh, that person is really suffering," and look at them from the perspective of a dispassionate bystander. This is just like when a doctor, faced with a patient convulsing in agony, calmly examines them to determine the cause of their pain. In this case, I receive the person's suffering as a "simple fact" that has been detoxified to the point that it has almost no effect on me. I will be much more comfortable if I am able to perform this kind of detoxification every time I encounter someone else's suffering. Even if someone is suffering right in front of me, I can just indifferently observe, "Oh, this person is suffering right now," and even if someone drops dead before my eyes, I need only note, "Oh, this person just died." Here the intrinsic power suffering possesses to compel human beings to get involved,

in other words, the power to threaten a human being's existence at its foundation, is detoxified and defanged. Other people's suffering is no longer a threat to me. Other people's suffering becomes not something that assails me but rather something that is merely described through my reason.

In a painless civilization, this kind of detoxification mechanism becomes internalized in the minds of human beings and embedded in our thinking and behavior as culture, and its techniques are learned and handed down as "a matter of course." To look down at someone writhing in agony in the street and dispassionately analyze this or that cause of their suffering – society is full of such mere bystanders' gazes.

At the same time, helping other people who are suffering or doing our best to lessen their pain is also something that is expanded in a painless civilization. Here, however, the foundation of this helping behavior is entirely based on "pre-established harmony" – helping behavior is primarily carried out with the motivation that my assisting these suffering individuals will come full circle and be for my own benefit. For example, by helping people who are suffering I may be able to discover my true self, I may be able to discover the meaning of life, or I may be able to confirm to myself that I am a human being who knows love. I help people with these kinds of thoughts in mind. Helping other people is for their sake, and on top of that it is for my own sake as well. This is "pre-established harmony."

A bipolar behavior pattern thus emerges in a painless civilization: on the one hand I detoxify other people's suffering and address it as a bystander, while on the other hand I help other people for my own sake. These poles are two sides of the same coin. When I want to distance myself

from others I use the former, and when I want to step in and interact with them I choose the latter. What is missing from these patterns of behavior is a scenario in which even though dealing with another person's suffering may throw me straight into the depths of hell, I am nevertheless unable to avoid being sucked into this interaction.

Painless civilization looks for this kind of pattern and adroitly eliminates it from society. The risk of my becoming unavoidably caught up in genuine suffering by dealing with another person who is in pain is removed from society. There are people who endorse helping behavior by preaching, "By helping others you yourself will be healed," but this posture itself unwittingly advances the movement toward civilization becoming painless. I do not doubt the good intentions of those who preach such things, but painless civilization rolls forward while incorporating such good intentions. Of course, it is possible for people who engage in helping behavior to experience the dismantling and rebirth of the self and obtain the joy of life through the process of providing aid, but painless civilization tries to make the chance of this occurring infinitesimally small. As a result, in a painless civilization helping behavior of the sort that leads to the dismantling and rebirth of the self is wiped out.

The movement toward civilization becoming painless as a whole progresses through these mechanisms for the eradication of suffering being expanded throughout society and internalized within each individual, and the people who live in such a society become able to maintain a comfortable life without being forced to dismantle their selves through suffering. Painless civilization will presumably undertake these pain-eliminating operations automatically, like a cell

metabolizing. As a result, within a painless civilization genuine pain that might force you to dismantle your self is banished, suffering is internalized and becomes a choice, human beings are caught in the trap of the desire of the body, and life is gradually anesthetized.

## 6. People in a Painless Civilization

In a modern society that is becoming painless, receptivity to suffering or pleas that might exist outside it declines drastically. A civilized person casually ignores the moans of suffering and pleas for help from outside their own society, crushing them unknowingly beneath their feet while whistling a happy tune. For an armored knight who has thoroughly girded his vulnerable areas with “eradication of existence,” “blindfolding,” “detoxification,” and “pre-determined harmony,” it is as though the voices from the outside world that do not penetrate this thick armor do not exist at all. A warrior advancing through a field in armor cannot hear the screams of insects he crushes beneath his metal-encased feet.

It is people who have thoroughly rendered their own suffering painless who least sense the suffering of others, make the least effort to hear the pleas of others, and are least aware of what they are doing when they unilaterally crush other people. So it is presumably a painless society and the people who live within it who will become the greatest perpetrators of violence on Earth. And their victims will presumably be the people who, without having fallen as far into painlessness, savor their own existence in the midst of suffering and hardship and attempt to find meaning within them or struggle to crawl out of them. The users of violence

are not only unable to hear the voices of these people, but they may not even be aware of their existence underfoot. In all likelihood, however, they are in fact choosing not to see them while looking right at them.

Painless civilization gradually expands across the globe while crushing such people one by one. A movement of perpetrators of violence referred to as “good people” who, while their own internal worlds become perfect pre-established harmonies, crush these people without voices one after another without realizing it and spread across the globe like amoebas while affirming their own existence and actions – that is a “painless civilization.”

Civilized people who have chosen to become domesticated animals conquer, dominate, and force into submission human beings who have not chosen this path. It seems very paradoxical that in exchange for becoming domesticated animals they are able to dominate others and make them subordinate to themselves. But if we stop and think about it for a moment it is actually quite obvious. Only those who have given in to the desire of the body and lost the joy of life can thoroughly dominate other people.

We must never forget that we are already on the side of painless civilization. That which can stop painless civilization moving forward under its own power to eradicate and internalize suffering is not to be found outside it. Sooner or later all external influences will be swallowed up by the expansion of painless civilization and become a part of it. In this way, eventually the vast majority of human societies around the world will presumably be completely enveloped by painless civilization. Painless civilization offers people who are poor or who do unpleasant jobs tools that blind them to

this poverty and unpleasantness, and in exchange for taking up these tools they too can be ushered into painless civilization through the back door. And since those who are victims of its expansion also have no choice but to find a way to react or adapt to it, no one is able to stand entirely outside of painless civilization.

People who have been swallowed up by painless civilization obtain security, pleasure, comfort and stimulation. If they cannot obtain these things, they escape from suffering through the eradication of existence or blindfolding.

Even in the midst of this rush toward painless civilization, however, we are by no means able to obtain peace of mind. On the contrary, we are terrified by an incomprehensible anxiety and beset by inexplicable, violent urges. We are seized by an urge to stab and kill everyone who is complicit in making civilization painless. We have these feelings because somewhere inside us the defiant power of “life” stubbornly survives.

But the desire of the body suppresses the defiance of life without difficulty, and the movement toward painlessness accelerates. The life inside us is thoroughly suppressed, and we become puppets of the desire of the body. Manipulated by this desire, we attempt to avoid any genuine suffering or joy that might destroy our own framework. As a result, we are driven to seek contrived “adventure and adversity” while avoiding genuine suffering, and to seek “pleasure and stimulation” while avoiding genuine joy. In concrete terms we fall into behaviors such as joining religious cults, being driven into romantic infatuation, wallowing in sexual love, getting into drugs, giving our bodies over to adventure, stimulating ourselves through trauma, and engaging in violence for no

reason. These acts give us pleasurable stimulation or a sense of comfort at the time, but these feelings never last very long. So people wander aimlessly in search of new stimulation, always taking great care to avert their eyes from the fundamental problem of why their current state of ample stimulation is always tinged with unease.

If our lives are totally anesthetized and the victory of the desire of the body is complete, even our lingering angst will presumably disappear. We will become desire satisfaction machines. We will be empty vehicles that move only with the aim of optimizing systems that satisfy our desire for pleasure. If painless civilization is perfected, at the dawn of its completion all of its citizens will become desire satisfaction machines, everything done within it will be a game of pleasure, and the result will presumably be everything occurring in accordance with a pre-established harmony. Painless civilization is a utopia for all schools of thought that have dreamt of a pre-established harmony.

While we are still on the way to painless civilization, however, our “life” is not yet completely dead. No matter how thoroughly it seems to have been suppressed by the desire of the body, “life” stubbornly survives in the depths of our beings. Even if its functions have been anesthetized by repeated defeats in its battles with the desire of the body, in the deep interior of our being it tries to make itself shine as it burns with its final flame.

In the throes of this final struggle of “life,” human beings in the midst of a modern society that is becoming painless display behaviors such as introversion, repetition, and addiction.

They shut themselves up in their own world, and fall into

a game without other people in which they engage in dialogue with another self inside their own perfect world of meaning. At the same time, however, somewhere in their mind there is a desire to go beyond their own introversion and be connected to something “transcendent.” They sense that by engaging in a dialogue with something transcendent they may be able to emerge somewhere in the outside world. In this way their introversion approaches something religious. Introversion can seem like a rejection of interaction with beings other than the self, but in fact it conceals a will to connect to the outside of this painless world through the path of dialogue between the self and a transcendent being. Behind this lies life’s final, desperate struggle. But if this transcendent being is “my personal god” who suits only me, what emerges is merely an intense self-justification. This approach may sometimes expand from the self to encompass a closed-off community, but the result is a cult religion or “healing” group. Introversion taking the form of “healing” is another characteristic of painless civilization; the temptation of “healing” paves the way to its development.

Such people also “repeat” their actions. After having been driven to romance, they suddenly pull back and abandon the love affair in question. They are soon driven to love again, however, and search for a new partner. This is repeated *ad infinitum*. Here there is only repetition, with no progress or development of any kind. They are simply moving back and forth between two points. It is as though this repetition itself is their goal. When they suddenly abandon an activity after having become absorbed in it, in that instant they are in fact invoking the power of life. A sense of the risk of life being anesthetized by becoming absorbed in games of pursuing



pleasure as contrived choices causes them to abandon these activities. Once they have pulled themselves back, however, such people do not know what to do next. For a while they may find meaning in this refraining from games of pleasure itself, but eventually this too cannot be continued. They are once again drawn into the same games, and in this way another layer of repetition is added.

If a person's invocation of the power of life weakens, their activity becomes an "addiction." They become obsessed with sex, drugs, or gambling, and make no attempt to break free of their compulsion. Even though their obsession does not bring them happiness, they go on pursuing it anyway. Before they know it they have become someone desperately grasping at the object of their obsession. They pour all of their free time and money into it. They are no longer capable of breaking free.

As people who fall into an addiction become absorbed in the activity in question, somewhere in their minds they are thinking, "Something is wrong" or "Something strange is going on." They do not engage in these activities wholeheartedly, with no sense of guilt or shame, but rather with constant doubt and hesitation, and it is precisely at this point that the cry of life is heard. The fundamental pattern of addiction, a person being unable to stop while some part of them regrets what they are doing, perfectly reflects the course of a painless civilization in which the desire of the body triumphs over and over again, constantly silencing the cries of life.

Addiction often takes the form of "I end up doing it even though I didn't want to" or "I do it but always regret it afterwards." Nonetheless, it is very difficult for the person in question to break free of it. It is a paradox that this behavioral

pattern proliferates in a painless civilization whose supposed aim is “being able to do as many of the things you want to do and as few of the things you don’t want to do as possible.” This should not happen if human beings seek only “what they want to do” or “pleasure.” We indeed have no choice but to assume the existence of a power of life that tries to destroy the framework of the body and transcend it. It is because life is not completely dead that we fall into addiction.

There is a phenomenon sometimes called “psychotherapy disease.” It refers to people who go from one kind of therapy to the next. These people are constantly searching for the temporary pleasure and sense of liberation they experience when receiving therapy. As for why they keep moving from one kind of therapy to another, it is because while they may savor the pleasure and liberation of therapy, they do so without making any change to their own framework. They are therefore always moving on in search of the same kind of pleasure or release when the therapy they are receiving stops providing it.

In a certain sense, people who have fallen into an addiction have succeeded in obtaining pleasure. This pleasure, however, conceals an anxiety at its root. They feel good, but uneasy. They are uneasy but they feel good. They don’t think this is the best state of affairs, but no other way of doing things comes to mind. Why doesn’t another approach occur to them? Because their “life” has been anesthetized. Because it has been numbed by painless civilization. People driven by such a state of affairs seek pleasure while remaining anxious, and eventually grow old and die without this ever changing. Some people are suddenly hit by inexplicable urges and do things like attempt to revolt against society or harm themselves or

others. These people themselves, however, do not understand why they do these things. They do not understand because they are unable to grasp the essence of painless civilization. In exchange for the eradication of pain, human beings in an era of transition toward painless civilization have to live amidst anxiety studded with nuggets of pleasure and urges that have lost their purpose. They are citizens of a painless civilization, gagging as they drown in an ocean of sugar.

There are forms of psychotherapy in which subjects relive traumas received from their parents when they were children in order to cure their “illness,” acknowledging and affirming the existence of an inner child. There are situations in which these therapies inspired by Freud can provide effective treatment, but they cannot resolve the “illness” of the mind arising from a problem in the civilizational dimension of the sort I have been discussing here. They cannot resolve this “illness” because not only the patient but the therapist, too, is living in this civilization, and therefore living with the “illness” of a civilization that is becoming painless. Moreover, by getting the patient to adapt to a real world that is becoming painless, such therapists can even be described as supporting the movement toward modern society being made painless. The elimination of pain infiltrates society in the guise of psychological care. The counseling and psychotherapy provided by experts to people like *hikikomori* (recluses, agoraphobics), children who refuse to attend school, or people with eating disorders has the effect of advancing the process by which modern society is being made painless.

## 7. Ways of Talking about Painless Civilization Theory

When did the process of making our civilization painless begin? A human society in a given time and place has a set of systems, organizations, customs, values and technologies that characterizes that particular group of people. When these characteristics have the power to transcend the bounds of time and space and begin to spread more widely, what is called a “civilization” emerges.<sup>8</sup> Civilization theory has covered a lot of ground since Alfred Weber and Oswald Spengler, but broadly speaking there is one view that positions civilizations as stages of development in human history and another way of thinking that divides civilizations among the regions of the world.

Let us begin by positioning painless civilization within the developmental stages of human history.

Painless civilization can be thought of as a form of civilization that has only appeared very recently. In other words, after passing through stone-age civilization in which we invented tools, agricultural civilization in which we started farming, urban civilization in which we created cities, and industrial civilization in which we undertook industrialization, humanity is barreling toward the next stage, “painless civilization.” Painless civilization is a new form of civilization created by capitalism and informatization in the twentieth century.

In contrast to this approach, it is also possible to take the

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<sup>8</sup> See Masahiko Kamikawa and Keisuke Kawakubo (eds.), *Theory and Practice of Comparative Civilizational Studies*, Asakura Shoten, 1999 (神川正彦・川窪啓資編『比較文明学の理論と方法』朝倉書店).

view that civilization has evolved from the stone age onward in pursuit of painlessness, and that we have been inside a painless civilization all along; the avoidance of suffering, the pursuit of pleasure, the preservation of comfortable frameworks, and the control of our natural environment are all things humanity has pursued since ancient times, and from the start civilization has aimed at painlessness. Civilization has taken different forms in different eras, but at its core there has always been an aspiration toward painlessness.

These two ways of thinking can both be seen as having correct aspects. The pursuit of painlessness has certainly existed since the distant past. Progress toward painlessness of the form seen today in places like Japan or the United States, however, would have been inconceivable in earlier times.

Next, let us consider painless civilization as a local or regional civilization.

What was life like in the palaces of ancient Indian or Roman civilizations? The lives of the royal family or aristocrats who made use of many slaves may have fallen into a state something like that of today's societies that are becoming painless. These aristocrats could have slaves do anything they found boring or unpleasant, and never had to worry about their next meal. In exchange, did they not indeed lose sight of the meaning of life, and fall into their own traps of repetition and addiction? Gautama Buddha, a prince who could have lived whatever life he pleased, may well have been seeking to escape a palace lifestyle that had been made painless. Taking this view, it can be said that while only a select few had been able to experience the state of painlessness in ancient regional civilizations, by the twentieth century this state had been popularized in a form that

included the vast number of people belonging to the urban middle-class in developed nations. Primarily in large urban centers, many of today's regional civilizations, including those of Europe, America, the Islamic world, and Asia, can be seen as becoming painless in parallel, albeit each in its own way and at its own pace. A study of the history of painless civilization is required in order to position it within the context of human history as a whole.

Here I'd like to consider what exactly the terms "pain" and "pain elimination" mean in the context of painless civilization theory.

To begin with, "pain" includes both physical pain and emotional suffering. In many languages the word "pain" is used in this way. What pain and suffering are for a particular human being cannot be defined by any other person. The only person who has the authority to define pain and suffering is the person who experiences them.

Turning to "pain elimination," so far I have spoken of this with the assumption it is something that must be criticized. But is this really correct? Must we really criticize, for example, taking away the pain of someone suffering from terminal cancer?

I do not intend to criticize the reduction of existing pain, the avoidance of pain, or the taking measures to relieve pain with the phrase "pain elimination." What I am criticizing with these words is constantly striving to escape any pain or suffering above a certain degree of intensity by seeking pleasure, avoiding pain, preserving comfort, putting off unpleasant problems, leaving difficult or painful tasks up to others, and turning away from one's own contradictions while cleverly employing "preventive pain elimination" and

“blindfolding structure” schemes, and the systems that support this approach being expanded throughout society.

In other words, there are two kinds of “pain elimination.”

One is “pain elimination that clearly must be criticized.”

This is pain elimination of the kind described above that involves constantly running away from suffering while employing techniques such as “preventive pain elimination” and “blindfolding structures.” I have tasked myself with fighting this form of “pain elimination.”

The other is “pain elimination” that does not fit this description, that is, simply trying to reduce pain when it is currently being felt, or, as in the case of terminal cancer, in cases in which if pain is not relieved it is impossible for the person in question to fully live a meaningful life. I do not say this “clearly must be criticized,” but at the same time I do not say that it “need not be criticized.” Here my self-assigned task is to constantly ask myself whether it is truly unnecessary to fight these forms of pain elimination.

I carefully avoid using phrases like “there is pain elimination that need not be criticized” or “there is pain elimination that must not be criticized.” I exercise this caution because the instant such words pass your lips a trap is laid. When you create the categories of “types of pain elimination that need not be criticized” and “types of pain elimination that must not be criticized,” all sorts of instances of pain elimination are certain to be given clever rationales, be justified, and roll into these categories one after another like storm-tossed waves hitting the shore. Painless civilization will devise attacks aimed at the opening in our minds created when we think how comfortable it would be if the pain elimination we engage in were “pain elimination that need not

be criticized” or “pain elimination that must not be criticized.” Anyone who divides pain elimination into two categories must be wary of this trap.

With this understanding in place, I would like to take this consideration a bit further. Managing human beings and nature is not to be criticized *per se*. In ancient civilizations, for example, humanity had to manage the floodwater of rivers in order to find a way to survive. I am not criticizing the management of human beings and nature under these circumstances as an instance of “pain elimination.” Even in today’s society, there are impoverished or unfortunate people who cannot ensure a minimum standard of living without thoroughly managing their own lifestyles (and the lifestyles of those close to them), and I am not criticizing the management such people undertake as “pain elimination.” When people who are so worn out by the burden of things like their own illness or the care of a loved one that they no longer know why they go on living attempt to reduce their own suffering, I do not criticize these efforts with the term “pain elimination.”

What I unequivocally criticize are people who, even though they have already escaped a state of affairs in which they must “find a way to survive,” still push ahead with making everything around them painless under various pretexts, in exchange lose sight of the meaning of life, become “frigid” or unable to feel the “joy of life,” and try to turn a blind eye to what is happening around them. I also, of course, unequivocally criticize the modern societies that systematically create this kind of situation.

My target is the pathology of those who try to hold on to what they have and those who try to avert their eyes from what they are doing, the pathology of those who are enthralled to



the point of not even being able to recognize their pathology as a pathology, and the modern societies that prevent this pathology from being identified. This pathology is also one from which I myself have suffered, and from which even now I have not managed to escape. And it is a pathology of which I suspect most of those reading these words are not free. In the remaining chapters of this book I examine this pathology of painless civilization as thoroughly as I can.

In this text I focus on the philosophy of painless civilization. It is a book that must be supplemented by works on “the history of painless civilization,” “the sociology of painless civilization,” and other aspects of this phenomenon to be written in the future. Modern society is composed of various social groups and strata with differing interests, and there is a great deal of diversity in the role played by “pain elimination” in these different contexts. Here I can only consider this phenomenon at the level of the broad framework of the movement toward painlessness of “society as a whole,” but it goes without saying that sociological analysis targeting each subgroup and social stratum with greater precision is also required.

This is not a text that preaches a norm of “this is how you should live” to its readers. Tools for luring people in from the outside and breaking them down or transforming them must not be used. Painless civilization theory must emerge only as knowledge for the sake of dialogue with the self, transforming the self from the inside, calling out to others on this basis, and transforming society a little bit at a time.

Today the telltale signs of the emergence of painless civilization have already begun to appear in the society in which we live. This is not something that is going to happen in

the distant future. It is already occurring quietly all around us. Take a look around you at today's society. Are the signs of painless civilization not indeed visible everywhere? Have you yourself not been caught in this trap? Is our society not indeed leading the pack in the rush toward painless civilization?

\*My painless civilization theory owes a great deal to the work of earlier thinkers. The thought of Adorno, Horkheimer, and other members of the Frankfurt School, in which it is asserted that human beings have tried to control "internal nature" and "external nature" through instrumental reason and as a result have lost sight of the purpose of life, is another perspective that captures a modern society bent on becoming painless. Erich Fromm, who later broke away from this school, gave an incisive depiction of modern people who put themselves in the hands of large organizations in order to avoid having to face the isolation and angst of modernity. Here individuals become cogs in the workings of these organizations, discard joy in exchange for momentary pleasure, and are thrilled by the expectation of death rather than the expectation of life. In *Brave New World* Aldous Huxley describes a similar state of affairs in the form of science-fiction. People are selected in advance to be born using reproductive technologies, and are given as much youth and pleasure as possible. Their ability to criticize the current state of affairs is taken away by various manipulations. In such a society opposition is never anything more than entertainment. Michel Foucault's theory of power also captures the move toward

painlessness in modern society. His view, in which anonymous power is reproduced day after day in every corner of society, is a precursor to the idea of the “desire of the body.”

I will examine the approaches taken by these thinkers in later chapters, and here touch only on the pioneering writings of Shōzō Fujita. In 1985 Fujita published a short text entitled “Totalitarianism Toward ‘Comfort.’”<sup>9</sup> Fujita called the trend that is currently dominating our society “comfortism.” People want to eradicate everything that causes pain, and attempt to “remove the origin of that which calls forth discomfort itself.” We are afraid of encountering and interacting with unpleasant things, and try to avoid acknowledging this fear itself. As a result, we have lost the feeling of “joy.” What we must do to solve this problem is bring back the “fulfillment” that comes from “the joy of self-overcoming and a calmness that includes a certain amount of patience or forbearance.”

In this way Shōzō Fujita observed Japanese society in the 1980s and picked up on its movement toward painlessness with great sensitivity. He had an excellent understanding of what is happening. But he saw “joy” as the “delight” achieved after “step by step self-overcoming,” a different idea from the “joy of life” found in my painless civilization theory. Regarding the battle against painlessness, too, surely it is not enough to merely reclaim fulfillment (see Chapter Four of this book).

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<sup>9</sup> Shōzō Fujita, “Totalitarianism Toward ‘Comfort,’” in *Experiences of the Era of Totalitarianism*, Misuzu Shobo, 1995, pp.3-15 (藤田省三『全体主義の時代経験』みすず書房).

End of Chapter One

## Afterword – 2021

The original Japanese book consists of eight chapters, and this volume is an introduction to the theory of painless civilization I develop in it. I was for a long time reluctant to translate this work into English because I was not fully satisfied with the ending of the last chapter (Chapter 8). In 2016, I finally decided to translate the whole book and asked Robert Chapeskie to undertake an English translation. I want to deeply thank him for his beautiful work. Translations of succeeding chapters will be published in the not-so-distant future.

The following is a provisional table of contents of forthcoming chapters:

### Chapter 2: Condition of Love in a Painless Civilization

1. Emergence of “Quality Control” of Life
2. Selective Abortion and Conditional Love
3. What is Unconditional Love?
4. Love in a Painless Civilization
5. Sex and Self Injury
6. Two Strategies of Painless Civilization

### Chapter 3: Painless Stream

1. In a Huge Whirlpool
2. Into Whom Is the Knife Stuck?
3. Painless Civilization’s Various Methods of Attack
4. The Fight Between the Desire of the Body and the

## Desire of Life

5. Three Dimensions of Being Caught in One's Own Trap
6. Where Is the Enemy?

## Chapter 4: Self-Dismantling in the Darkness

1. "I" as a Starting Point
2. Dismantling Self-Made Traps at the Level of Society
3. Dismantling "Domination by Co-Dependency"
4. Identity and the Central Axis
5. In the Case of Myself
6. The Meaning of Encounters
7. Love as an Endless Process
8. Absolute Solitude

## Chapter 5: From the Desire of the Body to the Desire of Life

1. "Desire of the Body" and "Desire of Life"
2. Going Through Pain and Suffering
3. Erotic Encounters
4. Against the Expansion of Territory
5. Chain of Predation
6. Prenatal Testing as an Example
7. Body, Life, and Intellect
8. Dismantling the Whole Civilization

## Chapter 6: The Trap of Naturalized Technology

1. Double-Controlled Structures
2. Landscape Immersion
3. Invasion of the "Sacred Place"
4. Exposing the Hidden Side of Nature
5. The Meaning of Nature in a Painless Civilization
6. A Strategy for Collapsing

## Chapter 7: My Own Death and Painless Civilization

1. Reflections on Death
2. Fear of Death
3. Why is Death Frightening?
4. My Own Death as an Event
5. My Own Death as an Idea
6. The Central Axis Tube

## Chapter 8: Painless Civilization as a Self-Healing System

1. Capitalism and Painless Civilization
2. Reconsidering Desire
3. A Study of Flowering
4. The Idea of Predation and the Wisdom of Returning to the Universe
5. The Central Axis Circuit Web
6. Pain Elimination Devices
7. Dismantling Pain Elimination Devices
8. A Self-Healing System
9. The Fight Against the Self-Healing System
10. Penetrator

I am now thinking about writing a long ninth chapter that would provide a conclusion for the book as a whole, first in Japanese and then in English. The existing eight chapters were written in my 40s, a comparatively immature age as a philosopher. Having entered my 60s, I now believe that I can describe the true features of painless civilization against the backdrop of the latest academic discourse surrounding this topic.

At the same time, *Painless Civilization* is also a book for

young people. It is a young spirit breathing inside me that made me write this text filled with ardent passion and eroticism. It was a happy surprise that the YouTube channel Wisecrack quoted sentences from *Painless Civilization* in their video *The Philosophy of ONE PUNCH MAN* released in 2017. A lot of young viewers who watched it contacted me and said they wished to read a translation. With the publication of this book I will finally be able to share my thoughts with them.

*Painless Civilization* is the second book of my “Life Studies” trilogy.

Book 1

*How to Live in a Post-Religious Age* (1996, in Japanese)

Book 2

*Painless Civilization* (2003, this book)

Book 3

*Confessions of a Frigid Man: A Philosopher’s Journey into the Hidden Layers of Men’s Sexuality* (2005, 2017)

*Confessions of a Frigid Man* has been translated into English and is downloadable from the Internet as an open access book. The translation of *How to Live in a Post-Religious Age* is to be published in the near future.

I also have another series called the “Philosophy of Life” trilogy.

Book 1

*Manga Introduction to Philosophy: An Exploration of Time, Existence, the Self, and the Meaning of Life* (2013, 2021)



Book 2

*Philosophy of Birth Affirmation* (To be published)

Book 3

*What Is Philosophy of Life?* (The first part, *Is It Better Never to Have Been Born?*, was published in 2020 in Japanese.)

The English translation of *Manga Introduction to Philosophy* is downloadable as an open access book. The other two books are yet to be completed in Japanese and will be translated in the future.

Masahiro Morioka

August 6, 2021.



## About the Author

Masahiro Morioka, Ph.D., is a professor at Waseda University, where he teaches philosophy and ethics. His specialties include philosophy of life, bioethics, gender studies, and civilization studies. He was born in Kochi Prefecture, Japan, in 1958. He graduated from the University of Tokyo and worked for the International Research Center for Japanese Studies and Osaka Prefecture University before coming to Waseda. He is considered by many to be one of the leading figures in contemporary Japanese philosophy.

Email address: <http://www.lifestudies.org/feedback.html>

Webpage: <http://www.lifestudies.org/>

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



## Painless Civilization 2

Painless Stream and the Fate of Love

Open Access Book

Tokyo Philosophy Project (2023)

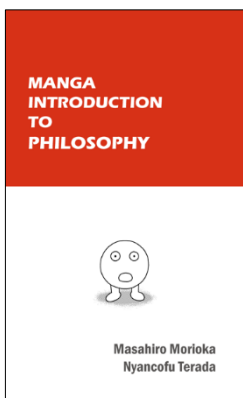
**Freely downloadable from:**

<https://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/painless02.pdf>

This is the English translation of Chapters Two and Three of *Painless Civilization*, which was published in Japanese in 2003. In this volume, I examine the problems of painless civilization from the perspective of philosophical psychology and ethics. I discuss how the essence of love is transformed in a society moving toward painlessness and how the painless stream penetrates each of us and makes us living corpses.

In order to tackle the problems of painless civilization, we must look inside our inner world because the “desire of the body” that lurks within us is the ultimate cause of our society’s movement toward painlessness. Love and the meaning of life are the central topics of discussion in the following chapters.

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



# Manga Introduction to Philosophy

An Exploration of Time, Existence, the Self, and the Meaning of Life

Open Access Book

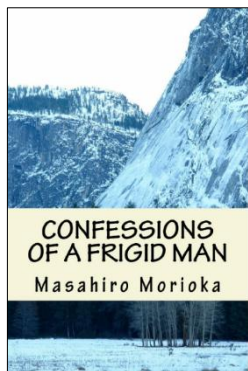
Tokyo Philosophy Project (2021)

**Freely downloadable from:**

<https://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/mangaphilosophy.pdf>

As the title says, this book is an introduction to philosophy. I tried to write about questions like “What is philosophy?” and “What does it mean to think philosophically” for a general readership. This is not a book that presents easy-to-understand explanations of the theories of famous philosophers. Instead, I have tried to express as clearly as possible how I myself think about four major topics: “time,” “existence,” “I,” and “life.” By following this route, the reader will be led directly to the core elements of philosophical thought.

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



### Confessions of a Frigid Man

A Philosopher's Journey into the  
Hidden Layers of Men's Sexuality

Open Access Book

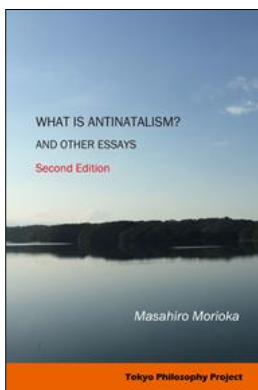
Tokyo Philosophy Project (2017)

**Freely downloadable from:**

<http://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/frigid.pdf>

The most striking feature of this book is that it was written from the author's first person perspective. The author is a professor who teaches philosophy and ethics at a university in Japan, and in this book he talks about his own sexual fetishism, his feeling of emptiness after ejaculation, and his huge obsession with young girls and their developing female bodies. He undertakes a philosophical investigation of how and why sexuality took such a form within a person who had grown up as a "normal," heterosexual man.

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



# What Is Antinatalism? And Other Essays Second Edition

Philosophy of Life in  
Contemporary Society

Open Access Book

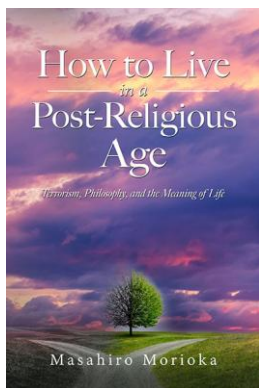
Tokyo Philosophy Project (2021,  
2024)

**Freely downloadable from:**

<https://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/antinatalism.pdf>

This book is a collection of essays on the philosophy of life's meaning in contemporary society. Topics range from antinatalism, meaning of life, the trolley problem, to painless civilization. I am now writing a comprehensive philosophy book on those topics, but it will take several years to complete; hence, I decided to make a handy book to provide readers with an outline of the philosophical approaches to the meaning of life that I have in mind.

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



### How to Live in a Post-Religious Age

Terrorism, Philosophy, and the  
Meaning of Life

Open Access Book

Tokyo Philosophy Project (2025)

**Freely downloadable from:**

<https://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/howtolive.pdf>

This is the translation of a 1996 Japanese bestseller that addresses terrorism from the viewpoints of philosophy and the meaning of life. I do not believe in a religion, but I cannot acquire the meaning of life through science. How can I live in a post-religious age?

In the spring of 1995, the Aum cult released a chemical weapon in the Tokyo subway system, killing and injuring many people. The incident shocked society because there were many young scientists from elite universities among the cult's high-ranking followers. Why did an activity that began as a search for the meaning of life end in unprecedented terrorism with poison gas? As someone who was once an aspiring scientist and turned into a philosopher, I tried hard to find out where and why they went wrong. This is a book in which a philosopher sincerely asks young readers to think about what it really means to live in a society where no one clearly knows what to believe in.