

Jeffrey Sissons
Victoria University of Wellington

Van Meijl is right to insist that epistemology must be about active, socially contested 'ways of knowing' and that understanding the relationship between such ways and their products is as much an ethnographic problem as it is a philosophical one. Ways of knowing, as social practices, are also, more generally, ways of being or becoming and so are not, in my view, radically distinct from the ontologies they produce and reproduce. Phillipe Descola argues strongly that his four 'ontologies' are also schemas of practice, fundamental ways that people know, experience and inhabit the world. I think Van Meijl is mistaken, therefore, when he characterises the ontological turn in anthropology as being about different relations between mind and matter. For me, it is most significantly about the different ways that personhood or subjectivity can be understood and embodied.

Personhood, within Descola's 'naturalist' ontology, can only be attributed to humans; attributions of personhood to non-humans are always metaphorical and potentially mystifying. Van Meijl's understanding of Maori ways of knowing at Waahi Pa is, therefore a wholly naturalist one in Descola's terms. It is founded upon a sharp distinction between the ideological and the factual, the former expressed via metaphoric discourse and the latter by literal statements. As concepts within an ideological discourse or within an ideological way of knowing the world, *wairua* (spirit) and *taniwha* (ancestral embodiments) are said to have functioned as tropes or metaphors. When deployed externally, as they most often were in this Waahi case-study, these tropes functioned politically. As concepts within a literal or factual way of knowing, 'eels' referenced something real and their numbers were the real, largely disguised concern of insiders.

My research in a Tuhoe community has led me to understand Maori ways of knowing about water, spiritual power and ancestral embodiment very differently from Van Meijl. Indeed, while people switched between Descola's naturalist and animist ways of knowing, none of the elders from the community would normally have understood *wairua* and *taniwha* as tropes (just as a Scot would not normally understand 'life' or the Loch Ness monster as tropes). The valley in which I conducted fieldwork takes its name from a sacred spring, 'Te Waimana' (literally water of *mana* or ancestral power), the water of which is said to have healed the wounds of a remote ancestor. I recorded several narratives about this spring and in one account, told to me by Materoa, a woman in her 80s, it was spoken of as an ancestor. Materoa told me that the spring was *wairua*, spiritual water once used by an old couple to cover their sweet potato pit, thus concealing their harvest from some thieving spirits. One day, when Materoa was digging potatoes in a family garden she was overjoyed to see the spring emerge from the ground and flow towards her in what she understood to be an act of love (*aroha*) towards its relative. Her companions were not interested in such matters, however; they told her to get on with digging potatoes. The old woman told me that she never went back to this place because the experience of meeting with and separating from her kin was too painful for her and the water (Sissons 1993: 110-113; 2013: 390).

For Materoa, the Waimana spring was physically real, spiritually real and ancestrally connected. For her companions, it was merely water. Contradicting Van Meijl's argument, neither Materoa nor her companions understood the spring to be symbolic or metaphoric in

any way. The physical appearance of the spring initially delighted Materoa as much as the physical abundance of eels would have delighted the people of Waahi Pa. But for Materoa and, I suspect, for many of the the Waahi people, such physical manifestations only served to confirm that spiritual agency and ancestral connection were *equally real*.

True, the people of Waimana have never needed to defend the purity of their spring from the direct aggression of a power company, but in 1880 they were forced to defend their land-rights in the Native Land Court of the colonial state. In the hearing to determine the ownership of the Waimana valley the ability of kin-groups to demonstrate ancestral connection to the spring was of central significance (Sissons 1993: 87-113). While, in this context, the spring clearly took on new external political dimensions, it would not be helpful to sharply distinguish external or judicial ways of knowing and internal ways of knowing in this instance. For the judge the spring was water; for some of the claimants it was spirit. A naturalist distinction between an ideological trope and a literal presence would only confound our understanding of the complex relationships produced and reproduced by this court case and I suggest this is also a risk for our understanding of the Waahi Pa case.

Despite my disagreement with Van Meijl's general argument concerning the ideological nature of some Maori ways of knowing, I think his ethnography poses a significant challenge to those who would draw strong boundaries around distinct ontological worlds. Materoa was a Mormon and her children and grandchildren attended state schools where they were taught geography in English. Ways of knowing are indeed contextual and often antagonistic. Like Materoa, the people of Waahi Pa do not inhabit a distinct world; they share one world with all human and non-human persons, inhabiting it in different ways according to context. I thank Van Meijl for having so clearly identified and sensitively followed this shifting process ethnographically.

References

Sissons, J. 1993. *Te Waimana, the Spring of Mana: Tuhoe History and the Colonial Encounter*. Dunedin, Otago University Press.

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