

تفسير القرآن ومواجهة العصر

فتح فيحز الإمام محمد عبده

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(ملخص)

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حاولت هذه الدراسة في قسمها الأول الذي نشر في العدد السابق أن تستكشف منهج الأستاذ الإمام محمد عبده في مواجهة العصر، بدعوته إلى تجديد تفسير القرآن الكريم منذ أواخر القرن التاسع عشر، مع الاجتهاد في ذلك استجابة لتحديات العصر التي أملت عليه، وعلى زعماء الإصلاح في بلاد إسلامية أخرى في ذلك الوقت هذه الدعوة، رفضاً لحجية التقليد الذي تمسك به كثير من معاصريه، والذي قيل إنه سبب تأخر المسلمين.

وقد رأينا في ذلك الاجتهاد طموحاً إلى "البحث عن معيار" - كما جاء في العنوان السابق لهذه الدراسة - يعين على هذه المواجهة، فهذا الاجتهاد عنده هو المعيار الأهم الذي يمكن أن يهتدى به المسلمون حين يتهددهم الخطر في مواجهة مشكلات العصر، كما يرى محمد عبده.

وفي القسم الثاني من هذه الدراسة الذي ينشر في هذا العدد من المجلة بعنوان "البحث عن مركب" نعرض لمبدأ آخر في منهجه يعبر عن سعى ثقافي جاد في هذه المواجهة، حيث يدعو إلى ما نسميه "المركب الثقافي" الذي يمثل حقيقة الموقف الاجتماعي للإسلام في مواجهة العصر، كما تنص على ذلك نصوصه المقدسة، وكما عرفته القرون الأولى من هذه الحضارة، وهو مركب يقيم الفاعلية الإسلامية في نشاطها العملي والتعبدي كليهما في وحدة روحية واحدة، بعد أن هددتها عوامل الانقسام في العصر الحديث بين القديم المعبر عن الانتماء الروحي والهوية التاريخية، وبين الجديد المتصل بمؤثرات الاحتكاك الثقافي والنفوذ الأجنبي، كما نرى في هذا القسم الثاني من الدراسة.

تعرض الدراسة، بعد هذه المقدمات، لضروب من التصورات المهمة لطبيعة المركب الثقافي الذي كان سائداً في عصر محمد عبده، كما تشير إلى بعض المؤرخين الذين تنبهوا إلى مظاهر هذه الأزمة الحضارية التي واجهها العالم الإسلامي في

(*) أستاذ الدراسات الإسلامية والثقافة العربية - كلية الآداب جامعة عين شمس.

العصر الحديث . من هؤلاء الباحثين المستشرق الكبير "ه. أ. جب" الذى يتحدث عن "مركب ثقافى إسلامى" ظل يجمع بين النزعة الروحية لدى المتصوفة والطابع الواقعى لدى الفقهاء على مدى قرون منذ أن أحدث الغزالى هذا المركب الجامع الذى أنشأ توازنا توفيقيا بين الفريقين ، بعد صراع طويل.

قد استطاع الغزالى الذى كان صوفيا ومتكلما وفقهيا فى الوقت نفسه أن يجمع بين الحقيقة والشريعة على اصطلاحهم ، وأن يؤسس لهذا المركب ذى النزعة التوفيقية بين الظاهر والباطن تأسيسا استمر عدة قرون . ولقد كان من ثمرة ذلك إقبال أهل السنة على التصوف ، وتعميق معنى الشريعة فى قلوب المتصوفة ، ثم تزايد على الزمن إقبال العامة والخاصة على التصوف إقبالا شديدا ، وزادت بدعهم مع تعدد فرقهم ومذاهبهم مما جعل فقهاء الحنابلة يدعون إلى رفض ذلك وإعلان الثورة عليه باسم السلفية الوهابية التى تصدت لشطحات الطرق الصوفية ، ولما أدخلوه على الدين من أشياء لم تكن فيه من قبل مثل نظرياتهم فى الحلول ووحدة الوجود والفناء والاتحاد وغير ذلك مما لا ينطبق - وفقا لأراء الوهابيين - على مبادئ الشريعة الإسلامية .

وبهذا الموقف تم انقسام المركب الثقافى التاريخى على نفسه ، انقسامًا يتصل بطبيعة التطور المذهبى للفرق الإسلامية ، وليس استجابة لمؤثرات خارجية . وهكذا ينفى المستشرق "جب" أى تأثير خارجى فى هذا التطور باعتباره مسألة داخلية محضة فى تاريخ الفرق الإسلامية وتصوراتها الدينية .

أما المستشرق "ن . صفران" فإنه يتحدث عن مركب آخر هو المركب التاريخى المتجانس بين الواقعى والروحى فى المجتمع الإسلامى : وقد تعرض هذا المركب فى رأيه لعدم التوازن نتيجة لتطور الجانب العملى لدى المسلمين ، وتأثرهم الإيجابى المستمر بطبيعة الحياة الغربية ، وما أحدثه ذلك من تقدم فى وسائل الحياة العملية ، وذلك فى مقابل الثبات التقليدى للجانب الدينى من هذا المركب . وبذلك زادت المفارقة بين الثابت والمتحول فى هذا المركب الثقافى الذى ظل فعلا طوال سنين طويلة ، وهكذا حدث هذا الانقسام فى رأى صفران تحت مؤثرات الاحتكاك بالجانب المادى من الحضارة الغربية .

ويقدم أستاذنا محمد العلائى تفسيرا شبيها بما يقدمه صفران ، ولكنه بدلا من أن يشير إلى المفارقة بين الجانب المادى المتطور والجانب الدينى المتجمد نتيجة لوقف الاجتهاد منذ زمن بعيد ، كما يزعم صفران - يعتقد أن هذا الجانب العملى من حياة المسلمين كان مظهرا لإخفاق كبير فى تاريخ الحضارة الإسلامية ، فليست المسألة مسألة تأثر إيجابى بالغرب ، بل إن العالم الإسلامى بهذا التأثير قد كشف عن

فقد كفايته الذاتية لأول مرة فى تاريخه ، بعد أن ظلت الثقافة الإسلامية مركبا متوازنا بين الجانبين العملى والصوفى فى الحياة .

ذلك أن بواكير النهضة الحديثة فى القرن التاسع عشر قد جعلت العالم الإسلامى يعتمد إلى حد كبير على غيره فى شئون الحياة من حرب وتجارة وصناعة . ولقد كان عسيرا على هذا العالم أن يفقد باطنه كما فقد ظاهره ، فضلا عن أنه نقل عن العالم الغربى ظاهره دون باطنه ، حتى أصبح هذا المركب الثقافى إسلامى الباطن غربى الظاهر ، وبهذا تحطمت الوحدة الثقافية فيه ، فى رأى العلأى .

وهنا يأتى دور محمد عبده الذى كان قد سبق هؤلاء الباحثين بالتنبيه إلى طبيعة المشكلة والدعوة إلى مركب ثقافى جديد يقوم على وحدة شاملة للجانبين الروحى والعملى من حياة المسلمين ، كما كان الأمر دائما مؤكدا أن الدين الإسلامى لا يقف بالعقيدة عند الحد الذى يتصل بالإلهيات والوصايا الأخلاقية فحسب ، بل يتجاوز ذلك إلى التشريع المنظم لكل العلاقات الإنسانية ، فالمعنى الاجتماعى مقصود فى شعائره التعبدية ، كما أن المعنى التعبدى متغلغل فى معاملاته الدنيوية ، لا ينفصل هذا عن ذاك ، كما هو واضح فى نصوصه الكريمة .

إن هذه الرؤية لذلك المركب الثقافى على هذا النحو تمثل وحدة الحقيقة الإسلامية فى صناعة الحياة والعمران ظاهرا وباطنا ، كما يراها محمد عبده ، إنه مركب يقيم الفاعلية الإسلامية فى نشاطها العملى والتعبدى فى وحدة روحية واحدة بعد أن هددتها عوامل الانقسام فى العصر الحديث .

* The examples of these attempts in Goldziher, op. cit., Arabic translation, p. 317.

* Ibid., op. cit., p. 137.

a mere rational response to mundane earthly conditions, discrete from the spiritual need, but an inner pious response to the religious feeling.

In the general evaluation of 'Abduh's interpretation, we have to admit that in showing the social aspect of the Qur'anic idea, he was usually depending heavily on earlier works. This in itself was not a defect because it maintained, in one way or another, the continuity of Islamic thought. Besides, for a man of 'Abduh's background it was almost impossible to free himself from earlier traditions. What we appreciate in his thought here is his careful selection from a heap of traditions, the suitable idea which fits with the new circumstances. This was not an easy task if it had to be appealing to modern society. But 'Abduh appears more original wherever he is free from the medieval apparatus of interpretation, especially in his essays and lectures.

The ultimate objective of his thought was to revive the social aspect of Islam. This in fact could provide the Muslim society - at least for the time being - with a criterion, by which the process of change resulting from the impact of an alien civilization could be controlled, and result in a synthesis that could keep the Muslim mind free from perpetual conflict.

'Abduh's assertion of the harmony between science and religion originates also from his desire to establish this synthesis. In various aspects, 'Abduh tried to provide the scientific thought with a spiritual basis and metaphysical background, either by shifting the motive of approaching science from man's desire to master nature to man's obedience to God's command to do so, or by trying to read into the Qur'anic text what is regarded as modern scientific thought.²⁶ This attitude on 'Abduh's part was actually in line with traditional thought of Islam but in spite of that, what appeared wrongly a contradiction between some religious statements and the new discoveries of science created a great conflict in the Muslim mind. 'Abduh's effort to create a harmonious relationship between religion and science was in fact directed to free the Muslim mind from that conflict. This aspect of his thought was primarily serving the psychological part of his contemporary Muslims. It is because of this fact that Horani finds that: "his writing was directed not so much to convince Muslims doubtful whether modern civilization was acceptable, as to men of modern culture and experience who doubted whether Islam, or indeed any revealed religion, was valid as a guide to life."²⁷ It was this group who suffered the dilemma of the paradox.

Various aspects of his thought can be analyzed from this angle, the urgent need for reformation in different departments of Muslim life was granted an inner metaphysical basis. Reformation is no longer

²⁶ See examples of these attempts in Goldziher, *op. cit.*, Arabic translation, p. 337.

²⁷ Horani, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

to achieve a harmonious correlation between reason and revelation. When 'Abduh exalted human intelligence, he in fact was trying to shift the center of gravity from its pure rational plane to its spiritual atmosphere. He praised the prophets as the most excellent intelligent human beings and considered prophecy the perfect state of man's perception of the world.²² But he distinguished between two domains accessible and inaccessible to reason²³ and did not find revelation and reason as antipodal, but as complementary. For him both religion and reason are good and reliable; yet neither one can sufficiently and safely substitute for the other, nor should it violate the rights of the other.²⁴ 'Abduh believes in innumerable possibilities at the disposal of reason. "It has golden opportunities and an enormous task in the field of the Qur'an and religion in general, since certainty in these matters is enjoined. It can reach an independent, sound judgment in cases of moral and ethical problems, and distinguish between the good and the bad by virtue of thinking about their results in the material psychological and spiritual realms."²⁵

Although the correlation between reason and revelation as complementary is more or less in line with the traditional thought of Islam, the thesis needed to be repeated and emphasized to combine the two extreme divisions of society into one Islamic synthesis.

²² See Jomier, *Le Commentaire Coranique du Manar*, p. 73, Paris, 1954.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁴ 'Abd al 'Ati, *The Concept of freedom in Muhammed 'Abduh*, a thesis presented to McGill University 1957, p. 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Moreover, Western intellectualism, being received passively and away from its historical milieu, could only enjoy in the Muslim society a shadowy lifeless existence; "nevertheless, by virtue of its association with Western prestige, it produced a disintegrating effect on the emotional values of the traditional Muslim culture."²¹

By this quick review of the historical situation, one can see the cultural paradox which endangered Islamic civilization by that time. On the one hand, it was impossible to stop the process of change which was begun by Muhammed 'Ali, both for the dynamism which it had acquired for itself and the general feeling of a necessary change. On the other hand, by the ever increasing contact with Western civilization, the traditional Islamic cultural pattern was bound to split as we have seen. It is here that 'Abduh again found his role, trying to create a new Islamic synthesis that could keep the process of change at work and at the same time avoid any fracture in the Islamic cultural pattern. Again, he could not find a better means than a call for re-interpretation of the Qur'an. He tried to read in its text more than the traditional interpretation would permit, something that can fit the new circumstances. By this attitude 'Abduh in fact was trying desperately to transfer the center of gravity again to its metaphysical plane, which had been its natural place in the Islamic synthesis. Man's relation to reality and his victorious control over nature were to be spiritualized again and endowed with a theocratic character and theocentric metaphysical basis. This was in my opinion the reason for his attempts

²¹ 'Ala'i, *op. cit.*,

world, thereby imparting a new arrangement to its internal economical activities.”¹⁸

Beside that breakdown which split the Islamic synthesis, causing its practical ideal to depart from its theocentric metaphysical basis, there were other factors of disintegration manifesting themselves even in this borrowed aspect. The prestige which the alien ideology enjoyed after its immigration to a different environment bestowed on it an overwhelming authoritative character, as we said, so much so that it resulted in a disposition “to apply to the whole of the standard of judgment, characteristic of a certain part of the whole, that is to say the power and certainty which characterized the physical sciences came to be projected on the other department of the knowledge.”¹⁹ Beside that, the vagueness of Western intellectualism, as presented to Muslim society by that time expanded the spiritual gap between the two divisions of society, by creating an impulsive, enthusiastic acceptance on one side, and naive rejection on the other. Furthermore, the fact that the first Muslim contact with Western civilization took the form of military dominion contributed in arousing an ambivalent feeling of admiration and antipathy; a feeling which resulted in a great strain and conflict in the Muslim mind by that time even in ‘Abduh’s appreciation of the British activities in Egypt.²⁰

¹⁸ Ala’i, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁰ Lord Cromer says of him he was a man of broad and enlightened views, who admitted the existent abuses under an oriental government, and recognized the necessity of European assistance in reform. Noted by C. C., Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, London, 1933, p. 64. This perhaps was the reason for the loose relationship between him and al-Afghani at last. A. Amin, *Zu’ama’ al-Islah* Cairo, 1948, p. 311.

might. But this seemed in conflict with the previous patterns and institutions. As an orientalist put it: "The power of science, of the West, seemed different from and in some ways more powerful than the power that his community (the Muslims) had."¹⁷ In order to face the challenge of power the Muslim had to adopt the technique, and he did not find much difficulty to rationalize that, but this in itself was seen as a declaration of Muslims' failure in regulating the external activities of their life. It was an expression of the lack of self-sufficiency since Muslims had to depend upon an alien ideology in their external life. This created a profound conflict between the two aspects of the Islamic synthesis by creating a society which was internally Islamic and externally Westernized.

This historical situation presented Muslim society with a real crisis demonstrating a collision between a traditional culture and a new civilization. As 'Ala'i puts it: "The Muslim world was placed between, on the one hand, history with its spiritual stability, emotional authority, and self-evident tradition, and on the other hand, Western ideology with its brilliant achievement, profound rationality and overpowering triumph. Being more accessible and easier of comprehension, the "material" side of Western civilization was first to exert its influential character (and to impose upon the Muslim world) the necessity of reorganizing an interdependence with the outside

¹⁷ W.C., Smith, *Islam*, p. 116.

the whole civilization of the West. The individual traits of the Western culture were about to be more readily admitted than that culture as a whole.¹⁴ This kind of influence began to cause a great transfer in the center of gravity in man's conception of life. Man's relation to reality began to be oriented towards energetic and effective contact with nature, and towards the scientific control over the conditions of outward experience.¹⁵ The overwhelming technological superiority, migrating to the Muslim world with a halo of power and prestige was apt to acquire an even more influential authoritative character than it possessed in its native environment.¹⁶ The individual traits of the Western civilization, as centering round man's role in history, threatened the Islamic synthesis to be split and to depart from its metaphysical foundation. An impact like that can be seen easily in Sayyid Ahmed Khan's claim that "Islam is nature and nature is Islam," the slogan which brought upon his head the wrath of Al-Afghani and his disciple 'Abduh.

An alien ideology, perhaps for the first time in Islam, began to regulate man's external activities and his conception of history. The governance of the universe ought to be now to man who could in an alien society create out of science a new technology and industrial

¹⁴ Toynbee in *The World and the West*, pp. 67-71, has aptly shown that a loose strand of cultural radiation may prove deadly when it is disengaged from the system within which it has been functioning hitherto and is set free to range abroad by itself in a different milieu. It is also worth consideration, in the Muslim case, his idea about the relation between the penetrative power of a strand of cultural radiation and its cultural value which is usually in inverse ratio. Although Toynbee by this attitude is forsaking the role of the historian for that of the prophet as Grunebaum has aptly shown in his criticism of Toynbee's doctrine, I would incline to adopt Toynbee's view as a guideline of the psychology of encounters, but not in the strict sense of the scientific rule.

¹⁵ Ala'i, *op. cit.*,

¹⁶ W.C., Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, Monter, ed., p. 116.

of life as a unified whole, as well as by the conception of divine activity in the sphere of history and nature.¹³ The ultimate value behind the Islamic pattern of culture, according to 'Ala'i, both in its regulative capacity and spiritual aspiration, both in affirming life and rejecting its sensuous world, remained theocentric in character and metaphysical in nature. The inner unity of this synthesis persisted as a unifying principle till the Muslim encounter with Western civilization which proved to be the most effective impact on the spiritual structure and the cultural pattern of Islam.

Whether the synthesis was a harmonious inner relation between the two extreme aspects of Islam, the transcendental and the personal, as Gibb maintained, or a kind of balanced correlation between a belief-system and material conditions, as Safran claimed; or even an inner theocentric metaphysical unity synthesizing the two principles, the practical and the pure as 'Ala'i believed, we cannot decide now. What is certain for us is the reality of the split which was taking place in the Islamic cultural pattern in Egypt by the time of 'Abduh. There was a danger of a kind of despiritualization trying to manifest in various departments of Egyptian life. The traditional metaphysical foundation of their culture, as Muslims, was threatened to be sapped by the new elements borrowed from an alien culture, always drawing after them other elements.

As Toynbee would expect –according to his theory– it was more disturbing for Muslim culture to borrow a lone element than to receive

¹³ *Ibid.*

to the degree of claiming that "the new tensions arose within Islam itself, by the operation of its own forces"⁸, that is to say that it is "quite untrue" that "the new factors were intrusions from without, impulses radiating out from Europe."⁹

Another attitude was maintained by Professor Safran who speaks of Islam's involvement in social and political life, noting that, while Egyptian society had undergone a very rapid change in the social and economical domain, under the renewed contact with the West, its belief system remained frozen creating an increasingly widening gap "between reality and ideology which undermined the existing political community and threatened to condemn Egyptian society to a permanent state of instability and tension."¹⁰

But Professor 'Ala'i speaks of an essential synthesis inherent in the Islamic system. According to him "the foundation of Islamic culture was a twofold synthesis, manifested in its moral energy in two ideals, namely the 'practical' and the 'pure' ".¹¹ Although in its practical ideal the synthesis was operating within a fragment of reality in regulating the outward activities, it was in essence the product of the existential tendency with its theocratic expansion.¹² It combined with the 'pure' ideal, the inner synthesis of Islam, as based upon the axiomatic conviction of the new religion, inspired by the conception

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Safran, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹¹ M. 'Ala' i, "The impact of Western civilization on the apperception of Islamic culture till the middle of the 20th century". *Annals of Faculty of Arts*. 'Ain Shams University. vol. 8m 1963, Cairo, p. 25.

¹² *Ibid.*

which had persisted for a long time. Scholars agree about this defect, but they differ concerning the nature and essence of that synthesis.

Professor Gibb speaks of a working agreement, between the mystical element and the orthodox doctrine, reaching its climax in the later centuries. This was a harmonious correlation and interaction synthesis in which the *sufi* brotherhoods cared for the personal religious needs of the people and gave full play to their religious emotions but were generally careful to avoid a clash with the orthodox theology. The doctors ('*Ulama*') and the theologians, on their side, entered freely into the *sufi* orders and there assisted to hold the balance against extreme pantheistic tendencies.⁶ But this equilibrium could not be maintained forever because this harmonious inner relation was accompanied by a relaxing attitude. This relaxation led to its usual consequence and the Islamic synthesis was tending to a lower standard. "The '*Ulama*' were being dragged in the wake of Sufis ... (and) theology was beginning to compromise with Sufi doctrine." A reaction to this downhill movement was bound to rise up violently and uncompromisingly.⁷

By this analysis Gibb interprets the breakdown of the Islamic harmonious synthesis, which was working out successfully during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His interpretation might be true concerning the emergence of the Wahhabi movement, in so much as it stood against the mystical innovations, but this cannot be generalized

⁶ H.A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, Chicago, 1950, p. 24.

⁷ *Ibid.*

economic opportunities attracted large numbers of foreigners "who had had an important role in the infusion of Western ideas and customs". The number of mission schools multiplied under Isma'il and their example stimulated the creation of communal and private schools. A large number of Syrian Christians who had studied in Christian missionary colleges in their own country and who now became pioneers in many fields of cultural endeavour were attracted to Egypt and founded the first Arabic daily newspaper³. The process was accelerated once more when closer contacts with Europe developed as a result of the opening of the Suez Canal. Finally by the ultimate occupation of Egypt by Britain in 1882, the exogenous forces of Westernization achieved primacy in the process.⁴

Thus by the time 'Abduh came to the scene the change was taking place in Egyptian society both in its civilization as well as in its culture. Although the physical aspect was more dramatic in its change, the intellectual aspect was imperceptibly dividing Egyptian society institutionally and spiritually. On the one side stood the religious schools with Al Azhar at their apex resisting all change, on the other, the modern schools founded on European model accepting all the ideas of modern Europe.⁵

The division was not only an external one dividing Egyptian society into two classes, this would have not been dangerous but it was more than that. Egyptian society lacked the Islamic synthesis

³ N. Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community*, Harvard, 1961, p. 35.

⁴ Abu-Lughud, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

⁵ Horani, *Arabic thought in the Liberal Age*, Oxford, 1962, p. 137-138.

MODERN CIVILIZATION AND QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION IN MUHAMMED 'ABDUH'S THOUGHT

Effat AL SHARQAWI*

2. THE QUEST FOR A SYNTHESIS

Beside *Ijtihad* as the Islamic criterion which M. 'Abduh advocated, as we have seen in the first part of this paper, there was another effort implicit in his works to create an Islamic synthesis after the traditional one was about to collapse. What we mean by the Islamic synthesis, and what happened to it would be clear by a quick review of the contemporary circumstances.

As early as the French invasion, Egypt began to gather some aspects of the experience of an alien civilization. The French expedition introduced the printing press, and the newspaper. It can be considered the first stimulus to modern Egyptian awareness of the West. The activities undertaken by Muhammed 'Ali, as an Egyptian response to this awareness began the change in the Egyptian society, especially in the physical aspect of civilization. Later on by Isma'il's effort to Westernize Egypt and his extreme interest in disseminating knowledge of French language,¹ the intellectual aspect of Western civilization began to be seen.² The process was accelerated when the

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¹ Abu Lughud, *Arab Re-discovery of Europe*, Princeton University press, 1963 p. 161.

² Although Isma'il's ideology was different from Muhammed 'Ali's, both efforts led to one harmonious result. The elements which M. 'Ali borrowed from an alien civilization led to others quite different from his own ideology. See an example of this process in A. Toynbee *The World and the West*, Oxford University Press 1953, pp. 75-78.

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Abul-Fazl Ibrahim, *Islamic Thought in the Modern World*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), p. 181.

Although Ibrahim's theory of Islamic thought is based on a dualism which he borrows from an alien civilization, it is still a valuable contribution to the study of Islamic thought. See an example of this in the work of the late Dr. Muhammad 'Abduh, *Islamic Thought in the Modern World*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), pp. 75-78.