TECHNOLOGY, UTOPIA AND SCHOLARLY LIFE:

IDEALS AND REALITIES IN THE WORK OF HERMANN HESSE

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Hermann Hesse, the German Nobel Prize winning author, published his last and longest novel, *Das Glasperlenspiel*, in 1943. The book has been available in English translation since 1949, initially under the title *Magister Ludi* and later as *The Glass Bead Game*. *The Glass Bead Game* (Hesse, 2000) depicts the experiences of Joseph Knecht, who spends most of his childhood and adult years in Castalia, a scholarly community of the future. The supreme cultural achievement in Castalia is the Glass Bead Game, described by the narrator as a form of universal language, a means for integrating different arts and scholarly disciplines, for expressing values, and for participating in the process of contemplation.

The Glass Bead Game is structured in three parts. The first section provides a 'General Introduction' by the narrator to the history and nature of the Game. The second and main part of the novel focuses on Joseph Knecht's educational life in

Castalia. Joseph is an outstanding student. He progresses through the elite Castalian schooling system, becomes an exponent of the Glass Bead Game, and is eventually appointed to the exalted position of Magister Ludi (Master of the Game). He meets his obligations in this demanding role with distinction, but as the years go by, he becomes increasingly concerned about the separation of Castalia from the rest of the world. He decides to resign his post as Magister Ludi and begin a new life as a private tutor for the son of an old friend. He commits himself wholeheartedly to his new task, only to have his life end tragically and abruptly with his drowning in an icy mountain lake. The third section is presented as Knecht's posthumous writings and includes 13 poems and three fictional autobiographies.

A number of commentators have read the book in the light of developments in digital technology, comparing the Glass Bead Game to the computer (Antosik, 1992) and the Internet (Peters, 1996). Hesse's contribution to utopian thought has also been acknowledged (Norton, 1968, 1973; Wilde, 1999; Peters and Humes, 2003). This paper addresses the relationship between technology, utopia and scholarly life in *The Glass Bead Game*. The first section summarises the narrator's account of the Glass Bead Game in his 'General Introduction'. The second part of the paper considers Hesse's position on technology and utopia. The third section shows how the narrator's portrait of the Game and of Castalian society is rendered problematic by the educational life of Joseph Knecht, and explores some of the implications for scholarly life arising from this. It is argued that *The Glass Bead Game* is both utopian and dystopian. The book, it will be suggested, demonstrates the importance of holding on to scholarly ideals while also acknowledging educational and social realities.

THE HISTORY AND NATURE OF THE GLASS BEAD GAME

In his 'General Introduction' to the book, the narrator provides an account of the origins and nature of the Glass Bead Game. We learn that the idea of the Game has always been with us and has been foreshadowed by a number of ancient cultures and civilizations. Its path can be traced from the early Greeks, the ancient Chinese and the pinnacles of Arabic-Moorish culture to Scholasticism and Humanism and the work of mathematicians and Romantic philosophers. 'The same eternal idea', the narrator says, 'has underlain every movement of Mind toward the ideal goal of a *Universatas Litterarum*, every Platonic academy, every league of an intellectual elite, every *rapproachment* between the exact and the more liberal disciplines, every effort toward reconciliation between science and art or science and religion' (Hesse, 2000, pp. 7-8). The narrator informs us that the Game as it is presently known (i.e., around 2400) arose out of the ruins of the 'Age of Feuilleton' – a period bearing all of the hallmarks Hesse saw as characteristic of his own times. The Age of Feuilleton was bourgeois and individualistic in orientation. Having released themselves from the shackles of the Church and – to some degree – the State, intellectuals during this period enjoyed unprecedented freedom. At the same time, there were also some 'astonishing examples of the intellect's debasement, venality, and self-betrayal' (p. 11). This was an age characterised by trivia, the cult of the personality, zealous productivity, and cynicism.

Yet, even during this period of general decline, there were a few individuals and small groups who remained committed to 'true culture', devoting all their energies to 'preserving for the future a core of good tradition, discipline, method, and intellectual rigor' (p. 16). Hope for intellectual and spiritual regeneration was to be

found among some historians of music and in the League of Journeyers to the East. It is reported that the Glass Bead Game seems to have arisen simultaneously in Germany and in England. It was originally a kind of exercise employed by musicologists, 'a witty method for developing memory and ingenuity among students and musicians' (p. 22). It was invented by a Bastion Perrot of Calw (Hesse's home town), who is believed to have been among the Journeyers to the East. Perrot developed an abacus-like frame on which were strung several dozen wires with glass beads of various shapes, sizes and colours. The wires corresponded to the lines of the musical staff and the beads were like the time-values of the notes (pp. 22-23). From this primitive beginning, the Game evolved, first in the hands of mathematicians, where it became capable of expressing mathematical processes by special symbols, abbreviations and formulas, and then by others from a wide range of scholarly disciplines and traditions:

> The analytical study of musical values had led to the reduction of musical events to physical and mathematical formulas. Soon afterward philology borrowed this method and began to measure linguistic configurations as physics measures processes in nature. The visual arts soon followed suit, architecture having already led the way in establishing the links between visual art and mathematics. Thereafter more and more new relations, analogies, and correspondences were discovered among the abstract formulas obtained in this way. Each discipline which seized upon the Game created its own language of formulas, abbreviations, and possible combinations (p. 24).

The Game became not mere recreation but a means for developing a concentrated self-awareness, a process of purifying and strengthening the mind while renouncing the rewards earlier generations of scholars had sought: 'rapid and easy money-making, celebrity and public honors, the homage of newspapers, marriages with daughters of bankers and industrialists, a pampered and luxurious style of life' (p. 25). In overcoming this debasement of intellectual life, it was necessary to rise above the separate languages and distinctive rules of each discipline with a view to realising the capacity for synthesis, for universality.   What was needed was a new alphabet, an international language of symbols, capable of expressing 'the most complex matters graphically, without excluding individual imagination and inventiveness, in such a way as to be understandable to all the scholars of the world' (p. 28).   A scholar now known as Joculator Basiliensis applied himself to this problem, inventing the principles for a new language, one combining astronomical and mathematical formulas, allowing music and mathematics to be reduced to a common denominator. With this breakthrough, the Glass Bead Game's influence spread through old universities, lodges, Leagues of Journeyers to the East, and monasteries, eventually becoming 'the quintessence of intellectuality and art, the sublime cult, the *unio mystica* of all separate members of the *Universitis Litterarum*' (p. 28).

To the advances made after Basiliensis's work, only one element remained to be introduced: the idea of contemplation. Where hitherto the primary focus had been on the intellect and ideas, now an appreciation of the spiritual dimensions of the Game developed and players were required to meditate silently on the content, origin and meaning of the symbols introduced in the games. Formerly a private form of exercise, the Game became a public ceremonial, with festivals often lasting for days

or weeks. These would be led by groups of elite Masters, at the head of which stood the Magister Ludi: the Master of the Game.

We learn from the narrator that no textbook of the Glass Bead Game could ever be written. The only way to learn the rules of the Game is to be initiated into them, via the prescribed course, which takes many years. The rules 'constitute a kind of highly developed secret language' (p. 6), drawing on mathematics, music and other sciences and arts. The Game is capable of 'expressing and establishing interrelationships between the content and conclusions of nearly all scholarly disciplines' (p. 6).

The Glass Bead Game is thus a mode of playing with the total contents and values of our culture; it plays with them as, say, in the great age of the arts a painter might have played with the colors on his palette. All the insights, noble thoughts, and works of art that the human race has produced in its creative eras, all that subsequent periods of scholarly study have reduced to concepts and converted to intellectual property – on all this immense body of intellectual values the Glass Bead Game player plays like the organist on an organ. And this organ has attained an almost unimaginable perfection; its manuals and pedals range over the entire intellectual cosmos; its stops are almost beyond number. Theoretically this instrument is capable of reproducing in the Game the entire intellectual content of the universe (pp. 6-7).

At its height, the Game 'represented an elite, symbolic form of seeking for perfection, a sublime alchemy, an approach to that Mind which beyond all images and

multiplicities is one within itself – in other words, to God' (p. 31). Through the Game players strove to achieve 'pure being', moving from potentiality to reality. The Game became akin to a form of worship, and the Magister Ludi attained the status of a 'high priest, almost a deity' (p. 34).

The home of the Glass Bead Game is Castalia, a hierarchical, ordered, independent 'pedagogical province'. Castalia has its own schools, and contact between most Castalians and the outside world is limited or non-existent. Key decisions are made by a Board of Educators, and strict adherence to the rules and procedures of the pedagogical province is expected. The Order of the Glass Bead Game is a male-only hierarchy. Young men who rise through the elite schooling system are permitted to have some contact with women, but they are not allowed to marry or to raise families of their own. They have no money and virtually no property (pp. 101-102). The children who become members of Castalian society often come from families where parents have died or from 'unfavourable' home circumstances (p. 39). Many cultural and scholarly practices in Castalia are steeped in tradition and ritual, and attempts to deviate from established norms of conduct are discouraged. Individual self-expression is allowed and admired only under certain conditions. 'For us', the narrator says, 'a man is a hero and deserves special interest only if his nature and his education have rendered him able to let his individuality be almost perfectly absorbed in its hierarchic function without at the same time forfeiting the vigorous, fresh, admirable impetus which makes for the savor and worth of the individual' (p. 5). 'We do not approve', the narrator continues, 'of the rebel who is driven by his desires and passions to infringements upon law and order; we find all the more worthy of our reverence the memory of those who tragically sacrificed themselves for the greater whole' (p. 5).

THE GLASS BEAD GAME, UTOPIA, AND THE QUESTION OF TECHNOLOGY

At first glance, *The Glass Bead Game* appears to have little to say about technology. The action in the main part of the book is set in the 23rd century, and the story is told by a narrator writing around 2400 (Mileck, 1978, p. 258), but there is little that is 'futuristic' in the novel's tone or content. There are few comments on technological developments of any kind, let alone those that might emerge after several more centuries of human 'progress'. There are brief references to radio, automobiles, loudspeakers, and ships, but these are mentioned only in passing. Key characters seem to travel as much by foot as by any other means. On completing his studies at Eschholz, for example, Knecht walks for several days with a classmate to see the Music Master. And when Knecht departs from the Order he chooses not to take a car but instead travels by foot.

There is no notion here of futuristic spaceships or even rapid transit metropolitan train systems, let alone teleportation or time travel! There are no references to genetic engineering, controlled breeding programmes, or other biological manipulations. No mention is made of 'smart' buildings or advanced surveillance and mass communication systems. It is not as if such ideas were inconceivable for Hesse's generation, for other writers in the late 19th century and first half of the 20th century (e.g., H.G. Wells, Yvgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell) imagined futures with technological developments of this kind.

An apparent exception to the lack of interest in technological matters is, of course, the Game itself. Antosik sees the Game as a 'utopian machine' (1992, p. 41), noting that at one point in the novel the narrator describes it as working by pedals,

manuals and stops. Yet, there is considerable ambiguity about the nature of the Game. It is not clear what kind of machine it is, how it works, or indeed whether the Game is really a machine at all. There may be machines of some kind involved, but they seem to be incidental to the Game itself. The narrator is also rather vague in describing exactly how the game is played. There are hints and suggestions at different points in the narrative, but there is never a precise description of the key distinguishing features of the play in this Game as compared with other games. We know that the driving principle behind the Game is the idea of a universal language, a means for connecting and communicating between all disciplines and values. But at no point in the novel does the narrator say exactly *how* this occurs. The exact rules and strategies remain mysterious. It is not clear whether the Game, as it was played in Knecht's lifetime, involved physical objects or whether it was conducted purely in the realm of ideas. Guidelines about the numbers and roles of different players remain ambiguous. Indeed, so mysterious is the nature of the Game that one commentator was led to see it as nothing more than a sham – and a damning indictment on Castalian ideals (Bandy, 1972, p. 304).

These ambiguities are arguably deliberate. In one of his plans for the novel, sketched on the reverse side of a letter he received in 1931, Hesse comments explicitly on this point. In the notes he makes the following comment: 'Description of the game: "not easy to render if visible, since it is very complicated, and has furthermore not yet been invented"' (cited in Mileck, 1978, p. 256). Hesse did not want the narrator to describe the 'machinery' of the Game or its operations in unequivocal detail because his concern was to portray an *ideal* – to sketch a mythical possibility, rather than making a technological prediction. As Mileck observes, although the history, language, potentialities and impact of the Game can be

conveyed, 'in its essence, the experience itself is beyond the capacity of direct verbal description: a highly intellectual and deeply mystical mental exercise upon which only simile and metaphor can shed light' (p. 333). Mileck continues:

> [T]he game is not only a cultural, but also, and more significantly, a profound life experience: a miraculous step beyond the temporality, disharmony, imperfection, and meaninglessness of the world of appearance, a venture into the heart of reality, an exposure to cosmic mystery, a union with the divine. Participants and spectators alike are exhilarated by this wonder, spiritually rejuvenated, and left in fervent awe (p. 334).

At different points in his writing career, Hesse expressed misgivings and sometimes abhorrence toward new technologies. On occasion, inventions such as the telephone and radio find critical comment, and in Hesse's penultimate novel, *The Journey to the East*, railways and even watches are named as examples of mechanical contrivances that 'drain life of its content' (Hesse, 1956, pp. 13-14). In some of Hesse's short stories technological developments are portrayed as hellish, demonic and grotesque (Norton, 1968, p. 267). Yet, as Norton argues, for Hesse it is not machines and new technological gadgets *per se* that are problematic but rather the corruption and alienation of the human spirit that comes from a reliance upon and worshipping of them (pp. 268, 273). There are passages in *The Glass Bead Game* that allow for a more positive reading of the possibilities in technology – 'not as a panacea or new orthodoxy but merely as one of the factors in life, which, if controlled, can facilitate spiritual experience' (p. 272). From Norton's perspective, *The Glass Bead Game* 'expresses Hesse's final position on the problem of a possible reconciliation

between technology and humanitarian concerns' (p. 270).

While some have questioned the depiction of *The Glass Bead Game* as utopian, Norton suggests that 'it is rather futile to argue the point, since the answer depends ultimately on one's definition of the term' (p. 270). Norton observes:

> Hesse himself called the work a utopia, but made clear that he did not mean it in the traditional sense of an unrealizable, fantastic dream of either scientific or social marvels. Primarily it represented for him a yearned-for spiritual condition composed of elements which are as attainable in the future as they have been in the past. [. . .] The real vitality and novelty of its utopianism derives from the particular combination and intensity of the idealistic elements it pictures, as well as from its quality of open-endedness. It embraces myriad possibilities of experience and future development (pp. 270-271).

Norton's comments are insightful, but on the question of whether the book is utopian or not, I would argue a slightly different position. It is true that much depends, as Norton maintains, on how the term 'utopian' is defined; yet, it is also the case that from one perspective the novel can be seen as demonstrably *anti*-utopian, or dystopian. It is possible to view Castalia not as a glorious haven for intellectual, meditative and ethical life but as a repressive, authoritarian regime, more like a 'police state' (Durrani, 1982).

As I read it, the book is *neither* unequivocally utopian nor wholly dystopian. Aspects of Castalia, Hesse shows, are consistent with the highest ideals of humankind. At the same time, however, there are also deep flaws and contradictions in Castalian society. There is a certain 'open-endedness' in the novel, as Norton

argues, but this is not simply within the parameters of a broadly utopian framework. Rather, the book points to the possibilities for both growth and decay inherent in all social forms. *The Glass Bead Game* shows that the struggle to give meaning and substance to life is, in considerable part, defined by the tensions that exist between 'ideals' and 'reality'; indeed, it might be more accurate to talk of this as a tension between *competing* ideals and *multiple* realities. Of greatest significance for the novel, these tensions are *lived* by Joseph Knecht, culminating in his unprecedented decision to resign his post as Magister Ludi – the very apex of the Order of the Glass Bead Game – and to seek a life of ongoing service through teaching. The tension between scholarly ideals and educational realities is explored in greater detail in the next section.

SCHOLARLY IDEALS AND EDUCATIONAL REALITIES

In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion of networks in education: of learning networks, networked knowledge and the networked university. The Holy Grail in many accounts of networked life in education is a form of universal language: a common means of communication between all disciplines, fields of inquiry and forms of knowledge. This dream of a universal language, as Peters (1996) notes, is captured effectively in Hesse's concept of the Glass Bead Game and can be critiqued from a postmodern perspective. Peters argues that the metaphor of the Glass Bead Game can be seen as thoroughly modernist in orientation, and is much closer, for example, to Habermas's ideal speech community than Lyotard's notion of the differend. The Glass Bead Game rests on a conception of the knowing human being as a stable, rational, universal subject, capable of establishing a consensus for

communication with others in seeking epistemological and spiritual enlightenment. This rubs against the grain of postmodern theorising, particularly within the French tradition of critical thought in the second half of the twentieth century, where greater emphasis is placed on the heterogeneity of language games – on acknowledging and celebrating difference in modes of understanding and being.

Yet, Hesse's book also provides a strong critique aspects of the modernist dream, with important implications for conceptions and practices of scholarly life. This is conveyed most clearly in the thoughts, words and deeds of Joseph Knecht: in the decisions he makes and the actions he takes over the course of his life in and beyond Castalia. The narrator's account of the Game and Castalia's achievements provides an enticing introduction to the book. It should not, however, be read in isolation from the rest of the text. For as the rest of the book unfolds, readers find every reason to view the narrator's portrait with a certain incredulity. The narrator is himself a representative of the Castalian hierarchy and thus has an interest in presenting his society and its prized achievement, the Glass Bead Game, in a particular light. The educational life of Joseph Knecht poses a challenge to the narrator's 'official' view. Knecht, as he grows, learns and matures, comes to see Castalia in an increasingly critical light.

Knecht's keen intellect is evident from an early age. He stands out among his peers and is selected for elite schooling in Castalia. He is inspired by the elderly Music Master, who serves as a mentor for Joseph in his youth. This attitude of reverence is, however, also coupled with some uncertainties. Joseph has searching questions that do find always find ready answers in Castalia. Important seeds of doubt are sown by Plinio Designori, a student from outside the pedagogical province who spends a period of his schooling at Waldzell, home of the Glass Bead Game.

Plinio and Joseph enter into a series of debates about the strengths and weaknesses of Castalian society.

The problems identified in these debates are explored in greater depth and with sharper scholarly discipline during Joseph's post-Waldzell student years. Joseph's studies take him further into the Glass Bead Game's mysteries than many of his teachers had dared venture. While he emerges from his years of investigation with a renewed appreciation of the Game's value, this is by no means an uncritical judgement and he remains open to further questioning about Castalian society. After completing this period of private study, Joseph spends two years at a Benedictine Monastery, where he comes under the influence of Father Jacobus. Father Jacobus, like Plinio, is a partner in an intellectual dialogue, and he teaches Knecht the value of history. Knecht comes to see that Castalia emerged through human effort and action and that one day it could disappear.

The pedagogical province, as Durrani (1982) points out, provides largely unfriendly soil for the development of individuality and self-will. Those who are more idiosyncratic and more creative (e.g., Knecht's friend Tegularius, whom Hesse modelled on Friedrich Nietzsche) live a precarious existence, buoyed by their love of the Game but at odds with the spirit of conformity promoted by the Castalian authorities. When difference is perceived as weakness, the treatment of the Castalian hierarchy can be brutal. Bertram, for example, Deputy to Thomas van der Trave, the Magister Ludi in place prior to Knecht's appointment, is regarded as less than competent in his management of the affairs of the Game following van der Trave's death and is persecuted by his colleagues. Knecht himself, while respected by his peers, is nonetheless alienated from the other Masters by his decision to leave the Order. His Circular Letter to the Board of Educators, in which he outlines what he

sees as crucial weaknesses in the Castalian way of life, is received with clinical incomprehension and he leaves without the Board's approval or support.

Knecht, through his thoughts, actions and relationships with others, raises epistemological and ontological questions not considered by the narrator in the early part of the book. He comes to see that Castalia, in trying to nurture its beloved Game, has become too closed-minded, too insulated from the messy realities of the outside world. Castalians, for the most part, have a disdain for history, and they cannot place their views and their way of life in their broader social, political and cultural contexts. Knecht is happy to live with uncertainty; indeed, he embraces this as a defining feature of his new approach to life. Most of his Castalian brethren, on the other hand, are, as Freire (1997) would put it, too certain of their certainties: too sure of the pedagogical province's founding principles, of Castalia's superiority over other forms of social organisation, and of the value of the Glass Bead Game. Castalia concentrates on the education of the elite; Knecht comes to see the importance of education for all. The rigidity of the Castalian hierarchy denies difference; Knecht positively seeks this, giving away everything he has known to experience more of what the world outside has to offer.

When read as a whole, then, the book can leave the reader with a profound sense of ambivalence toward Castalian ideals. There is, as Thomas Mann (1999) recognised, a strong element of parody in the book. Hesse sets up a flawed utopia (Wilde, 1999), with the mysterious Glass Bead Game at its centre, against which he juxtaposes Knecht's educational life – a life driven by curiosity, inquiry, questions, dialogue, and doubts – as a sharp critique. Knecht's willingness to rub against the grain of scholarly and institutional orthodoxy, even at the risk of alienating himself from his peers, has broader implications for a conception of the nature and purpose of

scholarship. An example from Knecht's young adulthood is instructive in pursuing these ideas further.

Knecht's ability to probe deeply, to commit himself to the pursuit of knowledge despite the costs this sometimes brings, is evident not just in his tenure as Magister Ludi (and in his decision to leave Castalia) but in his earlier student days. The period of free study he enjoys following the completion of his school studies proves both uplifting and troubling. These years of scholarly serenity allow Knecht far greater intellectual freedom than could be granted in the schools of Eschholz and Waldzell. The narrator notes that Knecht's tendency toward 'integration, synthesis, and universality' (Hesse, 2000, p. 100) rather than premature specialisation makes him particularly well suited to enjoying the freedoms afforded by Castalian life. Poised between the restrictions and limits (necessary though they were) of his schooling years and the onerous duties that lie ahead, Knecht stands ready to truly explore the 'infinite horizons of the mind' (p. 100).

At one point, after immersing himself deeply in his study of the Game, Knecht considers that he might be better not to make the Game his profession but to devote himself to music. The Music Master is disturbed by these mystical thoughts and warns Knecht about the dangers of seeking the 'innermost meaning' of one's activities. In the past, he suggests, philosophers of history 'ruined half of world history with their efforts to teach such "meaning"; they inaugurated the Age of Feuilleton and are partly to blame for quantities of spilled blood' (p. 112). Meaning, the Music Master agues, cannot be taught. The task of the teacher and scholar, he claims, 'is to study means, cultivate tradition, and preserve the purity of methods, not to deal in incommunicable experiences which are reserved to the elect – who often enough pay a high price for this privilege' (p. 112). Despite this gentle admonishing

from his mentor, Knecht continues his idiosyncratic and lonely path in his studies.

Two points are noteworthy here. First, there is a certain naïveté in the Music Master's comments. For all his strengths as a mentor and admirable qualities as a human being, the Music Master lacks the ability to examine his own society and its scholarly assumptions critically (Durrani, 1982). He may be right that meaning cannot be taught, but the very process of seeking to understand the meaning of texts, events, phenomena, and systems – those of both the present and the past – can itself form an important part of the educational process. The Music Master posits a strictly limited role for scholarship and teaching: one that is essentially *conservative* rather than *creative*. For the Music Master, the task of scholarship is principally to preserve what is already there, and to pass this on to others. There is no notion here of creating something genuinely 'new'; of the risk-taking that some (e.g., Freire, 1998) see as so important for intellectual and educational life. Knecht wants to go further than the Music Master. His probing questions may create discomfort (for himself and others), but his scholarly path is the more honest approach. His spirit of critical inquiry is not inconsistent with the *ideal* of the Glass Bead Game, even if in *practice* many of his Castalian colleagues, including some of the most venerated Masters, do not pursue those ideals with the sort of conviction and sincerity evident in Knecht's approach to his studies.

The narrator's reference to 'integration, synthesis, and universality' (Hesse, 2000, p. 100) is also of interest. These three terms are related to each other but they are not equivalents, and in understanding the nature and task of scholarship it can be helpful to draw distinctions between them. Knecht is certainly committed to a form of integration. This is evident not just in his post-school student years but in his later role as Magister Ludi. During his period of free study (and later in life), he seeks to

integrate different disciplines and bodies of knowledge, as the Glass Bead Game encourages. While serving in the position of Magister Ludi, he accomplishes the difficult task of integrating different talents and personalities for the betterment of the Game and Castalia. He recognises, for example, that his brilliant but highly strung friend Fritz Tegularius is utterly unsuited to service in a position of administrative leadership yet able to contribute with great effect to a successful Glass Bead Game ceremony.

The narrator appears to employ the term 'synthesis' in its Hegelian sense in the book. At several points in *The Glass Bead Game* he refers, directly or by implication, to a dialectical way of understanding the world. Hegel is mentioned more than once in the book and many of the relationships between characters are framed in a dialectical fashion. Knecht's relationship with Plinio is perhaps the most obvious example here. As Knecht grows into an intellectual life at Castalia, Plinio serves as a consistent counterpoint to his ideas. Their interactions allow Knecht to deepen and extend his understanding of the life he has chosen, and they haunt the rest of the book. From their dialogical exchanges, a synthesis emerges: the views they come to hold cannot be reduced to those of either Joseph or Plinio; nor are they merely the sum of their respective contributions. It is Plinio, together with Father Jacobus, who sows some of the seeds of doubt that ultimately lead to Knecht's resignation and departure from Castalia. The synthesis that emerges from the interplay of opposites allows Knecht to question where others within the pedagogical province have merely followed. Knecht reaches the highest levels possible in the hierarchy of Castalia, only to realise that the very system that has served him so well in this process is already in decline. Knecht comes to see that his 'success' is also limiting and that there is more for him to do elsewhere. The process of synthesising

thus occurs at multiple levels and over varying periods of time. There are moments within an individual dialogue where such a synthesis occurs, but his decision to leave the Order can also be seen as the synthesis – the culmination – of a lifetime of interactions, experiences, and relationships.

Knecht's thoughts and actions render the notion of 'truth' problematic. Knecht does not advocate a position of epistemological relativism. His words and deeds suggest that some ways of knowing are better than others. But Knecht, in his maturity, does not subscribe to a unitary concept of truth. This becomes apparent in his reflections on his own development, or 'awakening' as he calls it. Near the time of his departure from Castalia, Knecht recalls that in his younger years he had conceived of awakening as a 'step-by-step penetration into the heart of the universe, into the core of truth; as something in itself absolute' (Hesse, 2000, p. 357). He had followed what seemed like a straight road, only to find himself, in his maturity, no closer to the 'innermost core of truth' (p. 358). Straight lines, he concludes, belong to geometry, not to nature and life. Awakening, he now believes, is a momentary process – a process that will have to be repeated, again and again, throughout life. 'Truth', he discovers, is more complex, more elusive, than he had previously hoped. There is, Knecht comes to see, no single, absolute, decontextualised truth; yet, the process of *searching* for the truth – of *seeking to know* – remains as vital as ever. This needs, as Joseph's relationships with Plinio and Father Jacobus show, to occur in communion with others.

From one perspective, *The Glass Bead Game* appears strangely at odds with the time in which the narrative is set. It seems, if anything, to look *backwards* to an earlier time – perhaps the Middle Ages, in which a number of Hesse's novels and stories have been set. This impression, however, is countered by Knecht's

willingness to question tradition and prevailing wisdom, his detection of the seeds of decay in Castalia, and his acknowledgement of the need to move forward to a new form of intellectual service. The book does not provide an endorsement, either explicitly or tacitly, for a romantic or nostalgic view of earlier human history. As Norton (1968) points out, Hesse's idealism 'is directed not so much toward a recovery of the past as toward an enrichment of the character of modern man through a fruitful combination of old and new values' (p. 269). Herein lies one of the keys to appreciating the book's significance for contemporary scholarly life.

The Glass Bead Game, I want to suggest, encourages us to hold on to ideals – to seek to better understand ourselves and the world – while recognising that such striving always has its limits and must be contextualised. We need, as scholars, to see ourselves as social, cultural and historical beings, shaped but not determined by the events of the past and the structures, attitudes and ideas of the present. Teaching provides one way of 'grounding' our work as scholars: of putting our ideas and commitments to the test in the dialogical company of others. It was no accident, I believe, that Hesse had his main character give up almost everything he had hitherto known to take on the task of teaching a young person from the world outside Castalia. The Glass Bead Game, as a form of universal language, is an important scholarly *dream*, but in the closed, stagnant world of Castalia there is nothing to nourish the dream – to keep reinvigorating the myth in a manner appropriate to new times, new contexts, and new challenges. Teaching provides a bridge between the ideal of the dream and the realities of everyday life, not just within but beyond Castalia.

There is, then, a critique – one that is not evident from the narrator's 'General Introduction' alone – of a certain form of universalism in the book. The educational life of Joseph Knecht calls into question the smug certainty among Castalians that

their 'truth' – their form of social organisation, their way of understanding the world and their mode of life – should be seen as superior to all others. The book does not suggest the complete abandonment of universality in scholarly life. What is universal, Hesse implies, is not so much the truth attained as the process of striving for truth – whether this is knowledge of an art or discipline, of oneself, or of one's society. Castalia is both enabling and restrictive in the pursuit of this dream. It fosters a kind of scholarly game playing that enables participants to integrate different fields of study, and it encourages contemplation on the themes and ideas that structure these games. But with the exception of Joseph Knecht as Magister Ludi, even the most accomplished Masters of the various arts in Castalia seem unable or unwilling to probe deeply in seeking to understand their own society.   Joseph's attempt to understand the 'innermost meaning' of his activities, while discouraged by the Music Master, can be seen as an early indication of his tendency toward a deeper form of scholarly striving, and this persists throughout his life.

CONCLUSION

The Glass Bead Game is a prophetic but not futuristic novel. It raises questions about universality that would, in the last quarter of the 20th century, become the object of intense philosophical debate. It anticipates aspects of our contemporary technological world, prefiguring some of the ideals that would underpin later thinking about the Internet and networked communication, while having little to say directly about technical developments and the 'how to' of the Glass Bead Game. Hesse prompts us to think about the ontological, epistemological and ethical dimensions of technological change, recognising, as Heidegger (1977) did, that the essence of

technology is not technological. In setting up Castalia as a flawed utopian intellectual community and maintaining a persistent ambiguity about the precise workings of the Glass Bead Game throughout the narrative, Hesse also invites readers to consider carefully the relationship between scholarship, teaching and the structure of society. Scholarship, *The Glass Bead Game* suggests, requires more than isolated intellectual activity. If it is to stay alive it needs not only kindred spirits seeking to know, but a 'grounding' through teaching. Castalia provides a form of social organisation sufficient to hold a group of like-minded scholars and Glass Bead Game players together for a period of time, but it lacks the reflexiveness, the culture of critique, and the connections with the outside world necessary for a robust, creative, growing intellectual community. Finally, the book serves as a reminder that the tension between ideals and realities, far from being a source of angst, should be embraced as fundamental to the good health of any society. Reflecting on those tensions remains a fundamental task for all scholars.

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