

The Glass Bead Game

by Ernest Brown

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In a recent issue of *Go World*, William Pinckard described go as “an analog to the process of creation” rather than “a game of war”. This is a refreshing characterization. Until recently, go in the US has been an esoteric pastime for a few curious pioneers; but there is now a growing national movement. We have an exciting opportunity to expose the youth of America to a fabulous cultural treasure. In doing so, those of us who accept the task of teaching must also accept the duty of sharing the tradition and purity of the experience as best we can. To become better teachers, we must examine among ourselves the nature of our own experience in our unfolding process with go.

Many times we have heard that “Chess is a battle and go is a war.” Amateurs and professionals alike often describe go as a war game. But in taking such a limited view, we overlook other aspects of a game which represents the highest attributes of human consciousness.

War is a consequence of social conditions among humankind. While confrontation occurs throughout nature, war is found in but a few of nature's species, notably *homo sapiens*.

Looking at the various factors which make up the game of go will help to discourage us from seeing go as a war. The use of handicap stones, for example, goes far beyond the Geneva Convention's attempt to outlaw inhumane acts of war. The handicap attempts to make equals of the contestants! This requirement reflects an essential aspect of the game of go: the search for harmony. Otherwise, imbalance becomes the nature of play.

Although groups “die”, under the Japanese rules by which go is commonly played in the West, prisoners are returned at the end of the game. (Under Chinese rules, prisoners are returned immediately.) Only structures and systems are destroyed; the life of the individual is sacred. It is our errant ideas which “die” — those which do not add to the harmony present in the contest which confronts us.

Go is about truth, the truth of balance and harmony. It is a competition against self. The opponent need not enter our thoughts during a game. The true game is between our inner strengths and weaknesses.

Children learn in a more holistic manner than their increasingly tunnel-visioned elders. They learn more than the stated task. They pick up on everything in their environment. Learning go will provide the youth of America with a lifetime of enjoyment. It may also create a bridge of good will across the oceans connecting East and West. It will be an honor for us to expose the youth of America to go. Along with this honor comes a responsibility to make these lessons as pure as the game we love.