

The importance of non verbal communication in first contacts between different cultures¹

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1. Introduction: the relevance of studying ‘first contacts’

On 16 December they approached what seemed to be the end point of the land, turned east-north-east in light winds, sailed on through the night and at daybreak found themselves close to the coast, while smoke plumed up in various places from fires on the shore.

The fires were no doubt signals of consternation, lit at the sight of this unprecedented arrival. The Heemskerck was a 120-ton war yacht with a crew of sixty sailors, while the Zeehaen was a more ponderous but sea-kindly ‘fluyt’ with a crew of fifty. To the coastal people these vessels must have seemed fantastic and more on the scale of islets than of boats, with their high-looming sides, flagged masts, tangled rigging and squared, bellied sails. The figures on the decks must also have seemed extraordinary, with their weird hats and clothing just visible from the shore.

Later that day the Dutch ships approached a sandpit and anchored at dusk beside it, with a view across to a large open bay (Taitapu – Golden Bay, sheltered by Tahuroa – Farewell Spit). On the morning of 18 December they sailed slowly into the bay looking for a good anchorage, with the pinnacle and the cockboat searching out ahead. That night at sunset the ships dropped anchor, and about an hour later two canoes from a group of four approached them as lights flared up on shore. After a long, silent inspection, the men in the two prows began to call out to us in a rough, hollow voice, but we could not understand a word of what they said. We however, called out to them in answer, upon which they repeated their cries several times, but came no nearer than a stone-shot; they also blew several times on an instrument of which the sound was like that of a Moorish trumpet.

The rough calling was probably an incantation or a haka, a chant for war, and the instrument played from the canoes was almost certainly a shell trumpet, sounding to challenge the strangers and signaling that the people in the bay were on the alert. A sailor on the Heemskerck was ordered on deck to play some tunes in answer, and the second mate of the Zeehaen, who had come out to the Indies as a trumpeter, did the same. After these brief and ambiguous exchanges the men in the canoes paddled back to the land in darkness. (Salmond 1991: 21-22)

This is only one of many examples of so-called First Contacts (FC) between people from different cultures. Many linguists and philosophers unanimously

¹ I wish to thank Jaap van Brakel.

reject the relevance of studying concrete intercultural interactions, because they are convinced that it is the domain of historians, cultural anthropologists or political negotiators. We believe that philosophy and linguistics should be more inter-culturally orientated.

Much could be said about how accounts of FC are biased in terms of the 'dominant' form(s) of life in which the encounters are primarily recorded and discussed – and recorded contacts will rarely if ever be 'symmetrical'. Yet FC serve as 'live' heuristics in a way that is missed by imagined cases (which seem to be Wittgenstein's preference), thought experiments (Quine, Davidson), ideal speech situations (Habermas, Benhabib), texts and institutions (Foucault, Derrida, Todorov, Kristeva) or shared horizons (Gadamer, Taylor). We shall start from an analysis of some concrete examples of first encounters, taken from many different sources and develop some critical remarks, mainly focussing on the (too often neglected) subject of Non-Verbal Communication (NVC).

Of course, in the *Philosopher's Index*, we can find references to non-linguistic categorization, contexts and reality, but hardly anything on NVC, apart from two indirect references concerning the illocutionary aspect of speech acts. Searle's idea of 'background', which plays a crucial part in his speech act-theory, is non-linguistic. But this has more to do with his defense of the mentalistic conditions of communication than with non-linguistic communication as such. As far as human sciences pay attention to NVC, it is nearly always supposed that NVC and intercultural differences can be unambiguously described in one universal language, i.e. the language of the researcher (van Brakel 1998: 43-44).

2. The importance of mutual attunement

Let us consider two further examples of first encounters, together with some theoretical considerations. First example: March 1778, Yuquot, Vancouver Island (West Coast of Canada), Captain Cook's third voyage:

As we were coming [in], we were surrounded by thirty or forty canoes full of Indians who expressed much astonishment at seeing the ship. They stood up in their canoes, made many strange motions, sometimes pointing to the shore and at other times speaking to us in a confused manner very loud and shouting, and presently after they all sung in concert in a wild manner. ... We made signs of friendship to them and invited them along side the ship where they soon ventured and behaved in a peaceable manner, offering us their cloaths and other things they had in their canoes, and trading immediately commenced between us...

Night coming on they had all paddled ashore except five or six canoes which drew in a cluster together at a small distance from the ship, and as it were to bid us a good night the people in them sang in concert in no disagreeable stile. This mark of their attention to us we were unwilling to pass over unnoticed and therefore gave them in return a few tunes on two French horns after their song was ended, to these they were very attentive, not a word to be heard among them during the time of playing; this

salutation was returned by another song from the Indians, after which we gave them a tune on the drum & fife to which they paid the same attention as they had done to the horns. (Beaglehole 1967: 1088)

It seems to be unquestionable that intercultural communication is possible. Moreover, it is not just a matter of survival: in the above fragment, people do not start trading (exchanging) immediately, but they also make music, and so on. Note that it is not important that one party will interpret what happens as 'trade' and the other as 'ritual' or 'exchange' or whatever.

On the basis of these and numerous other empirical examples, one can safely contend that there is no pressing reason to worry about the incommensurability between cultures, peoples, etc. But it does not follow that there is one core or essence of human behavior, language, emotions, morality, ... We do NOT have to presuppose a Strawsonian 'central kernel of human thinking that has no history' or a LINGUA MENTIS in Fodor's sense, or some sort of pre-conceptual cognitive or affective structure of the human species as defended by George Lakoff (1987), or a universal 'pre-predicative and pre-linguistic experience' as Husserl believed (Bernet et al. 1993: 220). There is no culture-invariable basic scheme for all possible intersubjective forms of life. The fact that there is communication does not imply that there is exactly one way to report on it, or precisely one way to deduce its possibility, or exactly one way to analyze the experience of it. It is equally wrong to presuppose (as cross-cultural psychology does) that there is a central core around which different cultures (or individuals) cluster; such an alleged core is (nearly) always Euro-centric. A case in point is R.I. Levy on Tahiti RI'ARI'A, which means something like FEAR (Shweder & Levine 1984: 229-230). Levy contends that the central trends of different emotion words are probably universal, and that the edges of the categories can be different. There are also situations where two or more categories, separated in one culture (though they often seem linked in some other sense, or semantically 'close') are not differentiated in another. Our question is: who decides in what direction the central trend moves and who decides on the criteria for 'in some other sense'? Levy says about RI'ARI'A that it means 'fear as it is experienced now' and not 'fear in expectation', and that it also captures the meaning of 'mild disgust of some food'. However, who can decide whether 'as it is experienced now' is not part of the central trend of FEAR (and all words, like e.g. German *Furcht* or Dutch *vrees*, that are usually translated as *fear*?)

For a time at least in the first contact situation, tentative efforts are made on both sides to initiate a dialogue across differences, to break out of the enclosure of the mirror, as it were, and to institute an in-between state where one recovers his or her ability to communicate gesturally and not diacritically (Carter 1992: 80). Communication rests on MUTUAL ATTUNEMENT in a large number of judgements. It is our secure 'attuning' (that to which we must accede or be declared mad) which we tend to read into the behavior of others, unless something indicates that it might be a mistake to do so. Conversely, the other is equally busy interpreting us by means of her 'secure attuning', attempting to make intelligible (for instance) our beliefs and desires, and guess what we are likely to mean. Here, a degree of emotional and moral attuning is as necessary for communication as global agreement on what is the case in the locally

shared world. One might refer here to ‘empathy’, not as the projection of one’s own state of mind into something else or merely the capacity to feel what the other feels, but as the human capacity and sensibility to participate in the content, spirit, feelings, volition, movements, ideas, etc. of what another human being thinks, wants, feels, writes, does, says, etc.

The attribution of beliefs, actions, explanation of behavior, and so on, are interdependent. One important suggestion for dealing with this is Donald Davidson’s thought experiment of radical interpretation (Davidson 1984). Prior to interpretation, the beliefs and attitudes that ‘underlie’ a fellow-speaker’s utterances, as well as the meanings attached to the latter, are treated together as parameters, the values of which are unknown to an interpreter. For instance, she, an interpreter, cannot find out what he, a speaker, means by the words he uses without assuming particular things about his beliefs (at the time of utterance under consideration). The only access she has to the speaker’s beliefs is via the attribution of meanings to his words. Some sort of structuring principle is needed at this point, e.g. Davidson’s well known principle of charity. It says that the interpreter has to assume that any speaker is consistent, a believer of truth and a lover of the good in the majority of the cases. In the secondary literature the principle of charity (and other similar principles) is almost exclusively written about in terms of truth – thus restricting discourse to descriptive statements. Such an approach is fundamentally flawed.

From the point of view of ONE language or ONE form of life, forms of life always show similarities. If this were not so, communication would be impossible. It is a necessary requirement for communication (or translation) that these similarities appear, but there is no language independent way to say this or to guarantee it. There is no need for an appeal to some basic saliences as a precondition for communication and objectivity – contrary to what Quine and Davidson (and many others) suggest (van Brakel 2000: 81-99). Language is a mass term. There is no principled distinction between extension of first language and acquisition of the second language. As language is open and infinite in principle, there will always be more or less successful translations, and the criteria for their success will always be achieved through, and nearly always depend on, the success of NVC. Hence, for communication to work, one doesn’t have to share either language or world if they are what many philosophers and linguists have supposed the words ‘language’ and ‘world’ to mean. What humans share are broadly similar responses to a diversity of forms of life, which are constantly in flux.

3. No need for universals

Second example: New Zealand coast, 7 April 1773, Cook’s second journey (excerpts taken from the diaries of Cook and Forster):

We should have passed without seeing them [i.e. the man and the two women] had not the man holloa’d to us; he stood with his club in his hand upon the point of a rock. ... The man seemed rather afraid when we approached the rock with our boat, he however stood firm.

The captain then taking some sheets of white paper in his hand, landed on the rock unarmed, and held the paper out to the native. The man now trembled visibly, and having exhibited strong marks of fear in his countenance, took the paper: upon which captain Cook coming up to him, took hold of his hand, and embraced him, touching the man's nose with his own, which is their mode of salutation.

Presently after we were joined by the two women, the Gentlemen that were with me and some of the Seamen and we spent about half an hour in chit-chat which was little understood on either side in which the youngest of the two women bore by far the greatest share. We presented them with fish and wild fowl which we had in our boat, which the young woman afterwards took up one by one and threw them into the boat again giving us to understand that such things they wanted not. (Beaglehole 1969: 116)

Innumerable interpretations and judgements are made of the other persons – long before one word is understood or even uttered. Let's focus on one example: the trembling man. In Cook's journal as well as in Forster's, the man's behavior is interpreted to be expressing 'fear'. Perhaps he really was afraid – perhaps not. Perhaps he was angry. Perhaps he yelled at them 'Go away!' and that is what he and the two women tried to make clear during 'half an hour in chit-chat' and that is what they wanted to tell him by refusing the fish and the wild fowl. Cook could have interpreted this as offensive, but he did not – according to the instructions he got from the Royal Academy. But maybe that man was neither afraid nor angry. Perhaps he trembled with fever or he was very excited at the unexpected visit and he really wanted to get acquainted with the foreigners.

One could ask, What was 'really' the case? But does this matter? And what can be meant with 'really'? What is far more important, we think, is that the man and the two women recognized the visitors as human beings, or at least as creatures that were in some ways similar to themselves. They ascribed all kinds of characteristics to them (things LIKE emotions, beliefs, desires, moral judgements, etc.). Cook and his men did the same; their account wouldn't have been that different, if they had thought the man was 'really' angry instead of afraid. Yet it would have been completely different, if a footnote had been added: 'These creatures have no emotions'. However, this is not the case (van Brakel 1998: 52).

These considerations do not show that ANGER and FEAR are semantic primitives or natural essences. To be sure, many suggestions in this direction have been proposed. According to Anna Wierzbicka (1994: 130-198) for instance, the Ifaluk word *nunuwan* corresponds to the 'semantic primitive' THINK and it is *niferash* that corresponds to FEEL. But Wierzbicka accepts without further ado that THINK and FEEL are semantic primitives and not, for instance, *nunuwan* and *niferash*. Saying that all human beings have emotions is one thing; saying that FEEL is semantically universal another. We can report on many empirical facts about people: they can, ordinarily, distinguish colors; they have some linguistic competence; they see similarities between people behaving differently, and so on (van Brakel 1998: 48). But a plausible conception of inter-human communication must resist the temptation to reify meaning(s) be-

cause questions of interpretation and/or translation cannot profitably be reduced to questions about separate entities, categories or properties that exist independent of concrete interactions.

As the Hageners reportedly told the anthropologist Andrew Strathern (1971: xii): 'He gave us shell valuables in return for pigs, and we decided he was human.' There is no doubt that the Australian appeared bizarre, but the moment he gave them shells in return for pigs they decided he was not a spirit, but a human being (M. Strathern 1992: 250). There is no need to even utter a word; the judgement 'he is not a spirit, but a human being' is made before any strictly linguistic communication takes place. Another case in point is the following example given by Marilyn Strathern: 'So how did Wiru finally come to comprehend whites as human? When I asked this question I received the somewhat enigmatic reply 'because their arms bend', i.e., they have elbows' (M. Strathern 1992: 253). Some sort of mutually attuning is required for communication to take place, but there isn't any 'secure attuning' that has epistemological or ontological priority – refutation and revision is always in the air. Whether in science or in interaction of whatever people, the sole criteria for successful communication are fluency and effectiveness of dialogue, successful negotiation and willingness to continue the interchange. 'To link is necessary, but how to link is not', as Lyotard (1998: 66) claims.

People understand each other because they share a certain form of life. Growing up is growing into (A) FORM(S) OF LIFE (Wittgenstein). Starting from certainties we can give reasons, but there's an end to giving reasons. The end is just given in a so-called form of life² – it's where my/your/our/their spade is turned. Form(s) of life should never be understood as something static and/or permanent. Recognizing that at some point one's spade is turned does not imply that some things are permanently fated to be 'bedrock', or that any particular conviction is forever immune from criticism. It is just where one's spade is turned now (Malcolm & Winch 1997: 20).

FC show that to be a human person, it is both an empirical and a transcendental precondition to know the certainties of particular forms of life and to be capable of recognizing and somehow dealing with the enormous variety of other forms of life. The fact that different forms of life appear similar is no reason to presuppose that there is one core, essence, rationality, prototype, or transcendental subject, which they necessarily share! Human beings share all kinds of things: they have to eat, they die, they speak, and so on (Winch 1958). But this is an empirical statement made from within a particular form of life. Again, how these similarities are understood depends on the form(s) of life one has been exposed to and, in particular, on the language that is used to express these similarities. Therefore the understanding of what is similar is particularized and not something innate (in a Platonic, Cartesian, socio-biological, or whatever sense). A third example should clarify this still further.

² The term 'form of life' is used by Wittgenstein (1969: § 358; 1972: § 19, 23, 241; II: i, xi; 1978: VIII-47; 1980: I-630). For his use of the term in unpublished manuscripts, see Hilmy (1987). Important congeners are: background, language game, facts of life, natural facts, ... See also Van Brakel 1998: 61-81 and *passim*.

4. The other, not the Other

Third example: In the period 1930-1934 a great many first contacts took place in Papua New Guinea during Leahy's Australian expeditions, especially in the neighborhood of Mount Hagen (in the Wahgi area). Fifty years later, Kirupano Eza'e told Leahy the following:

Because they wore *lap laps* and trousers ... the people said, 'We think they have no wastes in them. How could they when they were rapped up so neatly and completely?' We wondered how the excreta could be passed. We wondered much about that. ... 'One of the people hid', recalls Kirupano, 'and watched them going to excrete over there.' He came back and said, 'Those men from heaven went to excrete over there.' Once they had left many men went to have a look. When they saw that it smelt bad, they said, 'Their skin might be different, but their shit smells bad like ours. (Connolly & Anderson 1988: 43-44)

Hilary Putnam remarks: 'We are committed by our fundamental conceptions to treating [...] members of other cultures past and present, as PERSONS; and that means [...] attributing to them shared references and shared concepts, however different the CONCEPTIONS that we also attribute [...]. However different our images of knowledge and conceptions of rationality, we share a huge fund of assumptions and beliefs about what is reasonable with even the most bizarre culture we can succeed in interpreting at all' (Putnam 1993: 119). This situation and the comment made by the natives reminds us of Wittgenstein's remark 'My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the OPINION that he has a soul.' This does not mean, of course, that interpersonal contacts will proceed without problems or violence. Violence may well be unavoidable. But even violence, racism, xenophobia, and so on presuppose that the other is recognized as a human being. Moreover, there is ALWAYS some (non-ethical) violence involved in an encounter with a stranger. As Husserl stresses, the problem of the other – which Husserl misleadingly calls the ALTER EGO³ – is characterized by 'a kind of verifiable accessibility of what is not originally accessible'. Put differently, the other is not simply accessible, he is accessible IN and THROUGH his inaccessibility. The other is not accessible in spite of his inaccessibility; his accessibility does not annihilate his inaccessibility, but rather lets it appear. The violence of an elision is inevitable (Visker 1999: 156). As Merleau-Ponty claims: 'What I cannot touch in the other, he cannot touch either' (Visker 1999: 159). This does not mean, though, that the other is 'unknowable', as Levinas (1994: 75) seems to suggest. Yet it does mean that without some sort of non-ethical, 'transcendental' violence no encounter whatsoever is really possible (Derrida 1978: 118 ff.). Again, incommensurability does not hamper communication; it enhances it. Of course, 'we' will never be able to know the 'other' completely. It is not even clear what complete knowledge of 'the' other means.

³ See Levinas (1994: 83): 'The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other's character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other's very alterity. The Other is, for example, the weak, the poor, the widow and the orphan'.

What is important is that this does not preclude the possibility of communication at all – on the contrary. Levinas is right, when he says that the ‘relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or of sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other’s place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us’ (Levinas 1994: 75). This cannot be stressed enough. Perhaps what we should be concerned with is not a community of what we share, as some romantic ‘trans-culturalism’ wants us to believe, but with a community of what we do NOT share with the others – as was, perhaps, Husserl’s but certainly Lyotard’s concern.

We don’t have to presuppose that all human beings share some specific concepts, for instance one determinate concept of what a human being is, or what a person is (van Brakel 1998: 46). Habermas criticized Rawls, because the central PERSON concept in his theory is not neutral enough to be acceptable to different world-views in a multicultural society (Habermas 1995: 109-131). This is correct, but there is no such thing as a ‘sufficiently neutral’ person concept (van Brakel 1998: 47). Cartesian dualism and individualism dominate Western views on what a person is. Even theories that explain differences between communities in terms of evolutionary development (according to universal fixed stages) or cultural ‘disturbance’ of what all children in all communities have in common fit into this general individualistic framework. This individualistic person concept is not as universal as many philosophers and researchers would have it, although it is not typically, let alone exclusively Western either (White & Kirkpatrick 1985; Shweder & Levine 1984). Even within so-called Western culture, the abstract and universal person concept has been increasingly undermined by social-constructionists – following Mead and Vygotsky – and post-liberals (Burkitt 1994: 7-28; Wallerstein 1995).

Not only the more abstract person concept, but also the more ‘common’ feelings are far less universal than one would think. Americans often talk about their feelings – compared to many other cultures (Davitz 1969; Lutz in Shweder & Levine 1984: 35-77). The *Chewong* in Malaysia never do: they seldom smile, cry or yell (in circumstances that many Westerners would consider ‘affectively stimulating’). People on Samoa smile, yell and cry a lot, but they told the cultural anthropologist Gerber that they were not aware of ‘feelings’ in their bodies in such ‘emotional’ situations (van Brakel 1998: 47). Contrary to Americans, for instance, the inhabitants of Samoa direct themselves outwards. As the cultural anthropologist Rodney Needham (1981) has stressed, inner states of mind are not universals and they do not form natural similarities between all people. Needham also argues that ‘belief’ is not some inner state of mind according to the *Nuer* people of Sudan.

This does not mean that we cannot attribute feelings, beliefs, desires, and emotions, and so on to the *Chewong* or the *Nuer*. What it does show is that those notions need to be de-essentialized and de-universalized. Moreover, a strict separation between rationality and morality, between rationality and emotions is irrational. Differences and similarities between emotions (emotion concepts and emotional experiences) are interwoven with similarities and differences between ordinary beliefs about the mental, the ‘ego’, community, nature, morality, et cetera. Some emotional and/or moral agreement is as necessary to

successful communication as agreement about what is the case (epistemic agreement). Therefore alone, NVC should be studied very carefully.

Worries about total inaccessibility mostly originate in too strict a difference between 'we' and the 'Other' and quite often have disturbing consequences, not in the least for cultural anthropological research.

A case in point of these disturbing effects is Evans-Pritchard's famous study on witchcraft and magic among the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1937). Evans-Pritchard frequently complains about Zande royalty, for instance, whom he found distant and unforthcoming, and thus 'with rare exceptions [...] useless as informants' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 13-14). Further, after discussing the attitudes of several informants whom he believed to have acquired the detached attitude of the nobles towards Zande practices, he contends that his 'informant, Kuagbiaru [...] was never deeply moved by revelations of witch doctors, and even treated them with a measure of open contempt' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 184). Yet he goes on to insist that the reader must not 'get the impression that there is anyone who disbelieves in witch-doctorhood'. The ethnographer's apparent disdain, and even personal dislike, for the 'detached attitude' of the uncooperative royal class – whose attitudes seemed to pose a problem for his web-of-belief account – is an important and disturbing element in explaining his curious readiness virtually to dismiss a 'considerable body' of skeptical opinion (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 184-185). Moreover, had Evans-Pritchard explored the implications of the links between Zande social class, on the one hand, and commitment to witchcraft and magic, on the other, he might have provided an intriguing contribution to the sociology of knowledge (Moody-Adams 1997: 50).

Other aspects of Evans-Pritchard's treatment of Zande thought merit even closer attention. Evans-Pritchard makes some curiously inconsistent generalizations about the temperament of the Azande. He contends, for instance, that the Azande are 'almost always cheerful and sociable' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 13) and later he adds that the Azande are 'always laughing and joking' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 148). But this picture of a people always 'cheerful' and always 'laughing and joking' does not square with much of what Evans-Pritchard claims elsewhere in the book. In an extended discussion of the circumstances in which accusations of witchcraft are generally made, the reader is informed that 'in the daily tasks of life there is ample scope for friction. In the household there is frequent occasion for ill feeling between husband and wife and between wife and co-wife arising from division of labour and sexual jealousies. Among his neighbours a man is sure to have both secret and open enemies [...]. One man may have uttered unguarded words, which have been repeated to another. [...] All unkind words and malicious actions and innuendoes are stored in the memory for retaliation' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 101). Evans-Pritchard's efforts to defend the 'seamless web'-account of Zande beliefs against such obvious counter-evidence leads him to reassert some familiar prejudices about the temperament of African peoples – prejudices whose crudeness runs counter to the usual complexity of his observations about the frictions of daily life.

5. Anything goes?

It may perhaps be necessary to add the following remark before concluding. Our critique of essentialism is not a defense of cultural or linguistic *anything goes* relativism whatsoever. Assumptions underwriting a relativist stance somehow issue in a decidedly non-relativist confidence in one fixed set of 'local' values. As Clifford Geertz (1986: 259) has suggested, this confidence has the air of a 'relax-and-enjoy-it ethnocentrism' which may result in the very condescension and cultural self-righteousness that relativism sought to avoid (Moody-Adams 1997: 26).

Moreover, even if, for instance, Richard Rorty's moral ethnocentrism is an understandably tempting response to a 'collapse of moral self-confidence' in Western liberal democracies (Rorty 1991: 203), it is fraught with difficulties. To begin with, no human form of life is a windowless monad. Every form of life must, to some degree, face the likelihood of encounters with other communities whose beliefs, values, and practices will place varying degrees of pressure on the calm pursuit of any local way of life. Moreover, the possibility of such agreement presupposes a mutual readiness to see initially unfamiliar 'others' as at least capable of (roughly) sharing some of the beliefs and values of one's current form of life. Rortian ethnocentrism, however, divides the world into 'us' and the 'others' in a way that renders fruitful communication difficult if not impossible, because it assumes that one can say in advance who is a member of one's community and who is simply beyond the pale (Moody-Adams 1997: 26 ff.). As we have argued, matters are not that simple, and it is precisely the acknowledgement of this vagueness and complexity of what it is to be 'a member of one's community' which can (or should) enhance successful interchange. Only if 'we' are ready to acknowledge the temporariness, flexibility and dynamics of many different forms of life, will we be able to avoid this ethnocentric point of view which inevitably hinders fruitful interchange with people from different cultures.

But let us finish in a language of the 'others' (Maori): *Mauria ko oku painga, waiho ko oku wheruu*. In another language of the 'others' (English), this boils down to: Take what is good in this, and leave the rest behind.
(*or something like that...*)

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