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"The Smell of Selfless Love: Sharing Vulnerability with Bees in Alternative Apiculture"

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The sudden decline of bee pollinator populations worldwide has caused significant alarm, not least because *Apis mellifera*, the European honeybee, is thought to be responsible for pollination of 71 of the 100 crop species which provide 90% of the world's food supply. Here we investigate the response to colony collapse disorder of a committed group of beekeepers who live in southern England, UK. These beekeepers are inspired by the writings of Rudolf Steiner and the principles of biodynamic agriculture, and they care deeply about bees. Drawing on Judith Butler's work on vulnerability as a shared condition of living, we examine the philosophies and practices of alternative apiculture along two axes: the gifts of honey and poison; longing, connection and bee-worship. The first emphasizes how poison and honey draw bee and beekeeper together in uneven gift relations; the second axis emphasizes how beekeepers make their bodies and their selves vulnerable to bees. We show how these beekeepers want us to do more than reshape bees' vulnerability to colony collapse disorder; they want to recognize, and reconstitute, their own vulnerability to the bee. The lessons to be drawn are less about solving bee decline and more about how becoming less uncomfortable with vulnerability and seeking to put ourselves at risk to others becomes an ethical practice. The example of these alternative beekeepers suggests that we might learn to accept more generously the risks of cohabiting with awkward nonhumans, so as to loosen the hegemonic grip of a self-certain subject that is disrupted by an outsider. (Text from authors' abstract)

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