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emphasized in the book, explicitly because it is more familiar and better understood than the forms of political engagement of science that are addressed extensively, and also because I had nothing very original to add to the available literature. But the book repeatedly emphasizes that ideology is important, and only objects to a common tendency to limit political assessments of science to considerations of ideology alone (cf. pp. 17-19, 190, and especially 253-55). I see no difficulty with Krips' extended criticism of ideological misrepresentations of breast-feeding as "unnatural," and am only perplexed as to why he believes that such criticism is inconsistent with the concerns I do emphasize in the book. This is not to say that there are not important and controversial issues at stake in the book concerning the scope and character of political criticism and the place of ideology critique within it. Readers interested in a sustained and Philosophically sophisticated criticism of the book on precisely these issues, including its resources for accommodating the critique of ideology, should consult Steven Vogel's recent essay review in *Social Epistemology*.[3]

1. Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
2. Nancy Cartwright, *How the Laws of Physics Lie*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
3. Steven Vogel, 'Science, Practice, and Politics,' *Social Epistemology* 5 (1991), in press.

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Shakespeare, Science and Magic

By John Sutton

John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. Pp. xviii + 309. US$29.95 HB.

Scholarly and readable, this provocative book covers a rich array of themes, living up to its brief of forging "symbiotic rather than predatory" relations between literature, history and philosophy (p. xi). Mebane's complex arguments are based on thorough research, attention to details of text and interpretation (with many original translations from primary sources), and confident paths through the secondary literature of diverse disciplines. The discussion ranges easily from early Renaissance Hermetic/Cabalist magic to the politics of the Stuart court, and from English dramatic practice to radical utopian reformism.

After an introductory chapter, the book falls into two main parts. Chapters on Ficino, Pico and Agrippa are followed by a careful transitional section on magic, science and witchcraft in Renaissance England. This study of English responses to the occult tradition prepares the ground for critical examinations in the second half of the book of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, Jonson's *The Alchemist* and court masques, and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. While closely following Frances Yates' work, particularly *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, in both scope and content, Mebane develops and extends many of her views, applies them to some new material, and answers a number of her critics. Full documentation and an extensive bibliography add to his book's usefulness. The author is not shy of suggesting morals for our time from the study of the Renaissance: as a

result readers unconvinced by his forthright defence of what he sees as the Renaissance vision of human potential may find, as I did, that the book induces considerable impatience. So after a brief sketch of some of its major themes and contentions, I focus on points of disappointment and disagreement.

The early chapters, with well-chosen quotations and neat summaries, set the intellectual agenda for the later literary studies: Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare, Mebane argues, "were consciously aware that philosophical occultism had given impetus to the burgeoning enthusiasm of the period about humanity and its powers" (p. 3). He uses Ficino's Hermetic writings on art, the perfection of the cosmos, man as microcosm, alchemy, the procedures of good magic, the use of talismans, Orphic singing, and medicine to introduce basic occult doctrines. The chapter on Pico, a convincing defence of Yates against William Craven's relegation of magic to a subsidiary place in Pico's system, adds the elements of Christian Cabala, hopes of self-perfection and contemplative ascent, and the aim of redemption in society as in the self, all leading to a vision of the magus as a free agent in control of life. Agrippa's more heterodox views, his abundance of numinous influences, his instructions on advantageous uses of occult powers, and his stress on the *furor* and *passio* of the seeker, helped to spread the occult tradition through Europe. An interesting treatment of Agrippa's sceptical work *De vanitate*, which criticises secular, intellectual and religious authorities as well as the occult doctrines and practices his other writings expound, completes the background sections of the book.

Following Yates' later work, Mebane sees humanism as progressive rather than conservative (pp. 10,20), so that the occult tradition, in developing "the humanists' affirmation of the power of human beings to control both their own personalities and the world around them" (p. 3), was a logical extension of humanism rather than a revolt against it. This extreme humanism stressed the human soul's potential divinity (p. 27) . Neoplatonic influence encouraged the idea that the true self is eternally saved (p. 33), and that Christ's divinity was not unique: humans too are responsible for the providential care of God's world (pp. 34, 38). The Cabalist tradition allows for "the restoration of humanity to its prelapsarian state" (p. 38) . The Fall is not irrevocable: each human has the free will "either to repeat the Fall or to overcome it" (p. 43). Despite the absorption of gnostic influences into the occult tradition, God's benevolence could not be doubted, if the seeker's intentions are pure.

The "widespread feeling" of the approach of "an age of spiritual, cultural, and political rebirth" identified by Mebane was based on the possibility of self-determination through spiritual transformation (often

expressed in alchemical terms, and mocked in *The Alchemist*) regeneration and self-perfection. The self, for the Renaissance occultist, was a work of art; and art had, as a result, a dangerous tendency to compete with grace as "the shaping force in human life and destiny" (p. 11). The ultimate individual goal of such self-creation was the possibility of transcendence, of union with God (pp. 18-19). Its social counterpart was a belief in the possibility of the return of a prelapsarian Golden Age, expressed more concretely in a wish to assist God with the urgent reformation of the world. This desire had greatest appeal for the radical mystical sects of sixteenth century northern Europe, among anti-authoritarian Paracelsian reformers, and in seventeenth century revolutionary England: but it was present, as Mebane shows, throughout the occult tradition, and was promulgated by Elizabethan Englishmen like Dee and Ralegh whose support of the tradition bolstered nationalist imperial ambitions. It was questioned by Marlowe and satirized by Jonson, both aware that the rhetoric of reformist idealism is easily undercut by the exposure of underlying ruthless powermongering.

Important intellectual and ideological parallels are drawn between Jonson and Bacon. The satires on and deflations of occult self-seekers in *The Alchemist* are tempered by awareness of the limitations of human idealism, and a consequent moderation which emphasizes "the concrete possibilities of the here and now" (p. 173). Jonson's attack on stylistic obscurity and intellectual self-deception, like Bacon's on the idols of the mind, is part of a general suspicion of overemotional faith in the individual mind. According to Mebane, Jonson's restrained neoclassicism turns, in Bacon's vision, into the cooperative enterprise of science. While it would be misleading to think of later seventeenth-century science as wholly different, as entirely empirical, devoid of excessive enthusiasms, and free of ambitious virtuosi, this is a plausible reading of Jonson and "the scientific frame of mind".

This brings me to a first disappointment about the book. Mebane's treatment of science is sketchy. With no specific discussion of particular scientific ideas or traditions, and only incidental reference to individual scientists (Gilbert, Harriot), his concern is rather to indicate the conditions of possibility for the development of modern science. Humanism and its occult extensions, when "purged... of the grandiose self-centeredness which so often corrupted" its vision of human potential (p. 35) and of esoteric mathematical mysticism, became, in Baconian and "advanced forms of rational inquiry" (p. 37), a cooperative endeavour less reliant on individual inspiration and so more appealing to traditional authority. But, as the prevalence of the somewhat disconcerting phrase "genuine science" throughout the book suggests, Mebane, while overtly acknowledging the

complexities involved in tracing stimulations of scientific advance, implicitly follows Vickers and others in accepting a dichotomy between progressive modern science and retrograde occult disciplines of alchemy, astrology and natural magic. In Bacon's lifetime, for instance, "only a handful of Englishmen could distinguish between controlled experimentation" and occultist claims that "genuine knowledge of nature was a combination of experience and divine revelation" (p. 6). It is, it seems, a source of regret that in the English mathematician and astronomer Robert Recorde, "progressive and enlightened attitudes exist side by side with a prominent interest in astrology" (p. 76).

For Mebane, magic, in certain forms, did contribute to "the emergence of genuine science" (p. 3) partly through the optimistic assertions of the occultists that the perfected human soul can "perfect, reform and amend" the natural world (p. 24 quoting Ficino). Their vision of humanity was "a necessary part of an atmosphere conducive to the birth of science" (p. 24). But surely, as Patrick Curry and many others have argued, the point of tracing the conceptual and causal connections between the occult tradition and the ideas of the scientific revolution is not more clearly to demarcate the line between science and pre-science but to understand alternative categories for knowledge which predate our classificatory frameworks. It is not at all obvious, as Curry observes, "that there *are* any such stable and enduring epistemological entities as ...'science' and 'magic'"[1]. Mebane has little to add to the historian of science's understanding of the background to seventeenth-century science.

In this and other respects, Mebane reveals considerable confidence in modern perspectives on the issues raised by Renaissance writers, and indeed in the continuity between their concerns and ours. It is "the perennial, unanswerable questions concerning the essence of human nature" (p. 136) with which they deal: the conflicts of their lives and ambiguities of their works are mirrors of our own (pp. 112, 200). He mentions briefly but does not explore the role of the rhetoric of "genuine science" and utopianism in later British imperialist propaganda: but he does, tellingly, conclude with a characterisation of "genuine science" as "the tool through which progress towards a chastened version of the dream of the return of the Golden Age would actually be accomplished" (p. 200). Cooperative empirical science, the eventual result of the humanist enterprise, *may* later have had some destructive consequences; but they are attributable to the self-deceptive confusions of sincerity and open-mindedness with dogmatism and self-vindication already discernible within Renaissance occultism. Science, then, is an institutionalised extension of the Renaissance idea of the free agent's intervention in the natural order: and we do well to notice Renaissance

awareness of the ethical dangers of "daring to assert control over our own destiny" (p.111). But, in Mebane's view, the driving humanist idea of individual and social regeneration through self-perfection, when tempered by a Jonsonian "affirmation of rationality and discipline" (p. 173) and purged of ambition, lust, greed and other effects of the baser parts of human nature, is basically beneficial.

Further display of these same humanist convictions induces in me a corresponding unease about Mebane's approach to Renaissance writers. While overtly welcoming ambiguity and paradox in writers like Agrippa, Marlowe and Jonson both within and across texts, he nevertheless seems to impose dichotomous moral and aesthetic frameworks on their ideas and work. Religious belief is either wholly sincere, or is motivated by ambition, lust, and desire for power. In parts of Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*, Mebane judges, "the desire for personal power penetrates quite subtly into what otherwise seems to be a sincerely religious context" (p. 55). Because Agrippa was at times aware of this unfortunate tendency towards the corruption of religious occultism, he "must have lived in constant spiritual turmoil" (p. 71): so his attack on magic and curiosity in *De vanitate* must be a "sincere personal confession of intellectual pride and selfish ambition" (p. 63) . Some of Agrippa's hints on the possible uses of talismans and potions pervert the true erotic imagery of union with the divine and "read like demonic parodies of Ficino's doctrine of Eros" (p. 57). This suggests to Mebane that moral concerns about the easy confusion of the occultists' wish to transcend mortal limits by perfecting the soul with delusions fostered "by egocentric ambition and by lust" (p. 58) were justifiable It *is* useful, no doubt, to link the overstepping of appointed bounds for which popular attacks vilified Agrippa (and which was dramatized in *Dr Faustus*), with reactionaries' fear of reformers like Bruno and Dee, whose idealist utopianism sits uneasily, from our perspective at least, with nationalism and political opportunism. But Mebane's confidence in distinguishing truly pious good magic from amoral uses of the occult to gratify personal desires for power is disconcerting. Similarly in the aesthetic realm: we are told that, while *Dr Faustus* may be an ambivalent text, its complexities must be "the product of consciously controlled artistry" (p. 116). Consonant with a prefatory justification of the possibility and critical relevance of reconstructing authorial intentions (p. xii-xiii), Mebane is concerned at a number of points to reject modern readings which attribute ambiguity and conflict in Renaissance texts to anything other than deliberate and skilful aesthetic design.

This policy results in some suggestive but thin psychological analyses. James I, for instance, the vigorous upholder of the persecution of

witches who could yet identify with the benevolent occult ruler portrayed in *The Tempest*, was, Mebane argues, torn between defending his own intellectual curiosity and prowess, and a fear that knowledge thus gained is forbidden. So he "apparently projects onto learned magicians his own feelings of guilt" (p. 107). More convincing to some will be Mebane's brief alternative explanation of the king's approval: "one could write a play about a magician so long as the proper authorities were reaffirmed" (p. 108). This is unfortunately about as close as Mebane gets to the detailed political or historical contexts of dramatic and philosophical texts: one often feels the literary critic taking precedence over the historian and the philosopher. Indeed his only minor criticism of Yates is that her studies in dramatic criticism "ultimately become lost in topical speculation rather than focusing upon the spirit of the plays as a whole" (p. 249 n. 19). Mebane's concern with the continuities between early and late Renaissance and between Renaissance and twentieth century renders him perhaps over-impressed, for some tastes, with the spirit of things as a whole.

The chapter on *The Tempest*, "Magic as Love and Faith", is a climactic conclusion to Mebane's book, and will serve to elicit my reservations about his approach. The "most intricate" of the works discussed, *The Tempest* is said to offer a "paradoxical and yet coherent compromise between the intensified quest for liberation and the traditional belief that self-fulfilment derives from participation in a larger community" (p. xiv). It is as if ambiguity, all very well as long as it is ultimately coherent in some grander frame of reference, must, to be acceptable, be an artifice created consciously to tease out the implications of a unifying vision. So Prospero, the "supra-rational and visionary" "holy magician" (pp. 245-6,n.5,n.4) at the end of a long line of Renaissance sages, reveals in art to us, through his alignment with "the cosmic order" (p. 180), "the validity of those insights, attitudes, and values which confer upon human life its deepest significance" (p. 198) . His magical art is not ambivalently poised between necromancy and sincere religious occultism, but is wholly benevolent from the outset.

The Tempest, argues Mebane, is largely "a dramatic debate over whether humanity is bestial or godlike, Caliban or Ariel" (p. 186), and Prospero's role is as an "agent of a beneficent providential order" (p. 176). In its questioning of the excessive self-assertion common in the occult tradition, the play accepts the limitations of the physical and social nature of humanity in a more realistic way than did Pico, Agrippa, or Faustus. Evil is ineliminable, and Caliban, Mebane tells us, is Shakespeare's reminder "that there are some creatures on whose nature nurture will never stick" (p. 176): the interruptions endemic to the moments of greatest harmony in the play remind us that "not all mortals will choose to assume their rightful

places within the natural order" (p. 187) . But art, when it meets true faith in its audience, can "reveal which interpretation of reality is genuine" (p.189). If we are prepared, even with "significant qualifications", to "affirm the revelatory and redemptive power" of the play, it may, like the occultists' alchemical process, "contribute to a magical transformation of our perception of ourselves and the world around us" (p. 199) . Some may find Mebane rather too trusting of easy Renaissance dichotomies, discord/ harmony, beast/ spirit, nature/ nurture, storm/ calm, bodily imprisonment/ rational liberty, unruly sexuality/ ordered chastity, resistance/ authority, gabble/ language, evil *goetia*/ pure *magia* and so on, which Shakespeare arguably breaks down through the play's incessant foregrounding of structural pattern, plot device and theatrical mechanism. But given his strongly positive valuation of the dignity of Prospero's "liberal arts" (*The Tempest*, I ii.73), no other interpretative strategy is really open.

For the whole vision of the Renaissance presented in humanist criticism of this kind is deliberately selective. Mebane links to the occult tradition none of the more uncomfortable Jacobeans like Marston, Webster and Greville, and prefers to examine a romance in which "Shakespeare reaffirms the faith in humanity which he permits us to question in the tragedies" (p. 175). There is no reference to the many sophisticated anti-humanist critiques of free-will, from Calvinists or from philosophers like Pomponazzi. Indeed the only reference to Calvin is telling. Miranda's first description of Caliban, as "Abhorred slave/Which any print of goodness will not take" reminds us, says Mebane, of Calvin's view of fallen human nature; but her response to "beauteous mankind" in the "brave form" of Ferdinand, imagining him first a spirit, then "a thing divine" in contrast "recalls Pico's *Oration*" (p. 190-1). Yet the fundamental conflict between Calvinist predestination and humanist free agency is otherwise erased in Mebane's text: God is good after all, and religious terror is only an instrument of reactionary social control.

So even as Mebane tolerantly acknowledges that Caliban's character "eludes complete categorization", he classifies Caliban as "in part,... a reminder of what human beings may become if our baser elements are uncontrolled" (p.197). Caliban, seen only in necessarily subordinate relation to the powerful humanist magician, is denied a separate place in the reading, as he has been denied his own place ("This island's mine": *The Tempest*, I.ii.331) in Prospero's. Correspondingly Mebane gives short shrift to modern anti-humanism. While echoing W.B.Yeats' lament about the materialism of modern utopian movements, he wholly ignores new historicist and materialist criticism, such as the work of Francis Barker and Peter Hulme [2], Paul Brown[3] and Terence Hawkes[4]. More recently, Stephen

Greenblatt[5] and Graham Holderness[6] have also offered contextual readings of *The Tempest* in considerable tension with Mebane's.

The many novel interpretations and finely-drawn connections in Mebane's learned and stimulating work, then coexist with a number of easy closures and controversial assumptions which its veneer of careful tolerance might render invisible to the unwary. The book closes, as, according to Mebane, does Prospero when he points to and claims Caliban as his, "with an admonition that our better selves can be liberated only if we remember those aspects of our personalities which must be controlled if they are to be fulfilled and perhaps, transcended." (p. 198). It is as if we should expect Caliban, a "thing of darkness" acknowledged and subjugated by a chastened Baconian Prospero, to welcome the opportunity of working for the imperialist magician/ scientist of the future industrial Golden Age. As the humanist magician says, in spite of Caliban's membership of a "vile race": "We cannot miss him. He does make our fire,/ Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices,/ That profit us" (*The Tempest*, I.ii.311-3). Mebane's view that "genuine awareness of one's spiritual potential" in the play "leads not to the desire to dominate, but to the desire to serve" (pp. 193-4), rings hollow. I hope many find his book a rich and challenging source on the multiform texts of the Renaissance.

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1. Patrick Curry, "Revisions of Science and Magic', *History of Science*, *23* 1985, pp. 299-325
2. Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, 'Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: the Discursive Contexts of The Tempest', in John Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares*, London, Methuen, 1985.
3. Paul Brown "'This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine': The Tempest and the Discourse of Colonialism", in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (eds), *Political Shakespeare*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.
4. Terence Hawkes, 'Playhouse - Workhouse', in *That Shakespeherian Rag*, London: Methuen, 1986.
5. Stephen Greenblatt 'Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne', in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
6. Graham Holderness, 'The Tempest: Spectacles of Disenchantment', in Graham Holderness, Nick Potter and John Turner (eds), *Shakespeare: Out of Court*, London: Macmillan, 1990.

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Response

By John S. Mebane

John Sutton's review of *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age* is a thoughtful and serious engagement with my work. All too often scholars and critics of differing theoretical persuasions appear unable or unwilling to strive to understand or appreciate each other's positions; Sutton, in contrast, graciously offers positive comments on many aspects of my research and, for the most part, succeeds in providing an accurate account of my intentions. His review thus provides a welcome occasion for a genuine exchange of ideas.

One central difference between John Sutton's view and my own is that I choose to defend - with substantial qualification - the humanist tradition, whereas Sutton appears to share the view of many cultural materialists that humanism *per se* is misguided or oppressive. The following paragraphs take up this and other differences, suggesting at some points that the conflicts are not as absolute as they might appear.

Sutton's point concerning my use of the term "genuine science" is well taken. While I believe that one may often distinguish between myth or fantasy (such as the belief in animating statues with daemons) and knowledge which has been validated by scientific method, many claims to knowledge - such as alchemy - cannot easily be categorized. I concede that at some points my classifications are subject to qualification or revision.

Sutton is correct that my allegiance to some aspects of the humanist tradition entails a belief that one may strive to reconstruct and appreciate the author's purposes. I would stop far short, however, of affirming individual or authorial autonomy: I regard the self as a locus of biological, social, and economic forces. I would add, however, that those forces interact at different points in different ways, so that it is still meaningful to speak of an individual.

One valid perspective upon a text is to approach it as the expression of an author whose responses to cultural and historical currents may involve passive reflection, active subversion or other responses. My reading of *Dr Faustus* thus argues that the ambiguities of the text might well be a conscious artistic strategy through which Marlowe sought to question imperialist propaganda and other aspects of Renaissance culture while purposely leaving the text open to other interpretations.

In my treatment of Jonson (especially in the chapter on the masques) I stress psychological conflicts and self-contradictions somewhat more than Sutton's review suggests. My interpretation of *The Tempest* strives to attain a kind of aesthetic appreciation which is based in part on seeing some of the work's conflicts as resolved into a harmonious vision which was purposely created by the author. I regard these approaches as neither more nor less speculative than the new historicist or cultural materialist ones which Sutton feels I have neglected. In my preface I note that "different kinds of critical endeavour may be valid, even when they seem to arrive at conflicting, rather than complementary, interpretations of the same texts. This is not to assert that all interpretations are of equal standing, nor to abandon entirely the quest for a degree of objectivity; it is simply to admit that knowledge is contingent upon the contexts in which interpretation occurs, and there are practical as well as theoretical reasons why none of us can claim to have arrived at certainty" (p. xii) . Whereas Sutton asserts that I believe that the complexities of *Dr Faustus* "must be 'the product of consciously controlled artistry'" or that the ambiguities of *The Tempest* "must, to be acceptable, be an artifice created consciously to tease out the implications of a unifying vision," I would change the phrase "must be" to "may well be," and, in accordance with the pluralism I affirm in the preface, omit the phrase "to be acceptable." I regret that my pluralist theoretical assumptions are not always as explicit throughout the entire book as they are in the preface, and I welcome this opportunity to say once again that many differing readings of these texts are either complementary to my own or valid alternatives.

It is true, for example, that critiques of *The Tempest* which stress its complicity with British imperialism are valid. As Annabel Patterson has recently demonstrated in *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (1989), however, such readings are no more certain than many other possibilities. In my chapter on the play in *Renaissance Magic* I strove to bring the reader to enhanced aesthetic appreciation of *The Tempest* by approaching it in a mood of empathy and appreciation. Hence I concentrated on the work's intricate symbolic structure and on certain attitudes and values which I confess I find congenial. When I teach *The Tempest*, I begin with such appreciation, and subsequently I raise questions concerning the play's complicity in cultural assumptions which support imperialism. Perhaps I should also have juxtaposed these two responses - which might well be regarded not as antithetical so much as different levels of criticism in my book. I am deeply concerned, however, that political criticism - which I often find stimulating and important - not bar us or our students entirely from aesthetic appreciation.

Sutton's assertion that my treatment of the occult tradition is "deliberately selective," omitting "the more uncomfortable Jacobeans like Marston, Webster and Greville" does not sufficiently take into account the extent to which I treat Marlowe as uncomfortable. Nor does it do justice to my criticism of John Dee's imperialist propaganda or my discussion of witchcraft persecutions as a means of social and intellectual control. A more accurate criticism, in my judgment, might be that my inclination to give Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare as sympathetic an appreciation as possible, to praise what I find worthy of respect even if I am aware of other elements in their works, leads to an inconsistency in the focus of the book as a whole, with a critique of imperialism becoming explicit in some chapters and not dealt with sufficiently in the concluding section on Shakespeare.

Finally, Sutton complains about my finding "morals for our time" in the works I discuss, and he criticizes my view that there is a "continuity between [Renaissance] concerns and ours." First, while I acknowledge the difficulty of historical and cultural reconstruction, I do not regard our worlds and those of the Elizabethans as so radically different that there can be no communication or continuity of concern. Second, I believe expressions of commitment to be important to literary and cultural criticism, and I would prefer to appear ingenuous than to abandon altogether any expression of my own values. What I appreciate most about the work of many cultural materialists is the sincerity and intensity of their social and moral commitments. Unfortunately, our discussions of our theoretical differences sometimes obscure the fact that our social agendas may often be quite similar. The consideration and acuity which characterize John Sutton's review are qualities which should help us progress toward further recognition of our common ground.

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