

Agriculture as a cultural impulse

*Reflections on the Goetheanum
Agricultural Conference 2023*

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This year's theme at the Goetheanum Agricultural Conference was titled 'Reflections on Agriculture as a Cultural Impulse'. My personal reflections are based on two series of talks, with which I resonated, and which are in line with my current path in biodynamics and my work at Coleg Plas Dwbl. The first was the daily morning reading of the Michael letter 'The Condition of the Human Soul before the Dawn of the Michael Age', written by Rudolf Steiner. This reading and discussion was presented by Albrecht Römer and Werner Michlits. This reading set the tone for the conference. What was brought to light in this letter is that we have entered a time, the Michael age, in which decisions are being made for us, and we are losing our ability to think. It has become imperative that we nurture our ability to think, and that we move beyond the realm of merely thinking, to develop sight.

Goetheanum Great Hall
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In the reflections and dialogue between the speakers, the notion of soul consciousness was depicted as a garden in which certain plants grow; these are our individual thoughts and feelings. The unique qualities of these plants in the soul garden do not develop on their own, but they must be trained. This is where tools, strategies, literature and work are used to persevere through obstacles which we may face. What happens to the plants is dependent on what the gardener chooses to do. If the plants are neglected, they will die. In order to thrive, the entire garden needs warmth, and through this, gratitude can be developed. We need to cultivate fertile soil, which prepares us for the Michael age. We are responsible for ourselves, for our thoughts, and what our soul does for our spiritual wisdom.

On the last morning of reading the Michael letter, the topic of the farm organism arose. How is the leadership on the farm? How is the farm organism? Am I listening? Do I send these thoughts or conversations away? The farm organism is a work of art. It is the fruit of engagement and light activity. The farm organism is about trust and connection. In lecture three of the Agricultural Course, Rudolf Steiner describes the farmer as a meditator; the winter is a time for reflection, and this is fundamentally a meditation in which spiritual knowledge is gained.

This links to the 3-day workshop which I attended titled *Von Ora et Labora, zum Bauer als Meditant*¹ facilitated by René Becker and Uli Johannes König. The workshop looked into the meaning of *ora*, pray, and *labora*, meaning work. The workshop explored how knowledge was elaborated and dispersed in the three monastic orders; Templar, Benedictine and Cistercian. The difference between prayer and meditation was explored through a dynamic discussion; what emerged from this is that whilst meditation is a dialogue, prayer can also embody forms of devotion and thanks giving. In the winter, farmers reflect upon the year. This becomes a meditation and during this meditation we enter a state, which is in between consciousness and meditation.

On the last morning of this workshop, we were guided outside to the garden where two trees, an oak and a lime, stood boldly. We approached the trees to encounter their *Wesen*², allowing images or feelings to present themselves. Each one of us, in our own work as a farmer, must find our own way to explore beyond the boundaries of our brain. Our brain and mind are less able to enter the etheric; indeed, to enter the etheric also means to switch off the mind. We are constantly learning about the etheric and can continue to foster this through *wachhalten* (staying wakeful, sustaining attention etc.) This links to the

1 “From ‘praying and working’ to the farmer as meditator”.

2 In *The Organon* by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, the term *Wesen* is used to describe an entity; it is dynamic and it has no mass. There is no English word which translates this adequately. *Wesen* can mean: essence, substance, creature, living thing, nature, being or vital force. Philosophers of the 19th century such as Coleridge used the word ‘genius’ in a similar way that Hahnemann and Goethe used the word *Wesen*.



practical application of biodynamics; through the biodynamic preparations, we are meditating, and the Agricultural Course is a meditation in itself.

These two talks and workshops filled me with inspiration. What I took with me is a deeper awareness of how biodynamics works with the spiritual on earth. With this, I understood the importance of biodynamics for the ever-changing times we are in. Biodynamics is part of a larger global community, and it was very momentous to experience the amount of people within this community.

Through these workshops, I reflected on my personal development throughout my biodynamic apprenticeship, as well as the farm organism at



Garden © Xue Li / Goetheanum

Plas Dwbl. Both of which are a constant work of art. Through the *Practical Skills Therapeutic Education* (PSTE) curriculum, we provide a harmonious environment to enable the development of self-generated conscious action. The biodynamic farm is the main vessel for therapeutic education for the students at Ruskin Mill Trust. There is a great importance in cultivating harmony on the farm as well as personal development in this “garden of the soul”.

References

Hahnemann, Samuel (1842), *Organon of the Medical Art*, Translated by Wenda Brewster O'Reilly, California: Birdcage Books.