Foucault and Animals

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CHAPTER 11

Apum Ordines: Of Bees and Government

Craig McFarlane

1 Introduction

Perhaps it all amounts to nothing. That is, nothing but a historical curiosity best left forgotten by the history of thought or, at best, left to graduate students in search of a sufficiently obscure dissertation topic. Most genealogists of government accept that the art of government did not seriously penetrate English thought until the advent of liberal political economy in the eighteenth century. My historical curiosity, a long forgotten text first published in 1609 as a manual for would-be apiarists, might present a significant example of the art of government in early seventeenth century English thought. Of course, the questions remains, why bees? Why an apiarist rather than one of the well-known canonical political philosophers? Those questions are not easily answered and fall beyond the scope of this essay. Here I wish to carefully outline grounds for believing that the art of government may have been introduced into English thought far earlier than expected.

In his famous lecture on governmentality, Michel Foucault refers to Guillaume de La Perrière’s Le Miroir politique where he discusses the king of the honey bees as an ideal example of political rule. The entire passage, which is not discussed by Foucault, reads as follows, “Every governor must also have patience, following the example of the King of the honey bees, who has no sting at all, by which nature wanted to show mystically that Kings and governors of Republics must employ much more clemency than severity towards their subjects, and more equity than harshness.”1 Comparing the ‘king’ of the bees to the ruler of the human political community—not to mention comparing the beehive itself to the political community—is an ancient idea, receiving consideration in both Aristotle’s Politics and his History of Animals. In these works, Aristotle recognizes that bees are, in a sense, political animals but, in another sense, they are not. What Aristotle means is that while bees live in communities and work co-operatively they are not fully political in the sense of being able to deliberate on law, justice, politics, and rule. That is, bees lack the

capacity to reflect upon the foundations of their community. Hence, he com-
mments, “man is much more of a political animal than any kind of bee or any
herd animal is clear.”

Bees would also be considered by many other ancient
and early Christian writers, among others, Pliny in his Natural History, Virgil in
Georgics, and Ambrose’s Hexæmeron. This is but a partial list.

The point which I’d like to make in this short essay is that bees and the art
of government converge rather nicely in seventeenth century English thought.
The most obvious example of bees in seventeenth century English political
thought is found in Thomas Hobbes who, in each of his major political works
(Elementos of Law, De Cive, and Leviathan), finds it necessary to attack Aristotle’s
interpretation of the beehive. The point of contention for Hobbes, relative to
Aristotle, is whether or not the political community must be conceived as
‘natural’ or ‘artificial.’ That Hobbes does so is interesting in itself, but it is not
the point I wish to raise. Rather, I wish to discuss a long series of texts, largely
written by apiarists, on bees, their politics, and the extent to which the bees
provide an exemplar of governmental practice for monarchs. Like La Perrière,
these writers make much of the fact that the beehive is ruled without the
use of sovereign power, symbolized by the stinger, and tends to be ruled in
accordance with affect, habit, and economy. While this discourse is immense,
I’ll limit myself to an analysis of Charles Butler’s The Feminine Monarchie.

Reflection on the relation between bees and politics would reach unprece-
dented heights in seventeenth century England and continue through the mid-
dle of the eighteenth century. The central text in the political discourse on the
bee is Charles Butler’s The Feminine Monarchie, or, A Treatise Concerning Bees,
and the Due Ordering of These which was published in its first edition in 1609.
Subsequent editions would appear in 1623 and 1634; two separate Latin transla-
tions appeared in 1673 and 1682; and, finally, it was translated back into English
from Latin in 1704. All subsequent treatises on bees, their nature, their politics,
and the proper way of managing a beehive were written in relation to Butler’s
text: The Feminine Monarchie overdetermined the discourse on the bee until
the mid-eighteenth century. Significant works in this genre included Thomas
Hill’s (1563) A Profitable Instruction of the Perfite Ordering of Bees, Edmund
Southerne’s (1593) A Treatise Concerning the Right Use and Ordering of Bees,
Gervase Markham’s (1614) Cheape and Good Husbandry for the Well-Ordering
of All Beasts and Fowls, John Levett’s (1634) Ordering of Bees, or, The True
History of Managing Them, Richard Remnant’s (1637) A Discourse or Historie
of Bees: Shewing Their Nature and Usage, and the Great Profit of Them, Samuel

Hartlib’s (1655) *The Reformed Common-Wealth of Bees*, Samuel Purchas’s (1657) *A Theatre of Politcall Flying-Insects: Wherein Especially the Nature, the Worth, the Work, the Wonder, and the Manner of Right-Ordering of the Bee, is Discovered and Described*, John Gedde’s (1675) *A New Discovery of an Excellent Method of Bee-House and Colonies*, John Worlidge’s (1676) *Apiarium, or, A Discourse of Bees, Tending to the Best Way of Improving Them, and the Discovery of the Fallacies that Are Imposed by Some, for Private Lucre, on the Credulous Lovers and Admirers of These Insects*, and, lastly, “the royal beemaster,” Moses Rusden’s (1679) *A Full Discovery of Bees: Treating of the Nature, Government, Generation & Preservation of the Bee*. Controversy surrounding bees would continue well into the eighteenth century, especially in relation to the sex of the monarch, which Butler is regarded as the first to correctly identify. Interest would also remain in the comparison between the organization of the beehive and organization of human communities, the most notable example being Bernard Mandeville’s doggrel poem, “The Grumbling Hive, or, Knaves Turn’d Honest” (1705) and his *The Fable of the Bees, or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714, 1723). Other significant eighteenth-century English texts included John Warder’s (1712) *The True Amazon, or, The Monarchy of Bees*, John Gedde’s (1721) *The English Apiary, or, The Compleat Bee-Master*, John Thorley’s (1744) *Melissologia, or, The Female Monarchy* and his *An Enquiry into the Nature, Order, and Government of Bees* (1765) and, lastly, John Mills’s (1766) *An Essay on the Management of Bees*.

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3 “The ancient parallel between human society and the beehive was never more popular than in the Stuart period when numerous published treatises on bee-keeping gave as much attention to the insects’ political virtues as to their practical utility. […] Writers laid heavy emphasis on the hive’s monarchical structure, though the embarrassing discovery that their monarch was not a king, as had always been assumed, but a queen, remained controversial until the 1740s. ‘A Queen-Bee,’ explained an encyclopedia in 1753, was the ‘term given by late writers to what used to be called the King-Bee.’” Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 62. Thomas overstates the case. Nearly all seventeenth century authorities agreed with Butler against the ancient sources, such as Aristotle and Pliny, that the monarch was female. See F. R. Prete, “Can Females Rule the Hive? The Controversy Over Honey-Bee Gender Roles in British Beekeeping Texts of the Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 243 (1991): 113–44.

Charles Butler was not a political theorist and, insofar as he theorized the political, he was not particularly original. The century prior to the publication of *The Feminine Monarchie* saw the publication of much more important works such as Machiavelli’s *The Prince* in 1532, Jean Bodin’s *Six Books of the Commonwealth* in 1576, and Giovanni Botero’s *Reason of State* in 1589. Likewise, the following century saw the publication of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* in 1651, Samuel Pufendorf’s *On the Duty of Man and Citizen* in 1675 and John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* in 1689. *The Feminine Monarchie* was not even the most important work of political theory published in 1609, justly being overshadowed by Hugo Grotius’s *Mare Liberum*. Why then talk about a text as insignificant as Butler’s? One reason is that this minor text brings into close relief how politics, but especially the relation between the ruler and the ruled, was conceived by average, educated men of the period. Another reason concerns the similitude Butler constructs between the beehive and the political community. The beehive has traditionally been used as a model for understanding human political communities; Butler’s text significantly re-interprets this ancient model in light of larger contemporary discussions of politics and rule. The period between *The Prince* and the *Two Treatises of Government* saw the destruction of the medieval cosmology and its understanding of politics and the creation of modernity and its understanding of politics. That is, the slow movement from politics organized around sovereignty to one organized around government. Sitting between these two extremes, *The Feminine Monarchie* sheds light on how these problematics sorted themselves out.

The destruction of the medieval understanding of rule led to a general problem of rule in early modernity, of which the modern concepts of sovereignty and government, among others, are a result. In Michel Foucault’s interpretation, sovereignty—parsed through Machiavelli—was understood as the attempt by the prince to maintain control over his territory over time while government—parsed through the “anti-Machiavellian” art of government literature—sought to articulate the interests of the state, as opposed to those of the prince, which depended upon concepts such as population, health, wealth, happiness and the like. Thus, a distinction and a division was created between sovereignty and forms of government (e.g., reason of state, police, political

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5 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*. For the distinction between the prince as a natural person and the state as an artificial person or corporation (of which the natural person of the prince is the ‘head’), see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) and Quentin Skinner,
economy, liberalism) and it is suggested that government displaces sovereignty as the locus of political power. In effect, sovereignty was about territory, while government was about relations, “the proper disposition of things.”

*The Prince* is identified more or less with sovereignty, in this case understood as a “synthetic” link that connects the ruler to the territory, which he has obtained through inheritance, acquisition, or conquest. Regardless of the means of possession, the prince has no natural or necessary link to the territory. Foucault argues that this link is “external” and “transcendent” because of the lack of any necessary connection between ruler and territory (i.e., obtained through inheritance, acquisition, or conquest) and because the prince constitutes the principality through the link (i.e., it is transcendent).

In the absence of a prince, there can be no territory, just unclaimed space—a political vacuum. Consequently, sovereignty is a form of power that seeks to hold out over time against challengers, who may come from within or without the territory, which accounts for the importance of juridical modes of power, such as the right to wage war against other sovereigns and the right to punish subjects. The goal of ruling is to protect and strengthen the *link* between the prince and his territory rather than any particular concern with the territory itself, its inhabitants, or the characteristics of either. The approach of sovereignty is negative insofar as it creates laws aimed at deduction: of money through taxes and of limbs through penal codes.

This is the entry point of the art of government, which maintains that holding on to territory over time is not the same as possessing the art of government. In contradistinction to the ruler/territory relationship, the governor/governed relationship is multiple and plural: monarchs, emperors, lords, magistrates, judges, popes, bishops, priests, and fathers among many others govern. Government, then, is not used in the contemporary sense of ‘the’ government, for instance the political party presently ‘in power,’ but in a much more general sense as ‘the conduct of conduct.’ As such, the ruler/territory relation is but one possible—and limited—form of government. These other forms of government can all be described as “internal” or “immanent” to that which is to be governed. In other words, there are few—if any—general principles which can be applied to all situations that are to be governed; the plurality of modes of government works in opposition to the singularity of the sovereign and

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6 Quoted in Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 96. The discussion that follows in this section is largely adapted from ibid., 87–114.

7 Ibid., 91.
juridical mode of rule. To further complicate matters, government by or of the state is not the only form of the art of government. Many organizations and persons seek to govern and, frequently, the same “thing” is governed by a multiplicity of authorities, some of which are beyond the state.

Take François de La Mothe Le Vayer as an example. In a series of texts written in the late seventeenth century for the Dauphin, La Mothe Le Vayer argues there are three general forms of government: of the self (morality), of the family (economy), and of the state (politics). To govern the self is different than to govern the family, which are both different than governing the state. However, despite their irreducibility, these forms of government are nonetheless similar in that they are non-sovereign modes of rule premised upon the ‘conduct of conduct’ rather than the imposition of law upon subjects. Of particular importance in these texts is the notion of an upward and downward continuity. Before a prince can govern his family, he must be able to govern himself and before a prince can govern the state, he must be able to govern his family. Hence, an upwards continuity:

\[
\text{self/morality} \rightarrow \text{family/economics} \rightarrow \text{state/politics}.
\]

The chain also works in reverse. If the prince is able to govern the state, then fathers will be able to govern their families, and if fathers can govern their families, then individuals will be able to govern themselves. Hence, there is also a downwards continuity:

\[
\text{state/politics} \rightarrow \text{family/economy} \rightarrow \text{self/morality}.
\]

Two important consequences follow: first, order at one level begets order at another level and, second, the level of the family/economy plays an essential role in the transmission of order insofar as it connects the political rule of the state to the moral rule of the individual. In other words, the economy mediates between the individual and the state.

While differences in forms of government have been shown, as has their relation to one another, the specific meaning of government as a practice has not yet been shown. For this, we must turn to Guillaume de la Perrière where he claims “government is the right disposition of things arranged so as to lead to a suitable end.” This idea of “things,” again, is in opposition to the Machiavellian theory that rule concerns the synthetic and transcendent

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8 Note that economics is still being used in the ancient sense of household management.
link between ruler and territory. This link is not a “thing” in the relevant sense. For La Perrière, things are the relations humans have with their environment: wealth, resources, the features of the territory, customs, habits, as well as accidents, famine, death, and the like. A commonly given example in these texts is the metaphor of a ship: to govern a ship is to govern sailors, to care for the vessel and cargo, to have knowledge of the shipping lanes, the ability to deal with misfortunes that may arise (illness, storms), and so on. The ultimate result is that government is not the application of laws (which Foucault identifies with sovereignty), but the disposition, or ordering, of things through tactics (which Foucault identifies with government). Government is the structuring of the field of action available to others, but it is “neither warlike nor juridical.”

For instance, a juridical solution to underpopulation in a given country might be to force reproduction (e.g., “All women of child-bearing age must produce at least one child in the next five years”); a governmental solution would be to create a positive environment for reproduction (tax benefits tied to number of children, generous maternity/paternity leave, access to affordable daycare, etc.) and immigration (easy to obtain work permits, payments for immigration, access to cheap housing, etc.).

Lastly, the government of things depends upon “patience, wisdom and diligence.” Here La Perrière has recourse to the metaphor of the beehive: the “king-bee” rules without having a stinger. The meaning of this, given to us by God and revealed in nature, is that the ruler does not need a sword—a traditional emblem of royal power—in order to govern well. Rather than relying upon violence and the law, the ruler should make use of his virtues: of his patience, wisdom, and diligence. It is precisely this call for patience, wisdom, and diligence that is emphasized in The Feminine Monarchie.

3 Honey and Silk

The bee is the “chiefe and most worthily to be admired” among all the insects because they are the only insects “bred for the behoof of men.” This, of
course, is clearly not the case as other insects, especially the silkworm, were used to produce goods for human consumption. The reference to silkworms in Butler’s text is significant. In January 1607, James I enacted a series of measures to encourage the introduction of a domestic silk industry. Among these measures included a license to William Stallenge to print a book entitled *Instructions for the Planting and Increase of Mulberry Trees, Breeding of Silkworms, and Making of Silk* and an order that landowners purchase and plant ten thousand mulberry trees to be delivered the following spring. The king himself had mulberries planted at Hampton Court Palace and there are records of the attempt lasting on his land a decade later. Finally, in 1619 after a lack of success in England, James I attempted to encourage the production of silk in North America. All these attempts failed seeing no successful introduction of silk production into England until after the expulsion of the Huguenots following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, many of who were skilled silkworkers.

Two insects are bred for the benefit of man: the bee and the silkworm. Butler draws attention to three ways in which the bee demonstrates its superiority to the silkworm. First, the product of the silkworm only covers the body while the product of the bee “nourishes and cures the soul.” Second, the product of the silkworm is only applied externally, while the product of the bee is “inwardly received.” Finally, the product of the silkworm is for “comeliness and conveniency,” the product of the bee is for “health and necessity.” The grounds for preferring the bee to the silkworm are not economic, but moral: the bee contributes to the health of the soul and body; its products are useful necessities rather than vain luxuries. The silkworm’s products are the

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14 Measures of this sort had a long history in England because the English were jealous of the wealth generated by the silk industries in Italy and France. Attempts to introduce the silkworm into England extended as far back as Henry IV’s reign. See John Feltwell, *The Story of Silk* (Phoenix Mill: Alan Sutton, 1990).


complete opposite: silk is used to make ostentatious and expensive clothing; its products are luxuries rather than necessities. Stallenge does not appear to disagree with these views, noting that “our Brother the French King has since his coming to that Crown, both begun and brought to perfection the making of silks in his country, whereby he has won to himself the honour and to his subjects a marvelous increase in wealth.”

Two points are essential. First is the conflict between rival theories of wealth; that is, does general prosperity derive from the production of necessities for the domestic market or from the production of luxuries for the world market? This question would become exceptionally important in the next century in the debate between the proponents of mercantilism and the proponents of political economy, such as Bernard Mandeville and Adam Smith. The second point is that a king pursuing a luxuries based economy has committed himself to a questionable moral decision: he is foregoing health and necessity in favour of garish decadence. The bee, unlike its close cousin the wasp and the silkworm, is a thoroughly moral and virtuous creature—a point the apiarists, but especially Butler, never tire of raising. In addition to providing a mirror image of the ideal political community, the bee also provides a mirror image of the ideal ordering of the virtues. When the kingdom and the virtues are perfectly ordered at the level of the monarch, then the proper conditions are laid for profitable—albeit not luxurious—production at the level of the commons, pointing to the continuity between the levels of government.

4 Virtue, Order, and Economy

Butler maintains that there is a close connection between the ordering of the virtues and the political structure, which is most clearly evident with bees: because their political structure is perfect, so too are their virtues; and, because they have perfectly ordered virtues, their kingdom is likewise perfectly

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Touchstone in Ben Johnson’s *Eastward Ho*: “Of sloth comes pleasure, of pleasure comes riot, of riot comes whoring, of whoring comes spending, of spending comes want, of want comes theft, of theft comes hanging,” quoted in Hunt, “Moralizing Luxury,” 357; c.f., “And for their persons (which are lovely brown) though they be not long about it yet are they curious in trimming and smoothing them from top to toe, like unto sober matrons, which love to go neat as plain; pied and garish colours belong to the wasp, which is good for nothing but to spend and waste.” Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie* (1609), B6r.

Stallenge, *Instructions*, B1r.
ordered. A monarch following the model of the silkworm is well on his way to a disorderly and vicious kingdom. If humans could replicate either the political structure or the virtues of the bees, then the other component would follow by the force of necessity because a properly ordered community produces well-ordered virtues and well-ordered virtues produce a properly ordered community. Similarly, once the virtues and the kingdom are ordered, then the proper conditions exist for the profitable flourishing of the kingdom and its subjects. Just as there is a moral bond between the monarch and commons in the hive, there is a similar moral connection between the monarch and commons in the human community. Given the close connection between virtue and political structure posited by Butler, he had extraordinary difficulty separating the two. Discussions of political structure quickly dissolve into discussions of virtue and vice versa.

Butler constantly returns to the relation between morality, politics, and economics, all of which he believes have a natural basis, but for which he is unable to identify or isolate a consistent relation between these three elements. In the “Preface” to The Feminine Monarchie, Butler argues that the perfect ordering of the hive and the virtues of the bees reflect one another and, with this relation established, it is possible to talk about economy and profit. In the first chapter entitled “Of the nature and properties of Bees, and of their Queen,” Butler begins with an economic argument. In parallel with the “Preface,” Butler compares the bee to other insects ultimately determining that “bees are most to be admired.” The basis of this admiration is neither moral nor political—although the bee is most certainly admirable in these respects as well—but economic because of “all the creatures” (and here Butler moves from insects to the entirety of domesticated animals) provided by God “for the use and service of man” (referring to the donation of dominion by God to Adam in the Garden of Eden at Genesis 1:28), the bee presents its superiority in three ways: (1) the economy and efficiency of its production—“great profit, small cost”; (2) its ubiquity through the world—no other domesticated animal is as geographically dispersed as the bee; and (3) “the continued labour and

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19 Witness the prevalence of the word ‘order’ in the titles of the apiarist texts listed above—especially the near obsession with ‘right ordering’ and ‘perfect order.’ The concept of ‘order’ grounds the discourse surrounding the beehive such that a properly ordered hive will be productive, profitable, stable, happy, and wealthy—not just for the monarch and the higher echelons of the aristocracy, but for the entirety of the hive.

20 Butler, The Feminine Monarchie (1609), A1r.

21 One wonders what conclusions Butler would have drawn from African and Africanized (‘killer bees’) honey bees had he known of them. Might have he drawn conclusions about the relation between climate and temperament as Montesquieu did in his Spirit of the Laws?
It is the third point, the relation between labour and order, that claims Butler’s attention for the next few pages and one he returns to frequently throughout the chapter. This connection between moral ordering and economic production bears a striking similarity to the art of government by La Mothe Le Vayer and La Perrière.

Bees, unlike other wild or domestic animals, combine efficient economic production and a virtuous political structure such that they present an image of a perfectly ordered common-weal. Note that here I write common-weal and not common-wealth. My usage here runs contrary to the actual word used by Butler, but it better preserves the meaning of his argument for my purposes. Both the words commonwealth and commonweal enter into English in the mid-sixteenth century, translating both civitas (‘the city’) and respublica (‘the public things’). Given that the unit of government was not the city and not quite yet the ‘public things’ or ‘general welfare,’ a new term was needed to adequately capture the meanings English writers wanted to convey. Even at the end of the seventeenth century, John Locke felt it necessary to comment on his choice of translating civitas as commonwealth rather than republic:

> By Common-wealth, I must be understood all along to mean, not a Democracy, or any Form of Government, but any Independent Community which the Latines signified by the word Civitas, to which the word which best answers in our Language, is Common-wealth, and most properly expresses such a Society of Men, which Community or Citty in English does not, for there may be Subordinate Communities in a Government; and City amongst us has a quite different notion from Commonwealth.

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23 On the relation between the cluster of terms surrounding state, commonwealth, city, civitas, res publica, res communis and their historical development, see Quentin Skinner, “The State,” in Political Innovation and Conceptual Change, ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 91–131. Skinner does not make this observation, but ‘commonwealth’ is a barbarism, deriving from the Old English wela and the Latin communis. The anglicanization of res publica, ‘republic,’ did not enter into use until the early seventeenth century, nearly a century after commonwealth entered into common usage. It too combined the meanings found in ‘commonwealth’ and ‘commonweal,’ that is, both the subject of government and the object of government.

Following Locke, we must enquire into why he thought it necessary to use commonwealth rather than any other word.

Contemporary usage of commonwealth combines two meanings that early modern English frequently, but not universally, kept separate. For us, a commonwealth includes both what early moderns would call the commonweal and the commonwealth. Early modern usage distinguishes between commonweal, meaning the common well-being, the general good, prosperity and welfare of the community (i.e., the object of government), and the commonwealth, meaning the entire body of the people (i.e., the subject of government). ‘Wealth,’ in this case, did not refer to material goods or riches. Consequently, these words referred to two processes undergoing rapid change in the political theory of early modernity: (1) the purpose of the political community and (2) the identity of the constitutive political subject. Hence, in this case we need to be cognizant of what meaning is intended: the public good or the constitutive political subject.

A significant result of the seventeenth and eighteenth century revolutions—English, American and French—was that the public good and the constitutive political subject become identified with one another. The good that the commonwealth is constituted to protect is the interest of the constitutive political subject; that is, the subject and object of politics becomes one and the same. We need to be mindful of larger patterns of social organization, especially during the transition from ‘the estates’ to ‘the state.’ This movement is co-extensive with the subsumption of the commonweal under the commonwealth. Thus, what is at stake here is the emergence of the top strata of the third estate (i.e., the people and the nation out of the third estate, or commons) as the dominant economic and political force. At this point, it becomes possible to speak about modern republican governments where there is no hereditary head of state and the government is (more or less) popularly elected by the commons. Hence, the ‘common’ in ‘commonwealth’ ultimately comes to refer to this strata.

When Butler is speaking of the commonwealth, he is most certainly talking about the commonweal; that is, the object of government. He is not referring to a political subject, but to the general good or public welfare of the community:

for their order it is such that they may well be said to have a commonwealth, since all that they do is in common without any private respect […] They work for all, they watch for all, they fight for all. […] their dwelling and diet are common to all alike; they have like common care both of their wealth and young ones.25

This description of the ordering of the hive is significant for two reasons. First, it confirms that Butler is not using commonwealth in the modern sense and, second, the hive in Butler’s description is surprisingly similar to the late feudal order of Elizabethan England—the very regime that Butler had lived most of his life under—and the then decaying structure of reciprocal rights and duties.

At the level of the symbolic, feudalism represented itself to itself as a system of three interdependent, but separate, orders or estates. Each estate received benefit from the other two while owing them particular duties. The monarch sat outside the system of estates, in effect constituting the kingdom and ensuring order. The first estate, the clergy, was concerned with spiritual matters; the second estate, the nobility, was concerned with defense; and the third estate, the commons, was concerned with producing the necessities of life. Butler’s schema repeats the feudal structure—working, watching, fighting—but with a significant change: the function of the third estate appears first, the function of the first estate appears second, and the function of the second estate appears third.

Another version of this re-ordering is found in later editions of *The Feminine Monarchie*, beginning with the 1623 edition. The image appears in all subsequent editions, including the Latin translation. In the image, Butler represents the hive as consisting of four orders or estates, which he calls Princeps (first in order; i.e., the monarch), Duces (dukes), Plebs (commoners) and Inerros Fuci (wandering drones). This image is partially at odds with the actual text, which continues to identify working, watching, and fighting as the primary functions.

The image rank-orders the functions Princeps inside the hive at the top; Fuci outside the hive at the bottom representing them with images of bees of different sizes, along with their relative dispersion within the hive. In Butler’s image, there is one Princep, at the top, two Duces, one on either side of the hive facing Princep at a forty-five degree angle, three Plebs organized in a triangular pattern, and four Fuci placed outside the hive—two on each side, one on top of the other. The three internal functions are shown from above while the Fuci are shown in profile. The Duces and the Plebs are represented by the same image, Princeps has its own image, which is the largest and is adorned with a crown.

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26 In England, the estates were called the Lords Spiritual, Lords Temporal, and the Commons. Once established, the bishops of the Church of England carried the title Lords Spiritual and sat in the House of Lords alongside the Lords Temporal. The lower echelons of the clergy—such as many of the apiarists, including Butler who was the vicar at Wootton St. Lawrence, near Basingstoke—were considered to be part of the Commons.

while the image of the *Fuci* represent them as a source of riotous disorder in comparison to the orderly arrangement of the *Princeps, Duces,* and *Plebs.*

The image is bordered by a series of mottos. The entire image is entitled *Apum Ordines* (“the order of the bees”), the sides of the image are contained within the motto *SOLERTIA ET LABORE* (“ingenuity and labour”), which appears twice, and the bottom of the image is contained within the motto

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28 Variant editions read *Quatuer apum ordines*, the “four orders of the bees.”
SOCORDIAM LUIMUS (“we pay for our laziness”). Finally, an epigram appears below the entire image:

Miraris arte conditas mirâ domos,
Opesque regales in his reconditas?
Solertiâ et labore fiunt omnia.

Or, in English,

Do you wonder at their houses founded with remarkable skill,
And the royal wealth hidden in them?
All things are created by their ingenuity and labour.29

While the image appears to call into question the structure of the hive presented in the first chapter, the mottos and epigram actually confirm the original presentation of the structure. The key to this is found in the opposition between solertia et labore and socordiam luimus. The hive is “held in” on the sides by solertia et labore, while the phrase socordiam luimus is bookended by the two sets of drones. The image is, therefore, presenting a contrast between princep, duces, and plebs, on the one hand, and inerros fuci on the other. The inerros fuci, representing the drones who do not work, must “pay for [their] laziness” and have been banished from the hive.30 The currency of their

29 I would like to thank my colleague, Professor Josh Beers, of the College of the Humanities at Carleton University in Ottawa for providing these translations.
30 Regarding the drone, Butler writes the following in the fourth chapter under the heading, “The drone no labourer”:

“The Drone, which is a gross hive-bee without sting, has been always reputed for a sluggard, and that worthily for howsoever he brave it with his round velvet cap, his side gown, his great paunch, and his loud voice, yet is he but an idle person living by the sweat of others’ brows. For he works not at all, either at home or abroad, and yet spends as much as two labourers, you shall never find his maw without a good drop of the purest nectar. In the heat of the day he flies abroad, aloft, and about, and that which no small noise, as though we would do some great act, but it is only for his pleasure, and to get him a stomach, and then returns he presently to his cheer.” Butler, The Feminine Monarchie (1609), D5r.

Note the connection between his laziness, ostentatious dress, and gluttony. The comparison between the fuci and the so-called ‘masterless men,’ as able-bodied but poor vagrants of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were often called, is obvious:

“it is still possible to conclude that vagrancy was one of the most pressing social problems of the age. […] Vagrants could face felony charges under many statutes. The crime was taken so seriously because to the dominant classes vagabonds appeared to threaten
payment is banishment because their laziness is a threat to the stability of the hive as a whole: to its “ingenuity and labour.” This interpretation is confirmed by the epigram that attributes “the royal wealth” to the ingenuity and labour of the hive as a whole and not, it should be noted, to the sovereign except insofar as the sovereign creates a system of order wherein prosperity is possible. Hence, solertia et labore is the foundation of order and prosperity within the beehive.

Returning to the “continual labour, consenting order,” Butler argues that there are no internal causes or motivations that can disrupt the labouring process, with one important exception: the presence of two or more queens, which leads either to war or separation of the hive into two swarms.

But if they have many Princes, as when two fly away with one swarm, or when two swarms are hived together; they strike one of them presently, and sometime they bring her down that evening to the mantle, where you may find her covered with a little heap of Bees, otherwise the next day they carry her forth either dead or deadly wounded. Likewise if the old Queen bring forth many Princes (as she may have six or seven, yea sometimes half a score or more which superfluity nature affords for more surety, in case some miscarry) then left the multitude of rulers should distract the unstable commons into factions, within two days after the last swarm, you shall find them that remained, dead before the hive. [...] For the Bees abhor as well polyarchy, as anarchy, God having showed in them unto me an express patterne of a perfect monarchy, the most natural and absolute form of government.31

The lesson here is that royal succession must be smooth and transparent, otherwise significant disruptions—if not the complete destruction of the hive—will occur. Labour is continuous because the order is agreeable. In other words,

the established order. They were ‘masterless’ in a period when the able-bodied poor were supposed to have masters. They also broke with official conventions of family, economic, religious and political life, some even venturing down the dangerous paths of organized crime and rebellion.” A. L. Beier, Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560–1640 (London: Methuen, 1985), xiv.

Come the middle of the seventeenth century, that is, during the Civil War, the poor became much more than a mere social problem, but one of the pressing political issues of the day: were the poor a part of the people? See Christopher Hill, “The Poor and the People,” in The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill: Volume 3, People and Ideas in 17th Century England (Brighton: Harverster, 1986), 247–73.

the hive is perfectly structured such that there are no grounds upon which a bee would ever complain and cease to work. The only factors which may ever impede continual labour are entirely external, such as poor weather, want of resources, or a successful invasion by robbers. The only possible internal cause is that the bees are so happy to labour that they may labour too much and thus exhaust themselves to the point of death. This opens up a potential problem for Butler (and the other apiarists) which he does not appear to recognize, let alone address: how do you prevent excessive happiness and, thus, overwork? The answer, if there is one, must lie in the opposition between necessity and luxury. Overwork can only lead to overproduction. To overproduce is to produce beyond necessity, which forms the condition for the accumulation of surpluses and, thus, of luxuries. There must be strict regulation of production and consumption; that is, a police: it is good to be happy, but decadent to be too happy. Consequently, “their labour never ceases.”

Ceaseless, tireless and continual labour provides an ideal model for the proper functioning of a political community: “their labour and order at home and abroad are so admirable, that they may be a pattern unto men both of the one and the other.” It is at this point that Butler shifts from an economic discourse to a political and moral discourse, crediting the political structure as the source of the continual labour and consenting order:

all this under the government of one Monarch, of whom above all things they have a principal care and respect, loving, reverencing, and obeying her in all things. [...] While she cheers them to battle they fight; when she is silent they cease; while she is well, they are cheerful about their work; if she droops, they faint also; if she die, they will never prosper, then henceforth languish until they be dead too.

Butler concludes, “God having shown in them unto me an express pattern of a perfect monarchy, the most natural and absolute form of government.”

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32 Ibid., 1609, A1v. The drones, despite their noted laziness, cannot be a source of disorder internal to the hive because of their precarious existence. The drones have the sole purpose of breeding and are driven out of the hive following breeding. Those drones that do not leave are killed.

33 Ibid., A1v.

34 Ibid., A2r–v.

35 Ibid., A1r. This passage has been incorrectly interpreted as a defense of absolute, divine right monarchy:

“The insectan version of divine-right monarchy is also found in a remarkable work published in 1609 by Charles Butler, The Feminine Monarchie, or, A Treatise Concerning
These statements are not innocent. As previously noted, Butler was writing just shortly after the death of Queen Elizabeth I and in the early years of James I’s reign. The commonly accepted view was that Queen Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, ruled over a golden age in English history seeing the arts, commerce, and state prosper. In comparison, James I (as was his successor Charles I, during whose reign the third edition of *The Feminine Monarchie* was published) was an unpopular ruler and resistance to his rule contributed greatly to the Civil War due to his—as ascribed to him, at least, by his enemies—preference for absolutist monarchy, poor financial management, and his promotion of largely unpopular advisors and ministers at Court. Butler’s subtle attacks on James I in *The Feminine Monarchie*, published in 1609, appeared just four years after the failed assassination attempt known as the Gunpowder Plot, or Powder Treason, where a group of Catholics attempted to kill the entirety of the royal family and Protestant aristocracy with a single explosion set off by Guy Fawkes. In addition to the Gunpowder Plot, 1605 also saw the return of the bubonic plague with particular ferocity in London. Hence, the first years of James I’s rule saw plague and disorder, both certainly

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the [sic] Bees, and the Due Order of Them. This treatise, one of the earliest comprehensive treatments of beekeeping and the habits of honeybees, was published in the reign of James I, the first Stuart monarch of England. Its portrayal of honeybee societies as perfect monarchies seems to go beyond the flattering ornamental statements often prefacing works published under the watchful eye of patron sovereigns: in his opening chapter, after extolling the many virtues of honeybees, Butler marvels that ‘all this [is found] under the government of one Monarch, of whom above all things [the worker bees] have a principal care and respect, loving, reverencing, and obeying her in all things.’ Butler is serious about the virtues of monarchy, as he goes on to explain why, should the queen ‘bring forth many princes,’ the new royals will either leave the colony in a swarm or be killed off by the workers: ‘For the bees abhor as well polyarchie, as anarchie, God having showed in them… an express pattern of a perfect Monarchie, the most natural and absolute form of government’ (chap. 1, emphasis added). In other words, the bees will not abide more than one leader in the hive, driving off or killing off would-be oligarchs till one ruler remains; God has here provided a perfect monarchical model for people.” James T. Costa, “Scale Models? What Insect Societies Teach Us About Ourselves,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 146:2 (2002): 173–4.

This error derives from two sources. First, that the book was published in the sixth year of James I’s reign has little bearing on the politics of *The Feminine Monarchie*. Second, Costa relies upon an anachronistic interpretation of the meaning of ‘absolute.’ He confuses early seventeenth century uses of absolute with later uses. Butler is using absolute to mean ‘complete, perfect.’ He is not using it in the sense of ‘absolute power,’ a meaning which does not enter into common usage for another decade. Costa is correct, however, that the monarchy of the beehive is intended as a model of human societies, he just significantly misidentifies the model.
signs of God’s disfavour with his form of rule in comparison with the form of 
rule adopted by Elizabeth: “if she die, they will never prosper, then henceforth 
languish until they be dead too.”

Butler goes on to draw out a comparison between Queen Elizabeth I and 
the queen bee, which is aimed against the form of rule adopted by James I. 
In comparison with the divine right monarchy of James I, Elizabeth I’s rule 
was comparatively moderate. Her motto, *video et taceo*, “I see, but say nothing,” 
should be kept in mind given the importance Butler attributes to ‘watching’ 
as opposed to acting, but also watching in the ‘police’ sense of surveillance. 
Elizabeth I, therefore, according to Butler—in direct opposition to James I, 
whose hostility to Parliament is well known—operated above and outside the 
rest of the political structure and her function was to unite the other functions 
under her steady hand:

> the spear she has [her stinger] is but little, and not half so long as other 
Bees; which, like a King’s sword, is borne rather for show and authority, 
than for any other use for it belongs to her subjects as well to fight for her, 
as to provide for her.

The trade-off, then, is that if the monarch is moderate, then not only will the 
kingdom prosper, but there will be order and peace throughout: the commons 
will “have a principal care and respect, loving, reverencing, and obeying her 
in all things.” In such a kingdom, a monarch only needs a “little spear” to 
maintain order and ensure prosperity because these emerge out of govern-
mental management rather than sovereign violence. The health of the com-
mons and of the queen are mutually implied. A moderate ruler ensures that 
their own good is in tune with the good of the whole, while an immoderate 
ruler places their own good above the rest. Hence, moderation/immodera-
tion (politics), necessity/luxury (economy) and virtue/vice (morality) are all 
closely associated with one another. Similarly, should the monarch pursue 
moderation, virtue and necessity, the fact of having a “little spear” will not be 
important because the monarch will have no reason to make use of the tools of 
sovereignty: of commands, of laws, and of violence. However, if the monarch 
is immoderate and decadent, then the monarch will no doubt have recourse

36 Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie* (1609), A2v, emphasis added. The 1623 edition reads 
differently: “if she droops and die, they will never after enjoy their home, but either 
languish there until they be dead too, or yielding to the Robbers, fly away with them.” 
38 Ibid., A2r.
to poor decisions when engaged in ruling and will thus tend to use their “little spear” to rule with violence rather than ruling with virtue—and, obviously, the use of that “little spear” necessarily entails the death of the queen bee.

5 From Monarch to Beekeeper and Back

It is not just the style of rule that Butler identifies. He also draws a connection between the virtue of the bees and the virtue of the beekeeper; after all The Feminine Monarchie is ostensibly an apicultural text intended to be used by actual beekeepers. Bees, Butler constantly reminds the reader, display an “incredible power and virtue.”39 This is a particularly interesting section of The Feminine Monarchie because it is one of the few places in the entire text where humans play a direct part and points to how the text can be read as advice to the prince because here the monarch and the beekeeper become indistinguishable. Just as it is the purpose of the monarch to display the finest virtues and moderation in order to give coherence and stability to the hive, the beekeeper must approach the hive with virtue and moderation with the goal of regulating the external conditions of the hive (where to place the colony, the form of the hive, the relation between the hive and environment—precisely the aspects that could affect the “continual labour, consenting order” that the queen bee is unable to govern). Proper regulation of the external conditions will enable the hive to prosper; neglect will cause the hive to “languish and die.” If the beekeeper takes care of the hive, the hive will take care of him. He isolates four principle virtues: temperance, justice, chastity, and cleanliness:

1. “In the pleasures of their life the Bees are so moderate, that perfect temperance seems to rest only in them.”
2. “Also, in their own commonwealth, they are most just, not the least wrong or injury is offered among them.”
3. “Their chastity is to be admired. […] They engender not as other living creatures: only they suffer their drones among them for a season, by whose masculine virtue they strangely conceive and breed for the preservation of their sweet kind.”
4. “For cleanliness and neatness they may be a mirror of the finest dames. […] For neither will they suffer any sluttir within… neither can they endure any unsavouriness without… pied and garish colours belong to the wasp, which is good for nothing but to spend and waste.”40

39 Ibid., B5r.t.
40 Ibid., B5r–v.
The virtues displayed by the bees must be replicated by the beekeeper or anyone else who would approach a swarm or hive:

    But if you will have the favour of your Bees that they sting you not, you must avoid such things as offend them: you must not be (1) unchaste or (2) unclean for impurity and sluttishness (themselves being most chaste and neat) they utterly abhor; you must not come among them (3) smelling of sweat, or having a stinking breath caused either through eating of leakes, onions, garlic, and the like; or by any other means; the noisomeness whereof is corrected with a cup of beer and therefore it is not good to come among them before you have drunk; you must not be given to (4) surfeiting and drunkenness; you must not come (5) puffing and blowing or sweating unto them, neither hastily stir among them, nor violently defend yourself when they seem to threaten you; but softly moving your hand, before your face gently put them by; and lastly you must be (6) no stranger unto them. In a word you must be chaste, cleanly, sweet, sober, quiet, and familiar so they will love you, and know you from all other.

Recall the previously cited passage: “of whom [the monarch] above all things they [the bees] have a principle care and respect, loving and reverencing, and obeying her in all things.” The queen and the beekeeper are bound to the hive through a connection of love and respect. Because the bee most perfectly displays the virtues, it is absolutely necessary that any beekeeper who would approach the hive or swarm likewise mimic the virtues as perfectly as possible because vice—be it unchastity, sluttishness, drunkenness, or laziness, which are traits of the drone—is a certain source of disorder that will disrupt the entire hive. Consequently, the virtues of the subjects and the monarch must be in complete harmony and perfect mirrors of one another in order to ensure the “continual labour, consenting order.” The lesson, if I understand Butler correctly, is that virtue begets virtue and vice begets vice. The central node in the transmission of virtue/vice is the monarch, thus implying a downward continuity. Should the monarch’s desire be properly ordered, then that moral ordering will spread downwards to the lowest tiers of the hive. Likewise, vice spreads in the exact same way. Consequently the monarch—or beekeeper—must always monitor the commons so as to ensure the proper functioning of the hive. However, that monitoring must not extend to violent intervention. The monarch’s “spear,” being smaller than that of the other bees, “is borne rather for show and authority” than for use.

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41 Ibid., A2r.
42 Ibid., A3r–v.
6 Conclusion

The art of government identified by Michel Foucault found its first expression on the European continent in the mid-sixteenth century as a reaction to Niccolo Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. The proponents of the art of government argued that to possess the art of government was different than to possess sovereign power, as the art of government is concerned with “the right disposition of things” while sovereign power is concerned with maintaining the synthetic link between prince and principality. A ruler who does not possess the art of government will not be a good ruler. As a result, government must be inculcated in both the prince and the subjects through the intermediary of policy understood as tactics rather than laws. Those writing the history of the art of government have not identified a penetration of government into England until the eighteenth century with the advent of liberal political economy. In this essay I’ve argued that the art of government was, in fact, taken up in the early seventeenth century in England, albeit not by political philosophers, but by apiarists. The extent to which this discourse on the government of bees influenced politics and political theorists remains obscure. Indeed, there may not be a significant influence at all thus rendering the discourse of the apiarists into a mere historical curiosity—albeit one that possesses a certain degree of charm. Nonetheless, through my careful analysis of Charles Butler’s *The Feminine Monarchie*, we have seen that many of the core tenets of the art of government were sufficiently in circulation in England that an apiarist saw fit to include them in his text.

Bibliography


