

## ASIAN PHILOSOPHIES FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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### 1. Introduction

If we look at the basic streams of Greek-Judeo-Christian tradition, we see that death is still taken as a challenge that needs to be overcome. Facing impermanence and death in Asia is, however, profoundly different, gentler and less traumatic. An attitude of such maturity is supported by several thousands of years of spiritual tradition, which has developed philosophical views that allow every individual to face his/her eschatological life events. The European approach characterizes life and death as independent states, whereas the Asian line of thought usually presents them as parts of a life-death continuum where one element necessarily and expectedly always follows the other. It is, therefore, important to encourage intercultural communication in religion and philosophy, balancing the theoretical and the practical part. The universal foundations of religions and the philosophy of life and death may be pointed out and questioned. Simultaneously, the critical dimension and re-evaluation of various Ways of searching for “good life” today might be exposed to ensure a more vital role of religion and philosophy in contemporary debates on topics concerning impermanence (the experience of death, the accompanying of the dying, the problem of a high suicide rate, ethical dilemmas such as the right to euthanasia, abortion, etc.). The goal is to learn from Asian traditions and to draw the basic structural foundations for a different, more accepting attitude towards impermanence of a modern individual. The main condition of accomplishing the practical goal is the development of proper conceptual tools and methodology that will be transferable and as such able to contribute to the philosophical field as well as to the development of other areas. Many contemporary American and European palliative care centres already use Asian

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philosophical insights and methods in the accompanying of the dying. The historically theoretical dimension of the topic aims to introduce critical thinking to the reflection of the world (as it is today, full of conflicts, disorientation, globalization challenges, etc.) and by doing so contribute to preparing people to face complex life situations and challenges.

The topic elaborates first on the contrastive dimension between Chinese philosopher Mo Zi's universal love – his most important contribution to Chinese philosophy and culture – and what Robert Hartman – philosopher and axiologist, the founder of formal axiological science, the study of values – called intrinsic intelligence or our ability to love and be intuitive. We access this kind of value intelligence through “listening to our hearts.” When we are connected to this dimension of value intelligence, we feel a direct connection, with no boundaries or separation of our knowing into parts. We experience this intelligence directly; no objective analysis is required. It cannot even be described using words. Intrinsic values permit us to recognize the individual or situation as a whole, unique, one of a kind. It is the dimension of unconditional loving. How can modern world learn and benefit from Asian philosophical and religious traditions? We are born with value intelligence capacities, which operate throughout all our living contexts: in all cultures, races, ages, genders, and perhaps even in species. From this inner intelligence we develop our inner assumptions about reality. Can this be one of the founding pillars for building a harmonious world today?

## 2. Universal Love versus Intrinsic Intelligence

The position of the acting subject was a dominant point in the history of European philosophy and should, therefore, be questioned on account of its tendency to domination. One of the main philosophical themes in Mo Zi's philosophy is the concept of universal love which deserves inseparable unity between philosophical insight and meditation. Philosophy is, therefore, not developed only on an intellectual level but also on the physical level, since the truth is not only the way of thinking about the world but rather the way of existing in the world. Discovering the truth is an activity beyond the pure intellect, being a psycho-physical awareness in which all instances of knowledge are simultaneously practical and theoretical.

Problems of diversity, wisdom, and liberation became also the main concerns of philosophical school of Mohism. Confucius stressed the importance of benevolence (*ren*) in relation to ritual and rules of propriety

(li). In Confucianism, the self-realisation can be achieved and the wishes should be fulfilled in the specific ethical context. Daoism, famous for its use of paradox, which should bring the adept to a higher level of understanding and experiencing the reality, understood the Truth as *purity and sincerity of the highest degree*. The superior man is able to reach the Dao and one's own liberation through meditation, intuition, and congeniality with the feminine. The notion of reality in Daoism, therefore, brings into consideration new paradigms of understanding life and new sensibilities of the regenerated consciousness, which can be expressed only through paradox as a necessary tool for dealing with diversity, enriching us with it.

Paradox and various other arts of debate became central in various Asian philosophical schools and they could serve as the basis for putting into contrast various Chinese and European ways of approaching truth and achieving freedom through these philosophical methods. The aim is to raise questions decisive for anyone dealing with different cultures in any way. On that way, Mo Zi can show us multiple ways of the construction of a coherent sense of one's own Selfhood through a possible dialogue and point at the necessary limits of the overall love and tolerance.<sup>1</sup> Through transcending the Self for the sake of creative living and an attitude of love to others and to oneself, special emphasis is given on the mind/body continuum which does not leave any room for the devaluation of emotional (bodily) aspects. The topic is particularly important for the possible construction of the multicultural societies and can provide us with some self-knowing methods which might be helpful for practising love, respect, autonomy, and dignity together with various self-empowering methods.

When differences among the ontological categories (being, non-being, etc.) are denied in regard to certainty, new problems as well as original solutions to the old problems arise. Therefore, Mo Zi's demand for a radical negation as the basis for the achievement of certainty, Absolute Truth, is beyond the beginning and the end, Being and non-being, something and nothing. Being and non-being are just two aspects of the inexpressible Truth. Such a methodology and the paradox demand an intuitive structure of understanding which assures meaning in the combination of concepts which would otherwise be understood as logically inconsistent. Metaphorical thinking in the Chinese philosophical tradition is not understood as something inferior to conceptual thinking,

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<sup>1</sup>Mo Zi, *jian gu*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1954.

which is itself put into question, especially in the undertakings, such as the path to certainty. The demand for deontologisation has been strong. The notion of voidness, is precisely the one which tests the nature of various attachments (to the Ego, etc.). Therefore, the demand for discovery of the nature of non-attachment, which forms the basis of certainty, is posed. Certainty, acquired in such a way, opens up new perspectives of existence. When the enlightened one, the one who has reached the basis of certainty, sees everything in the light of voidness, protection against the appearance of ontological entities is established, which then opens up this astonishing realm of suchness of Being. Although this means a temptation, the concept of voidness can never be brought to the metaphysical level or reduced to ontology. The voidness, therefore, is not the antithesis to Being, neither is it the position between nothingness and Being. Voidness is transcendence of all standpoints and positions. It provides the certainty which leads to the liberation from thinking, and from substantiating the Self and its imprisonment in the Ego.

Love as a philosophical concept is interesting when treating the problem of certainty. The obsession of having one's life and death under complete control reached in Japan its peak with a genre of descriptions of the people who were certain to have had a good death, i.e., have gone to the Pure Land of Amida to be reborn there. In the imaginative geography, one reaches the model death by passing over the sea of uncertainty, landing in the Pure Land, which is conceptually beyond both hell and heaven. It is an illusion created and transferred beyond one's own death, a dream of a certainty reached in a paradise far away in the West. The moment of death becomes the sole possibility of attainment of the certainty and love sought for during the entire lifetime.

When analyzing the Mohist theories of Heaven, we see that in most of them the transcendental moment is present. The situation, described in the texts as Heaven, is the state of undifferentiated consciousness. Since the language is rooted in the differences, here the void space comes into play. The unusual vision, which might be a product of mystical experience, appears in the spiritual eyes as a vast, limitless space, where things exist in an amorphous, dreamlike mode of existence, always changing and flowing into each other. The Heaven can, therefore, be named as the highest point of uncertainty, where everything flows in a dreamlike insecurity and indetermination. The borders and limits are fluid. It is only the veil of illusion which constitutes the form of language. The primal function of the intellect is that it holds to these mobile and flowing borders, and fixes

them into quiet entities. As a result, clearly defined and rigidly fixed distinctions are formed, although these do not correspond to the paradisiacal absence of the formation of meaning. The veil of illusion forms the totality of being and meaning by which, in our minds, the image of so-called reality is formed. This reality, however, is just a surface reality, just a phenomenon, an appearance, a distorted reality of a real unity of reality, which lies at the deepest level, hidden from the eyes of a common human being. Love and cultivation of knowledge as the means to liberation are instructive, since they do not deny the efficacy of knowledge and can help us advance by several ancillary techniques.<sup>2</sup> Such a standpoint is, therefore, connected with altering the state of consciousness through the use of various physical techniques. It is the state that transcends the *citta-vrtti-nirodha* and is, therefore, indescribable.

### 3. Beyond the Describable

Such a theory gives rise to a problem of language and the mind-body theory. The absence of Ego, the selflessness and the problem of the inexpressible are the effects of the absolute love and the transition to the level of *citta-vrtti-nirodha*. This is the level of the art of discourse (*pian*), mantra, and of some of the concepts that slip through the clutches of silence and language – the situation which originates and derives from the voidness, as the basis of certainty and *prajñā* or supreme wisdom.

In the moment of loss of philosophical centrality, we face a radical critique of the long lived dream to attain a foundation of knowledge, certainty, and an absolute basis for Truth. The topics discussed above and the methods of Mohist philosophical school call the rational argumentation itself into question. The obsession about whether or not something could be subsumed under the concept of Truth becomes irrelevant. One of the challenges that we face when approaching Mo Zi's text is the problem of language, of the status of words, and of the spheres of silent language and the language of silence in the process of attaining universal love and

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<sup>2</sup>C. Chapple, "The Unseen Seer and the Field: Consciousness in Saamkhya and Yoga" in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 62-63. While the author presents the five fluctuations (*vrtti*) of the mind (*citta*) as described in the *Yoga Sutra*, he comes to the conclusion that "for the yogi, the goal is to transcend all five by entering the state of *citta-vrtti-nirodha*. Hence, by definition, the practitioner of meditation is entering into a state of being that cannot be described in the same way one would describe conventional sensory or mental experience."

liberation. Language as the indispensable tool of intellect helps to create the distinctions of everything and the borders among the myriad things, which from the viewpoint of the *citta-vrtti-nirodha* are inseparably connected in the One. The word, by contrast, is a symbol, a sign of something that has been in the thoughts. The meaning itself is, on the other hand, the symbol of something which is beyond the grasp of logos and is indescribable, inexpressible, certain, since it manifests itself in everything. Here we deal with two levels: The surface one, in which reality manifests itself in the form of the ten thousand, myriad things; and the other one, beyond it, the certain one, which is spoken of (or kept silent about) in the sense of the first chapter of the *Dao de jing*.<sup>3</sup>

The mind-body concept is based on radical transformation of subjectivity, and with it the notion of rationality and approach to love. The notion of Heaven, as understood and described in the way of transformation of consciousness, demands the opening up of the established governing positions of European metaphysics to deeper dimensions of truth, often related to the trans-rational and trans-linguistic experiences upon which any kind of certainty is grounded. This has implications for the philosopher's interest. Namely, how should one read the autonomous philosophical productions of Asia from the standpoint of the European tradition which has been called *philosophia*, the *love of wisdom*, a discipline that in its development sought in the name of Truth a "pure" starting point, a foundation of Absolute Truth, the ground of certainty. Such undertakings have been brought close to the reflections of Zhuang Zi:

The Great Way is not named; Great Discriminations are not spoken; Great Benevolence is not benevolence; Great Modesty is not humble; Great Daring does not attack. If the Way is made clear, it is not the Way. If discriminations are put into words, they do not suffice. If benevolence has a constant object, it cannot be universal. If modesty is fastidious, it cannot be trusted. If daring attacks, it cannot be complete. These five are all round, but they tend toward the square. (All are originally perfect, but may become 'squared', i.e., impaired, by the misuses mentioned.)

Therefore understanding that rests in what it does not understand is the finest. Who can understand discriminations that are not spoken, the Way that is not a way? If he can understand this, he

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<sup>3</sup>“As for the Way, the Way that can be spoken of is not the constant Way.” Lao Zi, *Dao de jing*.

may be called the Reservoir of Heaven. Pour into it and it is never full, dip from it and it never runs dry, and yet it does not know where the supply comes from. This is called the Precious Light.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. Challenging Intuitive Approach

The negation of the ontological doctrine is one of the of liberation methods in the vast tradition of Asian philosophies. The way of achieving liberation through universal love in Mohist philosophical tradition, discussed above, can teach us of the illusion of the often supposed superiority of philosophical speculation as understood in the Greek-Judeo-Christian heritage. Such techniques are directed to the development and transformation of the mind and personality aiming at the achievement of wisdom (*prajñā*). Unlike European philosophy, which has sought, in its history, even mathematical models of philosophical thinking, the Asian philosophical schools have not put the demands of mathematical proofs in their philosophy. Instead of a rigid intellectual and logical approach, they have employed direct intuitive experience, which is without doubt richer than rationalisation based on a discipline of analysis and separation. The one-dimensionality of rationality is put into question and can, therefore, not be used as the sole tool for the 'analysis' or 'comparison' of these traditions under investigation with those of the Euro-American stream of thought. The soteriological project of the Asian traditions becomes evident, since knowing, also in its transrational dimension, necessarily interconnects with becoming. This can lead to a certain challenge to the philosophical schools based on the Greek-Judeo-Christian tradition, which have separated the fields of ontology and epistemology,<sup>5</sup> which have been cultivated together, inseparably. The metaphysics of subject and the ontological reductions so well established in modern European and American philosophical history can prove to be unsuitable for the approaches used in Asian philosophies and, therefore, also call for the re-examination of the foundations of rationality.

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<sup>4</sup>*The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968, 44-45.

<sup>5</sup>Two notable exceptions being Spinoza and Du Marsais, a lesser-known 18<sup>th</sup> century thinker, for whom, as Miran Bozovic writes, "the sense of probity is as much a constituent part of mechanical constitution of the philosopher as the enlightenment of the mind." It is for this reason that "any action contrary to probity is also contrary to the philosopher's very nature." Miran Bozovic, "The Philosophy of Du Marsais's Le Philosophe," *Filozofski vestnik* 29, 2 (2008), 70.

The questions of reality and universal love encroach upon the realm of the ineffable which remains the source of the great creativity in any philosophical tradition and its way into liberation. To reach this stage, we have to yield our 'given' spirit, and in accordance with this, fasten the spirit, sit and forget, forget ourselves and lose ourselves in love, which is egoless, selfless, without desires, expectations, and ideas about oneself. That is why it is completely free. The unification with the universal love, therefore, means giving up our Ego, Selfhood, which does not mean a kind of self-repression but rather forgetting the Self where nothing is left which could still be subjected to any kind of repression.

In contrast to the Mohist and Christian ways of love, which have often been superficially compared, it is interesting to see how C. G. Jung, the son of a pastor, understood religion. Did it mean to him an integral acceptance of the entire Bible with all its mythological elements, questionable ethical standpoints, and scientific absurdities? What remains of the religion to the true seeker, who gave up affiliation with any Church? Here, Jung's idea of individuation<sup>6</sup> is precious. To him it meant the integration of conscious and subconscious parts of the personality, which is close to the yogic aspiration of *Kaivalya* or liberation in the system of yoga. On the path to *Kaivalya*, the Church – which in its European model accepts the Holy Bible, and condemned as heretics those who could not accept the Holy Bible (except the generally acceptable chapters from the gospels) with all the aberrations from common sense or general wisdom – represents only a refuge for those who could not continue on their way and were panic-stricken when they were supposed to reach the final step in the process of liberation, redemption. For such a path, not only the true seeker but also the society should be mature.

### 5. Inability of Language Leading to the Open Circle

Notions of the all-encompassing power of language and word have been ubiquitous in the history and philosophy of religions. So too, has been a recognition of the inability of language and word to give full expression to the realities that constitute and engage human beings and the world in which they live.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Michael Palmer, *Freud and Jung on Religion*, London: Routledge, 1997, 142 ff.

<sup>7</sup>F. E. Reynolds, "Foreword: Ineffability" in *The Failure of Words in Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Ben-Ami Sharfstein, New York: SUNY, 1993, ix.



I am aware that with this debate I do not solve the dilemma of universal love and its possibility of application in the world today, but I think that we will have to continue to live with it and keep it alive. Let us say that the prospect of solving questions of love and spirituality lies in combining the logically discursive style of Uroboros with the meditative mystical style, that is, with the open circle, while dwelling on the subject. In this case, we must stop hoping that we will find a redeeming word for the final experience. Instead, we can hope for the indescribable experience, the enlightenment, as a quality of mysticism. If the Uroboros science and philosophy resist such tendencies, we can to some extent understand this as something characteristic for them and a possibility (on both sides) for useful, purifying dialectics. 'Mysticism' in particular may be resisted by well established science and its philosophy, whether it is explained as uncontrolled fantasy or accepted only as a monopoly of the encapsulated and "the only real" Church. If we continue with our vision of approaching authentic spirituality, the prospect of gradual merging of philosophies and religions is revealed. Moreover, the sense for the 'mystical' in literature and art and glimpses of 'mysticism' on various occasions of our everyday life will grow sharper. Shall we still wait for the arrival of *mysterii tremendi et fascinosi*, for something so dramatic as the experience of Apostle Paul during his conversion on the road to Damascus? Such experiences, although much subtler and less noticeable, are not reserved only for people who dedicate themselves to a monastic lifestyle, but in modest forms, they have also been present in the lives of great and solitary souls: philosophers, theologians, poets, and other artists. It is impossible here to start a discussion worthy of attention on the science and method of searching for one's essence in various Asian philosophical schools, such as has been developed through universal love in Mo Zi's philosophy, but this essay intents only a glimpse of its worth and challenge for philosophical and wider social undertakings today.

What challenge can this be for us in the third millennium? In Dàoism and various Buddhist streams, there is the obvious absence of any myth of creation; there is, however, a basic premise of reality that all phenomena and things are organically connected. There is no creator (God) who would act from the outside. Instead the creation grows from inside. There is a complete oneness and identity between the creative and the created, an organic, unbroken process of transformation. The principles of ecology, the mutual dependence, and interrelatedness of phenomena are central; it

does not build on analysis, classification, and isolation that divide everything into groups that can then be easily intellectually and technologically manipulated, but rather, in the spirit of cosmic ecology, develops the view of humans, nature, and their relationship. That view of existence that the theory of the 'Indra's net'<sup>8</sup> provides, the worldview that does not build on any idea of initial time, creator or purpose, is very close to Leibniz's theory. In this worldview there is no hierarchy with God the creator at the top and the chain or scale of beings below (from humans, animals, plants and stones at the bottom). There is also no room for the idea of a special position of humans who would own the cosmos for their own intentions in what is called human history, which is basically how history of the universe is understood. This should be seen as a speciestic delirium, not in the medical but in Hume's<sup>9</sup> sense of the word. There is no centre; if there is one, it is everywhere. This worldview presupposes that human beings can develop solely as very fortunate and very rare phenomena of reincarnation, but this does not excuse or condition the argument that the human being is the measure of everything.

## 6. Conclusion

The narrow part of the coast between land and sea which is constantly subjected to changes of the tides is supposed to be the richest and most diverse in animal or plant life forms. How does humankind encounter and confront its own diversity? In his novel on a Jewish man from Andorra,<sup>10</sup> Max Frisch described a young man who, due to the prejudices against Jews, had been killed by the people of the same village. After the disclosure that he actually was not a Jew, the author asked himself about the notion of true love and concluded that we express the true love to the beloved by not forming any ideas about him/herself. The same is true for

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<sup>8</sup>It is a view of nature and existence often used in Chinese Hua Yan Buddhism. With its cosmic ecology it contributed a lot to the concept of interdependence and interrelatedness of everything in the Cosmos. The symbol of Indra's net is based on the legend that God Indra ordered to his craftsman to make a net which is infinite and stretched all over the Cosmos. The net is covered with infinite number of diamonds, and each diamond is reflected in all of the other diamonds. It is a limitless process of reflection which symbolizes the interdependence and interrelatedness of each small part in the Cosmos with the entire universe itself. Whatever affects the smallest part of it, affects the entire process as well.

<sup>9</sup>David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, 269.

<sup>10</sup>Max Frisch, *Tagebuch 1946-49*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976, 35-37.

the God, to whom in that way we acknowledge that we cannot constrain Her into the narrow mould of our imagination, expectations, and intents.

"Who (*Ka*) is the god to whom we should offer our sacrifice?"<sup>11</sup> remains the crucial question of the Upanishads. This miraculous syllable is like an estuary to a hidden ocean, which produces a lot of uneasiness and closeness at the same time and opens up a vast space to worship: to the nonbelievers as well as to all those who worship differently or to those who think that they do not believe, and even those who might not even be aware of their deep faith, since they have never restricted their deep devotion to the local culture or the narrow timeframe which might be prescribed by a certain socio-political situation or period. For all those and for the ones who have practised absolute love towards God, without any hope for paradise or fear of hell, I ought to pay my respects by sharing with them the wealth of Asian philosophies which I have been lucky to get to know while living in Asia during the last thirty years and which made me critical also about the European cultural and religious myopia.

Can we talk about the fact that we live in times when the pillars of any kind of fundamentalism are shattering? If we take this term in relation to the dogmatic stress of various teachings, we could apply, in its broader sense, the main characteristics of this term to religious or other ideologies. If they, on the basis of dogmas and short-sighted presuppositions, try to expose one level of people as a chosen nation, and together with it put into subordinate position everything that does not adapt to criteria defined by them. Even if any new fundamentalism such as religious conviction, nationalism, adherence to a political party, and the-like, is born, it certainly is of a very short-lived kind, shorter even if, inside the group, it is more binding and, to the outside, excluding.

Confucianism and Daoism, the main Chinese philosophical schools, are two paradigms of a principal approach of human beings to the existential, in their essential basic psychological problems, on the one hand, and ontological realizations, on the other. Asian philosophical traditions have clearly formulated this duality. European and American philosophical traditions might be much closer to the Confucian paradigm, Daoist approach being still quite alien to them, and we could more easily find elements of such stands in alternative groups that are now compounded in

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<sup>11</sup>Roberto Calasso, *Ka: Stories of the Mind and Gods of India*, New York: Vintage, 1998, 17.

the New Age movements, a form of continuation or a new version of the so-called anti-culture of the sixties and seventies. Far from being a form of organization, it is rather a conglomerate of individuals and groups that share a common view of the world and form a specific lifestyle and can be recognized by some common features such as aspiration to a foggily defined "extension of consciousness," tendency to a kind of a new religiosity, resistance to technocratic civilization, endeavour for a healthy, peaceful community which respects life and cares for the ecological purity of this planet, etc.

This general orientation is also based on a certain lifestyle which rejects yearning or longing for material goods, inclines to vegetarianism and simple clothing and which does not tend to uniformity. Large organizations are uncharacteristic of this movement, which cultivates communes, unions, ashrams, libraries for literature, with a corresponding affinity to alternative healing, parapsychology, syncretism or religious ideas, approaching to Hinduism and Buddhism or "Eastern wisdom" in general, but of course rejecting any kind of fundamentalism, also the Christian one. Forming organizations, or even parties, endangers the existence of amorphous, diffuse movements, which are maintained and grow from inner motives. Narcissism of somebody who thinks that in that way – by becoming a part of the crowd – one can get some profit or advantage for oneself, in the sense of "Western values" (even more where there are hidden leaders) can be dangerous. Such tendencies can be a most destructive germ that drives such movements and deforms them in various deviant directions, until they finally drown in the existing social chaos.

Adherents of such orientations and movements are usually young people who abdicate from the consolidated and generally accepted patterns of communication, standard value scales, and ambitions. They are unable to do it any other way. They do not reveal their standpoints in a demonstrable way, and they do not manifest any destructive ambitions toward the existing norms. If they are labelled freak, outsider, queer fellow, and the like, they do not protest. With a slight sadness they accept them, being aware of their own insufficiency, namely, that they do not possess enough mimicry for the others to accept them for themselves. In their solitude, which does not bother them, they are creative – from themselves and for themselves – not in the quantity, but in regard to quality of their creations, that are often a little ahead of the times, so much so, indeed, that they do not live up to the time, when they could experience the acclaim of their work.