



# THE SEAMLESS GARMENT

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Second Extract From *Freedom The Only End.*

THE scientific background sketched out in the preceding chapter gives, of course, little hint of the spiritual advantages which should flow from the establishment of a natural world, and speculation on this matter must be left to the poet and philosopher. One problem, however, is a burning one in the world today and has such a definite connection with the monopoly system that it is worth our while to linger a short time on it now.

Most people will, I think, agree that the famous Cartesian dualism between body and soul, matter and thought, which has dogged the heels of philosophy during the last three centuries, is at the root of most of our spiritual trouble and that its healing would probably, in the long run, heal the human race. The conception of man, held during the Middle Ages, when monopoly was at least not so highly concentrated as in modern times, was that of a unified personality, body and soul, passing through the drama of life from birth to death with undivided personality. So firmly was this belief held that, according to Christian dogma, not only in birth, growth and death, but also in an eternal rebirth, this unity was preserved. Christ himself, the incarnation of the most high God, came down on earth and was born, grew and died, rising again the third day with his mortal body, with which he ascended, once for all, into Heaven.

The background to this was the spring resurrection of natural life, the rebirth of the vegetation God when the winter was over at Easter. Countless myths of Osiris and Isis, of Dionysus, of Demeter and Persephone, not to mention the whole Greek tragic drama, constitute this background, which is the oldest rhythm in the world. Further back still we can see its origin, biologically speaking, in the fruit itself which, dying in order to produce life, scatters fresh seeds for the oncoming year. This rhythm of nature, of tragic drama and of religion is the oldest and strongest tradition of the human race — the spiritual epic of mankind since the world began.

Preserved intact throughout the agricultural ages and reappearing under many forms in many civilisations, it suffered its first defeat on the threshold of modern times. The ancient and medieval Christian rhythm which includes both *soul* and *body* in one indissoluble process

was transformed, in the philosophy of Descartes, into a mere arithmetical addition, the sum of two separate and incompatible substances. These were *soul* on the one hand — thinking substance (mind) — and *body* on the other hand — extended substance (matter); neither were to be considered in any degree as rhythmical or organic.

Yet plainly enough it cannot be just one man, Descartes, however clever he may have been, who made so great a cleavage in human life, and he himself and his philosophy must surely be the reflection of something deeper. A little consideration will show easily enough that the great cleavage between the Middle Ages and the post-Renaissance era of Descartes was the transition from a comparatively individualistic conception of society to a more totalitarian Tudor or Bourbon despotism; from a feudal, localised, anarchic structure of life to a monopolised and centralised (though benevolent) despotism. The background of this tremendous development was the land-grabbing of the Reformation period and the ensuing peasant revolts in England, France and Germany; the shift in property relationships which left the land in the hands of a few, and nothing but their labour in the hands of the many.

The Wars of religion in France and Germany and the Civil War in England are the political reflections of this economic shift, at the back of which, as we have seen, stood the growth of land monopoly in this epoch. Cut off from direct contact with nature through the new property relationships, the new masses realised indirectly that something fundamental had receded from them. The bourgeois, growing rich in the spreading towns, realised the same thing from an opposite position and the first dim outline of that modern dichotomy, town and country, emerges into reflection from the subconscious minds of man.

If now we ask the obvious question why Descartes, brought up by the Jesuit fathers on good Catholic lines, should have thought he could easily split the world into two, the answer is not hard to find. True, there are subjective reasons which depend on Descartes' own nature and nothing else, such as his predilection for Greek Stoicism as a philosophy, his mathematical ability and his very abstract turn of mind. These personal

qualities explain something; but they do not explain all, and we must remember that in his day Stoicism was in any case a popular philosophy. It had good reason to be, amidst civil war, massacre, heretic burning and persecution. Moreover, we know that the classical sciences of the epoch, astronomy and mathematics, were *par excellence* abstract sciences, and the "living" sciences, such as biology, chemistry and psychology, were not yet developed.

But why, you may ask, were these two sciences so predominant and actually experiencing their "classical" era — by which I mean passing through their era of greatest comparative popularity? Partly, no doubt, because the Greek knowledge lately revived had left them in a fairly advanced state; but also, I think, for some deeper reason. Why did precisely these two, and of these two particularly astronomy, receive such a marvellous impetus. Why did Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo spring up about this time and revolutionise this branch of science, and why, above all, was their work regarded as so very revolutionary and so very dangerous to the established order?

The answer is probably that in the fight that was going on between feudal economy and the new land owning system of the Reformation, any spiritual weapon which could be used against feudal power was bound to be popular — and astronomy, of all spiritual weapons, was at that time the most adaptable. Rome was then the great symbol of feudal monopoly, and she claimed not only the whole earth, but the universe itself, in the centre of which Ptolemy, as by divine inspiration, had placed the earth, with Rome as its centre. Weaken this monopoly "in the spirit" and you weakened the "body" too. Destroy spiritually its claim to represent the universe and you weakened its monopoly claim on earth. This the astronomers were doing with unerring aim and efficiency and the Protestant reformers and the rising class of private land owners rejoiced behind them.

Of course, the scientists were not aware of this background to their activities and their motives were, as individuals, purely scientific, but the fact that the scientific interest of the age was directed in astronomical directions, that money was spent in research in that direction more than others, was due to the background described. When the discoveries were made, they were bound to have an effect and individuals were bound to suffer, as Copernicus and Galileo discovered to their cost.

We are probably justified then in maintaining that Descartes, in dividing the human and cosmic life into two separate and irreconcilable halves, was only doing what, on a larger and more practical scale, had been done before him. A strong state and a subject people, an enclosed land system and landless labourers, a new nobility of wealth and a poor class of worker were the real strata of the world into which he was both and of which he recognised the irreconcilability. Having

made the division he took the psychology of the society around him, to which attention has already been drawn, and fused it into his conception of the Deity. God is no longer felt as incarnate since the land (nature) has been taken from the people and has receded far away. And so He becomes the Calvinist God of Terror. Later He is the God of Big Business who is personal to each individual and reflects His inner power over his workers. He reflects also the *Smiles' Self-help* philosophy of the early capitalists, who emphasised thrift in order to amass savings and invest.

On this sort of God the modern world depended and the machines that grew up in its service multiplied the product of work till capital heaped up mountain-high. But it was not the sacrificial God of the Easter stories, nor even the gentle Christ of the Incarnate Word. Nature was exiled along with the crucified God, as the romantic reaction, by its attempt to respiritualise nature, tried to reveal. Descartes had supplied in theory what the industrialists were supplying in the market place. He furnished the theory of the machine, they the actual object; and his frightful hypothesis, that animals were really automata, came to life in the *Frankenstein* of mass production. Descartes in dividing soul and body was simply following the model given him by the world. The subject "divided" mirrored the object "divided". Behind all wealth lies the source of wealth and if man only returns to his natural right the seamless tunic is restored.



So it comes about that under monopolistic conditions, with the growth of unnatural big towns and mass production, a shift in emphasis has been made from the individual to the mass and that a collectivist philosophy now rules the world. Men still believe in the rhythm of birth, death and rebirth, but they apply it not so much to the individual as to the group, and they talk, almost from childhood onwards, of the class struggle. But for the rending of the "seamless tunic" of the universe, which led to the dichotomy of Descartes in metaphysics, to the divorce of the machine from nature, we should have the natural birth, growth and death of industries and enterprises which must come into being and pass out of it according to the law of progress, but only this and nothing more. There would be no blockage leading to war and revolution, but only the slow individual life and death fundamental to nature. Stage coaches must give way to railways, parchment to paper, sailing ships to steamships, and no power on earth can prevent production moving to the places where it may most successfully be carried on. But the transition would be slow and devastating and labour would be absorbed in the new sources of wealth. The world included (continued on inside back cover)