

Key paragraphs from lectures I and II

In my opinion, the most fundamental idea from lectures I and II is that the plant world is a microcosm of and within the macrocosm. At each level there is a balance and interplay of polar forces: in the soil this is borne by limestone (and allied substances) and silica, in the atmosphere by warmth and moisture, in the solar system by inner and outer planets. This knowledge gives us the tools to influence the balance and the siting of these forces in the plant either to address illness or develop 'new' plants.

Many things follow from attempting to appreciate the ineffable whole via such complementary and opposite activities. There are cultures and disciplines which have languages suited to and forged within this approach, including astrology and alchemy. Steiner's lectures started primarily with astrological references but the next lectures add another language which otherwise might seem un-connected.

The following excerpts from lectures I and II form the trail to this conclusion.

Lecture I

Nowadays we are wont to attach the greatest importance to the physical and chemical constituents. To-day, however, we will not take our start from these; we will take our start from something which lies behind the physical and chemical constituents and is nevertheless of great importance for the life of plant and animal....

Anyone, of course, to whom we say that human life is a microcosm and imitates the macrocosm, is at liberty to reply. That is all nonsense!... we shall never understand plant life unless we bear in mind that everything which happens on the Earth is but a reflection of what is taking place in the Cosmos. For man this fact is only masked because he has emancipated himself; he only bears the inner rhythms in himself. To the plant world, however, it applies in the highest degree.

Plant-life in the form in which we see it to-day can only thrive in the equilibrium and co-operation of the two forces — or, to choose two typical substances, in the co-operation of the limestone and silicious substances respectively.

Everything that lives in the silicious nature contains forces which come not from the Earth but from the so-called distant planets, the planets beyond the Sun — Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. That which proceeds from these distant planets influences the life of plants via the silicious and kindred substances into the plant and also into the animal life of the Earth. On the other hand, from all that is represented by the planets near the Earth — Moon, Mercury and Venus — forces work via the limestone and kindred substances. Thus we may say, for every tilled field: Therein are working the silicious and the limestone natures; in the former, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars; and in the latter, Moon, Venus and Mercury.

For we must ask ourselves: If forces come into the Earth from Moon, Venus and Mercury and become effective in the life of plants, by what means can the process be more or less quickened or restrained? By what means can the influences of Moon or Saturn on the life of plants be hindered, and by what means assisted?

These forces (inner planets) spring up and shoot into all the growth of plants, but they are unable to do so unless rainy days have gone before.

... the intensity with which the Saturn-forces are able to approach the plant life of the Earth is dependent on the warmth-conditions of the air. When the air is cold, they cannot approach; when the air is warm, they can.

II

A thoroughly healthy farm should be able to produce within itself all that it needs.

... the earthly soil as such not only contains a certain life — a vegetative nature of its own — but an effective astral principle as well.

The activities above the Earth are immediately dependent on Moon, Mercury and Venus supplementing and modifying the influences of the Sun. The so-called “planets near the Earth” extend their influences to all that is *above* the Earth’s surface. On the other hand, the distant planets — those that revolve outside the circuit of the Sun — work upon all that is *beneath* the Earth’s surface, assisting those influences which the Sun exercises from below the Earth. Thus, so far as plant-growth is concerned, we must look for the influences of the distant Heavens *beneath*, and of the Earth’s immediate cosmic environment *above* the Earth’s surface.

A true mutual interaction will arise with all the forces and fine homeopathic substances which are engendered by the water and air above the Earth. All this is drawn down into the soil by the greater or lesser limestone content of the soil. The limestone content of the soil itself, and the distribution of limestone substances in homeopathic dilution immediately above the soil — all this is there to carry into the soil the immediate terrestrial process.

We must know the conditions under which the cosmic spaces are able to pour their forces down into the earthly realm....

To understand the plant, we must recognise the form of the plant and from the colour of the flower, the extent to which the cosmic and the earthly are working there.... Assume that by some means we cause the cosmic to be strongly retained — held up within the plant itself.... Suppose that we wish to hold back in the root-nature of a plant that which would otherwise tend upward through the stem and leaf..... How must we look at a plant when we desire the cosmic forces not to shoot upward into the blossoming and fruiting process but to remain below? Suppose we want the stem and leaf-formation to be held back in the root. What must we then do?

This, therefore, is the ABC for our judgment of plant-growth. We must always be able to say what in the plant is cosmic, and what is terrestrial or earthly. How can we adapt the soil of the earth, by its special consistency, as it were to densify the cosmic and thereby hold it back more in the root and leaf? Or again, how can we thin it out so that it is drawn upward in a dilute condition, right up into the flowers, giving them colour — or into the fruit-forming process, permeating the fruit with a fine and delicate taste?

This decrease is indeed connected —like the transformation in the human soul itself — with the ending of Kali Yuga in the Universe during the last decades and in the decades that are now about to come. You may take my remark amiss or not, as you will. We stand face to face with a great change, even in the inner being of Nature.

I mentioned two English-speaking sources for ‘Understanding the Agriculture Course’ by people who consider they have a fair grasp of the whole puzzle and not just the fragments of jigsaw garnered from first reading the course.

Glen Atkinson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtYuWI3SQuo>

Enzo Nastati: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31hFkOTW_bU (English and Italian even if not obvious until 1min 20s in.)