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# Language Games in the Ivory Tower: Comparing the *Philosophical Investigations* with Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*

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*Wittgenstein explores learning through practice in the* Philosophical Investigations *by means of an extended analogy with games. However, does this concern with learning also necessarily extend to* education, *in our institutional understanding of the word? While Wittgenstein s examples of language learning and use are always shared or social, he does not discuss formal educational institutions as such. He does not wish to found a 'school of thought and is suspicious of philosophy acting as a* theory *that can he applied to other areas of life. While Wittgenstein s focus on developing independent thinking was neither individualistic nor anti-institutional, it did, however, focus on developing the thinking of his students rather than theorising about how this could be applied on a large scale. An analysis of Hermann Hesse s novel,* The Glass

Bead Game *will help us to pick up where Wittgenstein deliberately left off—thinking about how (or if) one can institutionalise learning methods that encourage thinking for oneself. These differences in the writers ' treatment of education will become evident in the differences between their game analogies. While language-games combat our 'craving for generality' in* Philosophical Investigations, *the* Glass Bead Game *represents this craving, and how it manifests itself throughout history in disciplines other than logic and philosophy of language. It also represents the potential for institutions to become insular, exclusive communities.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Wittgenstein explores learning through practice in the *Philosophical Investigations* by means of an extended analogy with games. But is this text about learning also about *education,* in our institutional understanding of



the word? While Wittgenstein's examples of language learning and use arc always shared or social, he docs not discuss schools, universities, or other formal educational institutions as such. Of course, we can make the jump from language communities to educational institutions without much difficulty—institutions are arenas of discourse, and foster learning communities. Yet Wittgenstein himself stipulates that his work should not be used as a *theory* that can be applied to other areas of life. The goals of Wittgenstein's various mental exercises through the *Philosophical Investigations* arc to

help the reader develop critical judgement and therefore greater intellectual independence and self-efficacy. The numerous questions addressed by the narrating voice directly to the reader prompt personal engagement in dialogue with the text. We must answer the questions for ourselves rather than relying on the authority of the philosopher and author.

Wittgenstein himself was not at case in educational institutions, first as a school teacher in rural Austria, then while teaching at Cambridge. Despite having a significant impact on some of the pupils and students he taught, Wittgenstein's demanding expectations did not always fit well into an institutional setting because they sometimes went beyond the curriculum. As for establishing ‘schools of thought’, Wittgenstein makes the remark, in *Culture and Value,* that ‘I cannot found a school, because I actually want not to be imitated’ (CV, p. 69c).[1] Institutions arc often places that *preserve* modes of learning, rather than encouraging each individual to think for themselves, and rather than allowing for the fact that these modes might change. While Wittgenstein’s focus on developing independent thinking was neither individualistic nor anti-institutional, it did, however, focus on developing the thinking of his students rather than theorising about how this could be applied on a large scale.

Due to the nature of Wittgenstein’s methods and his scepticism about spreading these to wider audiences, there is a potential problem at the heart of reconciling his philosophy with institutionalised education. The

*Philosophical Investigations* is not intended to provide a philosophy *of* education, stating how educational institutions ought to be run. Indeed, Wittgenstein would prefer to think of philosophy itself as a learning *practice* or exercises, rather than as a *theory* that dictates ideal learning methods ('we may not advance any kind of theory' (PI §109)). It is unlikely, then, that he would support any systematic theory of education being developed and then 'applied'. And with regard to the overwhelming dominance of the economic imperative, of instrumental reason, and of performativity that prevails today, we can make the fairly safe assumption, as Paul Standish has put it, 'that Wittgenstein would have been appalled' (Standish, 2018, p. 224). Can institutions 'stimulate someone to thoughts of his own', as Wittgenstein hoped reading the *Philosophical Investigations* for oneself might? (PI, p. x) Or docs the necessary uniformity of institutionalised education defeat the purpose of the kind of intellectual independence and self-reliance that Wittgenstein wants to facilitate?

I would like to introduce Hermann Hesse, a writer also pondering similar questions during the 1930s and '40s, and his novel *The Glass Bead Game* into a comparison with *Philosophical Investigations.* The inspiration for





this paper was sparked by the shared interest that Hesse and Wittgenstein have in using 'games' as an analogy to link play, culture and pedagogy. The connection between 'language games'

and ‘the Glass Bead Game’ is not merely serendipitous —‘play’ is used as an analogy for pedagogical practices by other writers during the 1930s and ’40s, such as Johan Huizinga and his *Homo Ludens* (1949) While *Homo Ludens* might seem very relevant to this discussion of game analogies, we will not be investigating it in any depth here, as this comparison aims to focus on the issue of education within institutions, rather than the much broader topic of culture.

As well as sharing Wittgenstein’s analogy between language and games, the novel explores learning to think for oneself both through and beyond educational institutions. While in his own life Wittgenstein was highly sceptical about institutionalised teaching, his efforts to teach both in primary schools and at Cambridge betray a conviction that this must nevertheless be attempted. Hesse’s novel helps to cast light on issues that arc not explicitly present in the *Philosophical Investigations.* The premise, characters and structure of *The Glass Bead Game* highlight by comparison the manner in which diverse ideas about ways of learning explored in the *Philosophical Investigations* link together in questions surrounding institutional education.

Set around 400 years in the future, the novel unfolds in the fictional province of Castalia (which itself is situated within an unnamed European state). Castalia is essentially like a university town such as Oxford or Cambridge, but on a regional scale. The educational

institutions of Castalia arc all funded by the larger state, with the unspoken expectation that they will eventually produce teachers for regions outside of the province. At the time of narration, Castalian graduates arc increasingly opting to remain in Castalia to pursue their education and research further, rather than become teachers who leave the province. The novel is set during a period of economic and political turmoil, and so the usefulness of the province's archaic institutions is called into question by some of the characters, though most established Castalians continue to assert the value of their activities.

There is one new discipline that has emerged alongside the other traditional arts and sciences taught in Castalia, and this is called the Glass Bead Game. The Game consists of drawing comparisons between seemingly disparate themes. In this way it could be thought of as a universal language for scholars; it is a symbolic notation that enables academics from different disciplines to communicate with one another about shared values. For instance, if a musician wanted to express to a mathematician how a fugue by Bach is comparably beautiful to an equation by Einstein, they could express this by means of the Game. There arc debates within Castalia as to the nature of the Game—whether it is a universal and ideal language that can express all possible connections in the world and even the structure of reality; or whether it is merely a useful tool for facilitating collaboration between academics in specific research contexts. The novel's narrative is

framed as a biography of one of the greatest players of the Game, Joseph Knecht. The narrator is an anonymous Castalian scholar, who also includes an introduction to the biography and a selection of Knecht's unpublished works before and after the biography respectively. Hence, the novel does

not appear to be a novel at all, but rather a historical testament; the significance of this for the discussion of educational institutions will be explored later.

It may be tempting to read the novel, published in 1943, as presenting an academic utopia, a safe haven in times of political turmoil for those who wish to devote themselves to a life of learning. Tobias Wenzel, writing on a recent exhibition about Hesse's political engagement at the time that he was living in Switzerland during the Nazi regime,[2] dubs the novel 'a beautiful utopia, an alternative to the ideology of the SS' that ultimately 'appears retrospectively as an unrealistic attempt at aesthetic resistance' (Wenzel, 2017, author's translation).[3] Yet Hesse docs not present Castalia as a theoretical blueprint for a utopia. In a letter written in February 1944, Hesse very clearly states, 'The book is certainly not a treatise, much less a philosophy, it is a story and a confession, and structure, tone and colour are no less important to it than the concept ... In reality, Castalia, the Order, meditative scholarship etc. arc neither a dream of the future nor a postulation, but rather an eternal, platonic idea which has become visible

through various degrees of realisation on earth' (Michels, 1973, p. 241, author's translation). Hesse asserts the fictionally of the novel in order to maintain the division between author and text, so that the reader is not tempted to simply accept the novel's world as if presented as an ideal by an authoritative and philosophical author. Hesse's comment that his novel is not philosophy docs not rule out a comparison of the novel with philosophy at all. The 'philosophy' to which Hesse refers is a mindset, resulting in philosophical writing that appears to provide answers rather than prompt readers to develop their *own* critical judgement. This mindset is also what Wittgenstein is also determined to leave behind, hence the use of a dialogic style in *Philosophical Investigations.* Hence Wittgenstein's remark in *Culture and Value,* that 'one should only write philosophy as one *writes a poem, [dichten]*[4] (CV, p. 28c), opens up the possibility of comparing his philosophical writing with literature. It is not my aim here to discuss the distinctions between philosophy and literature, but it is important to note the value that Hesse and Wittgenstein put on the way in which they write, particularly figurative aspects of their work. According to Wittgenstein, 'Nothing is more important though than the construction of fictional concepts, which will teach us at last to understand our own' (p. 85c). Hence, we shall here be looking at their treatments of the concept of game, which itself could be argued to set up a fictional space that seems to resemble the real world, or which *is* real and not real in

some important sense.

In the following paragraphs I will first explore how play, pedagogy and culture are linked for Wittgenstein. By closely examining the dialogic and figurative language he uses I hope to clarify what Wittgenstein's pedagogical attitudes and methods were, and to what extent these allow for their own institutionalisation. In order to bring Hesse into this comparison, I will then examine the historical and conceptual links between *Philosophical Investigations* and *The Glass Bead Game.* An analysis of the novel itself will help us to pick up where Wittgenstein deliberately left off—thinking about how (or if) one can institutionalise learning methods that encourage thinking for

oneself. These and further differences in the writers' treatment of education will become evident in the differences between their game analogies—for example, the *plural* language games in Wittgenstein versus the *singular* Game in *The Glass Bead Game.*

**CONNECTING PLAY AND PEDAGOGY**

Wittgenstein first links play and pedagogy in the *Philosophical Investigations* when describing the process of language acquisition in children. During this process, 'the learner names the objects' the teacher points to, such as a stone, and this process could be thought of 'as one of those games by means of which children leam their native language' (PI §7). It is in this early passage in the *Philosophical Investigations* that we can sec how learning, language and play are all linked

for Wittgenstein. ‘Language game’ is a coinage that arises out of this connection between learning and play, and it is meant to emphasise the dynamic nature of linguistic activities— that our language is bound by rules that arc more like conventions than laws of nature. As guidelines for our behaviour, they arc followed but can also be manipulated, subverted or changed. Jerome Bruner expands on the connection between play and pedagogy in *Childs Talk* by drawing heavily on Wittgenstein to describe child language acquisition. Games form a self- contained safe space for children to ‘explore without serious consequences’ by operating within ‘a limited area of combinatorial activity’ (Bruner and Watson, 1985, p. 46). The creativity and unpredictability inherent in many games arc precisely what allows the child to grow. However, the self-contained structure and guidance that game rules provide allow the child to learn *constructively.* For Bruner, ‘entry into language is an entry into discourse’ (p. 38), and language games help initiate the child into a culture that likewise functions by means of following convention (p. 55).

How docs Wittgenstein use language games to facilitate his readers to improve their critical judgement and awareness of their own assumptions and biases through his writing? In *Philosophical Investigations* there is an ongoing exchange between the narrating voice and an interjecting voicc(s). For instance, the narrator anticipates the readers’ expectations of what a philosophical text should entail, by imagining how an

objection might be raised against them: ‘You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language game, and hence of language, is ... ’ (PI §65). The reader is literally given a voice in Wittgenstein’s text—their exasperation is puppeted as direct speech by the narrator. Their foiled expectation that the text should provide them with authoritative definitions is revealed. Yet the dialogue here cannot be said to be a direct critique of established philosophical expectations and practices. The tone of ‘You take the easy way out!’ is more of an outcry, a personal explosion of exasperation with someone we are trying to converse with. By voicing this outcry, he grounds us in the actual human experience of reading a book and trying to make sense of its narrating voice, and of our own philosophical questions and misgivings. The grounding in the actual experience of conversation allows us to be more honest with

ourselves. The fact that Wittgenstein describes philosophy as a kind of therapy shows that he aims to treat, rather than correct, our philosophical misgivings.

While Wittgenstein would not deny the situation of the reader within institutions, in the sense of being embedded within established practices (linguistic, philosophical), his use of direct speech frames the reader's response to his text as necessarily personal. ‘Personal’ docs not detract from its impact—indeed, the personal response readers have deepens their

engagement with the text, meaning that its potential to influence is great. Several other points in the text testify to this idea of a personal response: the ambition expressed in the Preface (‘to stimulate someone to thoughts of their own'); the use of the second person singular; and the use of the imperative (at least six instances of ‘Imagine... ’,[5] as well as the command to *"look and see'* in §65). Wittgenstein's *dialogic* style—the direct questions, the play of the different voices—means that the reader has a personal responsibility to engage with the text; no one else will do it for them.

A good teacher ought to support their students in developing their ability to ‘navigate’ their own way, their self-efficacy. Therefore, Wittgenstein writes, ‘a teacher who can show good, or indeed astounding results while he is teaching, is still not on that account a good teacher, for it may be that, while his pupils arc under his immediate influence, he raises them to a level that is not natural to them,[6] without developing their own capacities for work at this level, so that they immediately decline again once the teacher leaves the schoolroom’ (CV, p. 43c). A teacher has only done well when his students arc able to continue to perform well beyond the classroom, beyond the structured institutional environment in which they arc taught.

In *Philosophical Investigations,* we can see Wittgenstein trying to facilitate this self-efficacy through giving the reader exercises. One of the exercises we arc invited to undergo is trying to define a concept for

ourselves (rather than expecting the author of the work to do it for us). Following the reader's exasperation at not being presented with a complete definition of 'language game', Wittgenstein invites us to have a go at conceiving a complete definition of'game' for ourselves:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call 'games'. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don't say: 'There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games"—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all (PI §66).

Trying to define 'language' is similar to trying to define 'game'. We struggle to define 'game' in the abstract, in a way that accounts for the different qualities of all games; but despite this inability to define 'game' essentially, we nevertheless have little trouble understanding what someone means by statements such as 'They arc playing a game'. Wittgenstein calls into question our supposed need for abstract and exhaustive definitions. When




completing the above exercise, we start to *look and see* for ourselves how difficult it is to produce an exhaustive definition of something. This is the pedagogic value of *Philosophical Investigations,* in that it provides a kind of training in thinking.

Wittgenstein docs not introduce the language game as a new *concept,* but very specifically says that he is using

the term figuratively, as an *analogy'.* ‘Doesn’t the analogy between language and games throw light here?’ (PI §83) If ‘language game’ is meant as an analogy, then we must take it as heuristic rather than as a complete description of linguistic practices. Language games serve a pedagogic function, in that figurative language can be a useful way of seeing something in a new light but must not be leaned upon. The imagination and intuition that readers arc required to put into practice when working through this figurative language will be helpful in enabling them to ask more and better questions, of their assumptions and of themselves.

Wittgenstein draws a connection between the fact that we can understand and use such a nebulous concept as ‘language’ by showing how we can do the same for the similarly nebulous concept of‘game’. ‘Nebulous’ here means that the concept is difficult to define exhaustively, but it docs not mean that the concept is problematic or unusable. Wittgenstein explains how a concept can have any number of manifestations:

But how many kinds of sentence arc there? Say assertion, question, and command?—There arc *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call ‘symbols’, ‘words’, ‘sentences’. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a *rough picture* of this from the changes in mathematics) (PI §23). The ‘multiplicity’ docs not render the concepts

of‘sentence’, ‘language’ or ‘mathematics’ unusable; we arc still able to get a ‘rough picture’ of these, how they manifest themselves in various ways and evolve other time. It is not entirely impossible to describe the ‘multiplicity’ (Wittgenstein continues in §23 to list examples of the ‘countless’ forms of sentences). Only, our description of the ‘multiplicity’ must be understood as a *rough* rather than complete picture. This incompleteness can nevertheless have its uses—it encourages us to look for questions rather than answers.

The idea of family resemblance, which accounts for the simultaneously similar and diverse manifestations of what we understand as a ‘game’, is crucial to *Philosophical Investigations,* and could be applied to mctacul- tural discourse—for instance, conversations where we talk about the wider cultural value of what we do and teach in higher education. Indeed, the very idea of family resemblance arises out of Wittgenstein’s adaptation of Spengler’s *Decline of the West.* Wittgenstein remarks that Spengler’s account of cultural decline could be ‘better understood if he [Spengler] said: I am *comparing* different periods of culture with the lives of families; within the family there is a family resemblance ... ’ (CV, p. 21e). Stanley Cavell’s

essay, ‘Declining Decline’, helps us to understand what Wittgenstein is trying to achieve with this adaptation of Spengler. Cavell writes, ‘I do not take Wittgenstein’s observations ... on for example music and Jewishness and originality and architecture and Shakespeare, to constitute

Wittgenstein's claim as a philosopher of culture' (Cavell, 1989, p. 31). Instead, Wittgenstein is 'Endlessly forgoing, rebuking, parodying philosophy's claim to a privileged perspective on its culture' (p. 73). Language games can be a key heuristic device in educational contexts, because they can bring about this change in perspective.

A Wittgcnstcinian approach to 'mctacultural discourse' could therefore be re-phrased as a question: 'For it is not enough any longer to be able to play the game well; but the question is again and again: what sort of game is to be played now anyway?' (CV, p. 31e) When these questions arc asked within educational institutions, they become questions of value in culture: What do we want to pass on to future generations? How do we want to teach people to play these games, and why is it important that they play them in this way? While Wittgenstein would probably not deny the importance of such questions, he docs not pose them himself in the *Philosophical Investigations,* and certainly not in the context of institutions. It is up to Wittgenstein's readers to learn to ask these questions. Education (of children and adults) takes the form of an initiation into a culture, and so offers an opportunity to reflect on the principles or 'rules' on which these activities arc based. 'Language games' form part of a toolkit that we can use to consider the premises on which our activities arc based, on how we play the game.

**CONNECTING LANGUAGE GAMES WITH INSTITUTIONS**

So far we have seen how language games could be a

useful pedagogical tool, helping us to develop our critical judgement in a way that allows us to change our perspective on how we handle and define concepts (such as ‘culture’, ‘beauty’, ‘language’). This change in perspective is helpful because it allows us to reflect on the premises on which our definitions of such concepts arc based. But the question remains: how can we apply the ‘games’ heuristic in the context of educational institutions?

Rush Rhees provides an interesting comment on Wittgenstein's use of games as an analogy for language, which could help us some way towards making this connection. He speculates that ‘thinking of language as an *institution'* is in ‘some ways better than the game simile, because an institution belongs to the lives we lead as a game docs not’ (Rhees, 2006, p. 250). Rhees’ objection here is that we should not be able to say that our linguistic exchanges with others are ‘just’ a game. Rhees’ claim that games do not belong to our lives is of course not entirely correct. There arc a great many games that form part of our everyday lives. However, Rhees has hit upon an interesting point regarding the tendency of groups of game players to be insular, which I would argue in fact makes games a good analogy for institutions. Despite the remark above, Rhees remains open to connecting institutions with games:



A game and an institution—there arc important parallels here. If he is speaking of games and institutions the importance of rules seems fairly prominent. In legal

institutions the importance of legal rules is obvious. If one speaks of language as an institution, as something that governs our lives in the way legal institutions do, it is misleading. Language docs not play this part, or even a parallel part, in our lives; even if the peculiar rules, grammatical rules or what it may be, of a *particular* language, Latin or English or French, could be said to do that (p. 176).

There is *some* truth in language being an institution, but in the sense that language use is to a certain degree governed by conventions, and is regulated (theoretically) by linguistic institutions, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the *Academic Frangaise.* The activities of institutions and their 'players' effectively create their own (partially permeable) enclosed gameworld, and one has to be *au fait* with the rules in order to enter into it (we need only to think of the court in Kafka's *The Trial).* Perhaps Wittgenstein intentionally avoids talking about institutions because he docs not condone the (blind or thoughtless) following of rules; he warns that 'Everything ritualistic (everything that, as it were, smacks of the high priest) is strictly to be avoided because it straightaway turns rotten' (CV, p. 10c). Wittgenstein's remark from *Culture and Value,* that he wants neither to found a school nor be imitated, is perhaps linked to this warning against the ritualistic. We need only to think of the ceremonies and traditions of elite universities to sec the connection between the ritualistic and the institution.

Rhees' comment highlights a potentially fruitful connection between cultural institutions and play, which

is undcrcxplorcd in Wittgenstein's texts, but which we will sec developing in Hesse's fictional province, Castalia.

**HESSE'S GAME**

At first glance, Hesse's Glass Bead Game seems to have an entirely different function to Wittgenstein's language games. It seems to represent a single ideal sphere of activity, instead of allowing us to compare *multiple* spheres of activity as language games and the way in which they arc played. Knecht summarises the prevalent Castalian view of the Game as a 'universal language and method for expressing all intellectual concepts and all artistic values and reducing them to a common denominator' (Hesse, 2000, p. 110). The particularity of how the Game is played is left somewhat vague in the novel. There arc some descriptions of examples of Games that have been played or planned, and from these we can glean a rough, but incomplete sense of how it might be played. Precisely how it is played is not important for the novel's purposes; what is important is that the Game is a metaphor for the 'craving for generality'.

Players of the Game use it as a way of arranging and connecting their diverse range of cultural knowledge. In the first chapter, which provides 'A General Introduction' to the Game and the biography of Joseph Knecht, the narrator explains that a skilled player 'is capable of reproducing in the Game the entire intellectual content of the universe' (2000, pp. 6-7). The narrator



also connects the Game to philosophy, art and music of

previous centuries and other cultural traditions in order to build a narrative of progress towards the Game as crowning glory of Castalian culture (Hesse, 2000, p. 7). As part of this narrative, the narrator includes prominent philosophers: ‘Men *[Geister]* like Abelard, Leibniz and Hegel, unquestionably were familiar with the drcam of capturing the universe of the intellect in concentric systems, and pairing the living beauty of thought and art with the magical expressiveness of the exact sciences' (p. 8). The narrator's language shows clear sympathy with the ideals the Game embodies. We should be wary of this fascination—the ‘magical’ power and concentric circles tend in the direction of the esoteric and the mystical, a reification of the game. It has the air of‘everything ritualistic' that Wittgenstein seeks to avoid.

The idea that a single Game can encapsulate the whole multiplicity of the world’s culture is something Wittgenstein would be entirely at odds with. After recounting the multiplicity of language games by means of examples in §23, Wittgenstein invites us to compare this description with ‘what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.y*. Later in *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein again reflects on his own earlier fascination with logic as an ideal form of language that ‘presents an order, in fact the a priori order of the world’, as if this order were of the ‘purest crystal’ (PI §97). This *'preconceived idea* of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole examination round’ (PI §108). In a footnote to his discussion of the

*Tractatus* and the possibility of an ideal logical language in *Groundless Grounds,* Lee Braver remarks that 'Leibniz too dreamt of a notation system to represent all human knowledge and force thought down the right alleys, a kind of colourless Glass Bead Game that would clear up all disputes by translating the issue at hand into symbols that can then be calculated to find the answer' (2012, p. 36). The striving after the purity of logic in the *Tractatus.* and kindred projects which preceded it and sprang from it, such as the Vienna Circle, arc comparable to the Glass Bead Game. Instead of logicians, the Castalians arc players of a *game.* Games have the power to fascinate and hold us captive. The novel takes us a step towards 'turning our whole examination around' by using the game as an analogy.

As a historian or chronicler, the narrator details forms that the Game can take that arc less admirable. For instance, he describes how the young Knecht, who is becoming increasingly adept in the Game, manages to gain high regard among an elite group of Players, known as the *Vicus Losurum.* The narrator recounts the mixed opinions about this group:

Many in Castalia, and some in the rest of the Province, regarded this elite as the ultimate flower of Castalian tradition, the cream of an exclusive intellectual aristocracy, and a good many youths dreamed for years of some day belonging to it themselves. To others, however, this elect circle of candidates for the higher reaches in the hierarchy of the Game seemed odious and debased, a clique of haughty idlers, brilliant but

spoiled geniuses who lacked all feeling for life and reality, an arrogant and fundamentally parasitic company of dandies and climbers


who had made a silly game, a sterile self-indulgence of the mind, their vocation and the content of their life (p. 123).

It is not so much the Game *itself that* is the problem, but the caste of players. This passage has strong echoes of the long tradition of critiquing the 'stuffiness' of academia in higher education institutions (such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer), which continues into the 20"' century in figures such as Heidegger/ Wittgenstein shared some of this pessimism towards academic circles, such as the Apostles in Cambridge, and the Vienna Circle. However, Knecht, the narrator notes, is 'untouched by either of these attitudes' (p. 123). We arc not encouraged to fall on cither side of the debate; the many sides of the Game, and what it represents, arc held up to us for our own judgement. The novel facilitates the critical framing of Castalia and its values in two ways: dialogue between characters and the historical form of the novel.

**DIALOGUE AND DISSENT WITHIN CASTALIA**

Criticism of the Glass Bead Game emerges during conversations between the protagonist Knecht and the other characters, as he progresses through various stages of his education and career. The following passage is taken from the description of a conversation between Knecht and Elder Brother, a Chinese hermit to whom Knecht is apprenticed:

Once Knecht confessed to his teacher that he wished to learn enough to be able to incorporate the system of the / *Ching* into the Glass Bead Game. Elder Brother laughed. 'Go ahead and try', he exclaimed. 'You'll sec how it turns out. Anyone can create a pretty little bamboo garden in the world. But 1 doubt the gardener would succeed in incorporating the world in his bamboo grove' (p. 139).

Elder Brother gently but wisely points out the naivety of Knecht's ambition to incorporate the *I Ching,* an ancient divination text, into the Glass Bead Game. The text contains a system of hexagram diagrams, which might attract Knecht due to their affinity with the idea of 'concentric systems' capable of expressing the cosmos. Elder Brother draws attention to the flaws in this ambition. The Game, however beautiful, is artificial and limited—it cannot express the multiplicity of the world's culture, as the narrator has suggested.

Something that Hesse's *Bildungsroman* makes particularly clear, and that might be overlooked in the *Philosophical Investigations,* is the key ingredient of time and experience in changing one's perspective. Knecht's fascination with the Game (which is symptomatic of his 'craving for generality') cannot be overcome immediately. The Music Master, a respected Castalian teacher who was an extremely influential figure in Knecht's life from a very young age, secs a connection between Knecht's idealist impulses and the teaching he desires. In response to Knecht's question, 'Isn't there any truth? Is there no real and valid doctrine?' the Master replies, 'The

doctrine you desire, absolute, perfect dogma that alone provides wisdom, docs not


exist. Nor should you long for a perfect doctrine my friend. Rather, you should long for the perfection of yourself (p. 73). In the original German, 'doctrine' is in fact *'Lehre*\ which makes explicit that Knecht is seeking a perfect *teaching,* and this does not exist. Some years later, Knecht writes to his mentor about choosing a discipline to teach after completing his studies. He believes that he cannot teach the Glass Bead Game, because 'I have come close to the meaning of the Glass Bead Game'. He argues that he is close to understanding the innermost workings of the Game, and thereafter 'would no longer dwell in the world of multiplicity and would no longer be able to delight in invention, construction, and combination, since [he] would know altogether different joys and raptures' (p. 111). One Knecht has 'finished' playing and studying the Game, it will have revealed unity in everything, the 'One and AH', as Knecht puts it *(ibid.).* With some concern, the Music Master responds in a letter advising Knecht that

> A Game Master or teacher who was primarily concerned with being close enough to the 'innermost meaning' would be a very bad teacher. ... I myself, for example, have never in my life said a word to my pupils about the 'meaning' of music; if there is one, it docs not need explanations ... 1 have always made a great point of having my pupils count their eighths and sixteenths

nicely *(ibid.).*
Whether learning to play a game or learning to play music, one has to start with the basics and learn through practice, and not seek to overcome the multiplicity of experience within a discipline by establishing an overarching theory. Practical exercises, such as musical scales, form a significant part of the teaching.

There arc similarities here between Hesse and Wittgenstein with respect to the idea that we must learn through practice. The Music Master tells Knecht that 'Truth is lived, not taught' (p. 73). Learning through experience (as in the *Bildungsroman)* and learning through practice (as with Wittgenstein's language games) arc not quite the same thing—the first is a holistic vision of a whole life, while the latter arc situated within specific contexts. There are, however, underlying similarities between Knecht's *Bildung* in the novel and Wittgenstein's offering of an opportunity to work on oneself. The process of *Bildung,* formation or education of the character, must be undergone through experience and not solely through explicit teaching in a school or university. The institutions of Castalia do play an important role in 'work on oneself, through explicit teaching and by creating a space or a community in which fruitful and formative dialogue can occur.

One of the most significant characters with which Knecht comes into dialogue is Plinio Designori, a visiting student from outside the Province. As the son of a wealthy politician, Plinio is one of the privileged few who are permitted to study at Castalia's institutions. His

character provides a counter-point to the bom-and-bred Castalian, Knecht, as Plinio 'frankly and belligerently professed a non-Castalian, worldly point of view' (p. 83). He argues that Castalia is an 'artificial, sterilized, didactically pruned world, a mere sham world' (pp. 293-294). Castalians have not only cut themselves




off from normal life, but they also have few 'burdensome responsibilities', such as 'economics, law, and politics', meaning they are 'cowardly and well-protected'. They 'count syllables and letters, make music, and play the Glass Bead Game, while outside in the filth of the world poor harried people live real lives and do real work' (p. 294).

Although Knecht defends Castalia in this conversation, the criticism leaves a deep impression on him, contributing to his decision to leave his position as Master of the Game in Castalia. He writes a 'circular letter' of resignation to representatives of the Order:

> ... in brief, this Castalian culture *[Bildung]* of ours, sublime and aristocratic though it certainly is, and to which I am profoundly grateful, is for most of those associated with it not an instrument they play on like a great organ, not active and directed toward goals, not consciously serving something greater or profoundcr than itself. Rather, it tends somewhat toward smugness and self-praise, toward the cultivation and elaboration of intellectual specialism (p. 329).

Knecht's resignation letter is not only a critique of aspects of Castalia he finds obsolete or neglectful; it is also a wakeup call for the institution to remember its historical contingency and responsibilities towards the rest of society. Standish also expresses the view that institutions must necessarily question themselves in order to evolve, in a manner suggestive of Knecht's vision of Castalia at its best. In this process, and within the content of what is taught, it is necessary,

> to recognise the opening of possibilities of expression that schooling can offer, especially in the initiation into diverse traditions of critical thought and practice—in short, a liberal education. Such traditions, if they are worthy of their name, arc far from static: they depend upon criticism for their vitality, they depend upon their rival factions and disputes, as they do upon their avant garde (Standish, 2018, p. 236).

Without the kind of internal debate described here, the Game will slowly stultify and Castalia with it, becoming 'a sterile self-indulgence of the mind' (Hesse, 2000, p. 123).

The novel gives us insight into institutional psychology, helping us to understand why Castalia and real institutions fail to live up to the vision of a self-criticising community, a vision that might be founded on Wittgenstein's pedagogy. The Castalian Order has its own reasons for not wanting to wake up. They want to preserve and conserve their way of life, a 'striving for the truth' that is coming under threat from 'propaganda and the conflict of interests', both of which arc fuelled by

growing economic and political turmoil (an important issue for Hesse writing in the 1930s and '40s). Castalia is only able to teach according to its values because it is completely funded and has no need to be politically partisan. Yet by the time of Knecht's resignation letter, 'Some of our representatives in Parliament are already saying that Castalia is a rather expensive luxury for our country. The country may very soon be forced into serious rearmament ... and great economies will be necessary' (p. 336). This reminder of the politics that affect even an insular society like Castalia is, however, not a call to direct political engagement. '[I]t is not our business to rule', states Knecht, 'and not our business to engage in politics. We arc specialists in examining, analysing, and measuring ... [O]ur first and most important function, the reason people need us and keep us, is to preserve the purity of all sources of knowledge' (p. 338).



Instead of a call to politics, there is a call to teach: 'the more endangered Castalia is, the more its treasures stale and crumble away, the more our country will need its schoolmasters, its brave and good schoolmasters. Teachers arc more essential than anything else, men who can give the young the ability to judge and distinguish' (p. 342). This sense of responsibility is precisely why the Knecht is able to choose to leave the institutions he was educated in and teach a young pupil Tito, the son of his friend Plinio, in a region outside of Castalia. (In his resignation letter, Knecht writes that the teachers trained in Castalia who choose to leave arc 'the

only ones really carrying out the purpose of Castalia. Through them we repay the nation for our privilege' (p. 329)). The novel helps us to pose such ethical questions of what should be done once one has been prompted to thoughts of one's own, questions that remain implicit in *Philosophical Investigations.*

Knecht's departure from Castalia is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's own decision to leave academic life and teach primary school children in rural Austria. Neither attempt entirely succeeds. Wittgenstein becomes increasingly frustrated, and Knecht dies soon after leaving Castalia. No perfect pedagogy is found by leaving the insularity of academic institutions, despite the grand claims in the circular letter about the Castalian 'creed'. Knecht never lives to discover an ideal pedagogy, based on his Castalian values, that could be applied in schools or universities. And yet his death has a profound effect on Tito, leaving him with a sense of responsibility that 'would demand much greater things of him than he had ever before demanded of himself (p. 403). All of the people, institutional practices, cultures and books that came together to form Knecht's education and pedagogy, arc condensed to bring about an extremely modest change in the world—change in the way of thinking of a single child.

## HISTORICISING THE INSTITUTION: RETROSPECTIVE NARRATIVES AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

From conversing with Pater Jacobus of the Benedictine monastery, at which Knecht was employed on a diplomatic mission to promote Castalia and the Game,

Knecht realises a key flaw in Castalia's worldview, which is perpetuated by its educational institutions and leads to its insularity: 'We forget that we arc ourselves a part of history, that we are the product of growth and are condemned to perish if we lose the capacity for further growth and change' (p. 332). The institutions of Castalia view themselves as perfect and ideal, therefore as timeless—they operate according to universal values that will remain true and valid for all subsequent generations and must therefore not be questioned.


Whatever the Castalians' view of their Game, the novel's narration from a retrospective point of view and its form as an edited collection of historical documents (i.e. Knecht's *Nachlass* and a history of his life) encourages the reader to consider Castalia's historicity, therefore the mutability of institutions and their principles more generally.

The first step in historicising the Game for the reader is the recounting of its origins by the narrator. From 400 years in the future, the anonymous Castalian academic describes how the Game originated in the early 20lh century, when it was first invented to combat a perceived decline in intellectual life. During this period, which the narrator refers to as the Age of the Feuilleton,[9] there was a 'torrent of zealous scribbling poured over every ephemeral incident, and in quality, assortment, and phraseology all this material bore the mark of mass goods rapidly and irresponsibly turned out' (p. 13). The

quality and content of *feuilletons* is shallow and produced to meet the demands of the market:

> If a famous painting changed owners, if a precious manuscript was sold at auction, ... the readers of many thousands of feature articles at once learned the facts. What is more, on that same day or by the next day at the latest they received an additional dose of anecdotal, historical, psychological, erotic, and other stuff on the catchword of the moment (p. 13).
>
> In some periods interviews with well-known personalities on current problems were particularly popular ... All that mattered in these pieces was to link a well-known name with a subject of current topical interest (p. 12).

These criticisms echo Karl Kraus' criticism of Viennese *feuilletons,* which was influential on Wittgenstein. The idea that 'man's art is intimately connected with his moral character', i.e. that one should do work in philosophy by working on oneself, comes in part from Karl Kraus, who Wittgenstein cites as one of his major influences (CV p. 16c). Kraus saw this 'integrity' as fundamentally lacking in many of his contemporaries, but some figures such as the architect Loos (also cited by Wittgenstein as a major influence alongside Kraus) were able to cultivate it (Janik and Toulmin, 1973, pp. 81, 99). The 'virtuosity' that these artists achieved cannot be obtained by those ambitious for acclaim and material gain'; therefore, 'there was no room for sensationalism or crowd pleasing', which were present in the *feuilletons* of the Viennese press that Kraus detested (pp. 81, 88). This uncompromising

Krausian integrity has its roots in Schopenhauer's asceticism (a third major influence cited by Wittgenstein in the passage cited above in CV, p. 16c). For Schopenhauer, ethics could not be learned in a university, as the shaping of one's moral character could not be explicitly taught (p. 156). We see these values expressed in the Game's origins as a response to this 'sin of superficiality and fcuilletonism' (Hesse, 2000, p. 27), in that it introduces rigour into intellectual life, offering 'a virtuosity and formal strictness at once athletic and ascetic' (p. 24).



The early drafts of the 'General Introduction' to Hesse's novel contained explicit date references to the 1930s, taking up lines of criticism similar to those that are found in *Culture and Value.* They were later removed. By making these changes Hesse transformed his work from a contemporary cultural critique into something more constructive, which future generations might relate to. His aim changed from a critical to a pedagogical one. When teaching Knecht, the Music Master is determined to combat 'talent without character, virtuosity without values' (p. 70). The Music Master acknowledges that 'recognized errors were never eliminated for good, that again and again the selfsame failings have to be combated' *(ibid.).* The Castalian narration of a culture that consumes rather than actively or critically engages with culture rings true in the 21$^{s,}$ century. The narrator's comments on mass media and the culture of consumption is reminiscent of social media today, the

posting of opinions and the sharing of data and articles. A Wittgcnstcinian pedagogy would be extremely valuable in the present day to teach readers of online articles to question their sources, premises and credibility. The question is, how do we facilitate cultural criticism without also instilling a sense of superiority, as we find in this narrator? A good idea, once institutionalised, can develop into an ideology.

**HISTORICISING INSTITUTIONS: HISTORICAL TESTIMONIES**

The next step in the historicisation of Castali, is the novel's assemblage of many different kinds of texts: the academic introduction; the biography; correspondence (quoted within the biography); a 'Legend' (an account of Knecht's post-Castalian life, drawn from oral accounts from his students); an edited collection of poetry written by Knecht; and the 'Three Lives' (stories written by Knecht as a student, as part of an assignment to imagine lives from diverse times and cultures; the themes of the stories broadly reflect the themes of teaching and learning in the rest of the novel, and have a parable- or fairy-tale-like quality that differs from the academic, historical style of the narrator). These documents arc presented as historical artefacts and secondary sources, which are encountered by us, the readers, in a different time altogether. The narrator often draws attention to absent sources.[10] We are encouraged to read the novel with the critical eye of the historian. Arc these accounts complete? Arc they a selection? Exactly what time were they written, and were

they ever revised by Knecht at a later point in his life? Some of these questions arc answered in the biography proper, but there arc no editorial notes to help us answer these questions alongside the poems. One of the poems is entitled ‘Stages’, but we find out earlier in the biography that the younger Knecht originally called it ‘Transcend!’ (p. 353). This editorial detail sums up the protagonist’s transformation from an idealist to a pragmatic attitude towards learning, from the idea that it has an ultimate goal to the idea that it is ongoing self-development. The narrator’s acknowledgement of the fallibility of his account, and evidence of selection, omission and editing sources, mean that our critical judgement can come into play, to practice a critical eye with this fictional history of an institution.



The presence of peritexts indicates that the Glass Bead Game is not necessarily the most important part of the novel. The Three Lives juxtapose Castalian culture with others. They arc Knecht’s language games, an exercise in imagining alternative lives and ways of learning beyond Castalia: an apprenticeship to a rainmaker, the travels of a pilgrim or confessor, and yogic exercises. The placement of the ‘Lives’ at the end of the novel, allows us to see that the novel has broader aims than setting up a utopian society, or focussing solely on Castalia. When approached by his publisher to break up the heavy slowness of the long main biographical part of the novel by interspersing sections of the biography with the stories, Hesse refused, saying

that he was not interested in making the book more accessible to readers who were easily put off by boredom; in fact, he would rather such readers be put off reading the book entirely. (White and White, 1986, p. 930) Hesse clearly wants his readers to take on the challenge of reading and be transformed by it. Furthermore, the novel's form means that in effect it has no ending—it ends with the biography, then the 'Legend', then the unpublished poems, then each of the Lives ... Without an ending, the novel docs not present a *conclusion* to the pedagogical issues raised. In this sense, Hesse is adapting the purpose of the *Bildungsroman,* from one that recounts a character's development towards a final, fulfilled stage to one that docs not have perfection of character as its goal. This is not to say one cannot work on oneself at all; but this process of *Bildung* must always be ongoing. Hence, the novel is about how the work of an institution in striving for perfection is never done.

**CONCLUSION**

Whereas Wittgenstein uses language games to compare *multiple* practices, Hesse uses the Glass Bead Game to frame one particular sphere of practices within the traditional Western univcrsity/sphcrc of academia. This means that the novel confronts explicitly pedagogical questions which *Philosophical Investigations* intentionally leaves implicit. While language-games combat our 'craving for generality' in *Philosophical Investigations,* the *Glass Bead Game represents* this craving, and how it manifests itself throughout history in

disciplines other than logic and philosophy of language. It also represents the potential for institutions to become insular, exclusive communities.

Hesse and Wittgenstein deliberately use their writing methods in a way that docs not adhere to generic expectations of what a novel or a philosophical text should do, and this is why their texts have had such an impact. Their ‘concepts’ survive so effectively because they arc not learned like other concepts that are presented with a straightforward definition—our understanding of them grows and evolves through experience. Although the game analogies serve different functions, they have similar afterlives in the way in which they arc used. The novel helps us to see how Wittgenstein’s pedagogical methods have value for institutional practices, but can never be immortalised in an ideal institution. Likewise, reading *Philosophical Investigations* helps us to see that Hesse is presenting us not merely with a single,

utopian way of life, but also the ability to compare and evaluate ways of life to the *vita contemplativa.* Both Hesse and Wittgenstein would agree that institutions do not simply provide a form of *Abrichtung,* a training ground for ideal subjects. The element of play that occurs in learning encourages both skill *and* creativity, so from decade to decade the institution does not simply teach the same thing, but its curriculum and methods can be changed from within by its own teachers, researchers and students. In order to provide a space in which play can occur, the institution in

question must both be open to internal and external criticism, and be relatively free from economic and political pressures.

This comparison can act as a springboard for those who want to contextualise Wittgenstein's writing methods in the *Philosophical Investigations* in terms of ethical questions surrounding institutionalised education today. The delicate balance between questioning convention and reaching a consensus within a community is implicit in Wittgenstein's 'language games', and it comes into its own in the institutional setting of Castalia, prompting more specific questions relating to teaching methods and shared value in cultural institutions. What arc the benefits of a humanities education? What is the purpose of funding academic research, and what is its cultural impact? How do we bridge the gap between policy makers and higher education institutions without rendering the latter an instrument of power? Such questions need not completely undermine the idea of institutions, nor entirely support them. As with games, institutions arc only as good as their players. They can teach us to learn, to move beyond them into other games and forms of life.

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**NOTES**

1. This article will use the following abbreviations to refer to Wittgenstein's texts: *Philosophical Investigations* (PI); *Culture and Value* (CV).
2. 'Zwischcn den Fronton. DcrGlaspcrlcnspiclcr Hermann Hesse',

Litcraturhaus Berlin, 13 December 2017—11 March 2018.

3. I should note here that there arc also readings of Hesse which do not support the 'failed utopia' view, such as Peter Roberts, who connects Hesse to the 19th century philosophical and literary tradition of *Bildung* (Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Humboldt, Goethe, Schiller). Roberts reads Hesse as participating in this long-standing philosophical conversation on how (or indeed whether) to apply the ideals of *Bildung* in an institutional context (Roberts, 2012).
4. *Dichten* is a difficult to render into English, and can refer to writing poetry but also other forms of literary writing, such as novels.
5. Sec for example §4, §6, §9, §14 and §21.
6. Underlining in the original. The editor's note on this in *Culture and Value* is as follows: 'Passages underlined in the original with a wavy line (expressing doubts about the expression) arc here underlined'.
7. Sec endnote 5.
8. *Cf* 'Die Sclbstbchauptung dcr dcutschcn Univcrsitat' (Speech on becoming rector at Freiburg University, 1934). Heidegger takes the criticism of academic 'self-indulgence' to the extreme, saying that academic freedom should be abolished, because it allows professors to pursue their




own agenda, burrowing into niche specialist interests, without benefitting the rest of the society (or in Heidegger's Nazi jargon, *das Volk).*

9. A fcuillcton is a newspaper or magazine, or a part thereof, devoted to fiction, criticism or light literature.
10. For instance, the narrator describes Knecht as 'brought to the verge of exhaustion' by the end of his elite schooling, 'although there is no direct documentation for it' (Hesse, 2000, p. 106).

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