TAKING STOCK OF THE EMIC-ETIC DISTINCTION IN SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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ABSTRACT

The distinction between emic and etic interpretations is not only commonplace in many social-scientific interpretations of the New Testament, but also fundamental to the interpretive enterprise. Emics and etics are, however, concepts with a history in the natural science tradition of anthropology. A critical evaluation of this tool in both anthropological and New Testament studies reveals not only a disconcerting variety and a far from uniform understanding of this tool, but also its natural science legacy. An evaluation of four specific New Testament studies reveals that this legacy plays a significant role in both the formulation of interpretative procedures and the conceptualisation of the interpretive process.

Criticism does not destroy, it aims at putting things in their right place amongst other things (Fellini).

1 INTRODUCTION

With social-scientific and cross-cultural interpretations, New Testament scholars are moving increasingly into the field of cultural anthropology. Consequently the anthropological toolbox is becoming not only familiar but also well known to New Testament scholars. The increasing use from the anthropological toolbox of the emic-etic distinction in New Testament circles is an indication of the awareness that New Testament studies cannot avoid ethnocentrism unless the historical and cultural distance between that world and today is adequately bridged.

The emic-etic distinction is used not only as methodological device in distinguishing between the use of natives’ and investigators’ concepts, but even functions as organising principle in the broad outline of studies. Furthermore, there is no uniformity in its use in New Testament studies. Therefore, it is important to detect the possible pitfalls and to establish its usefulness as an exegetical tool. Specifically to be questioned is its adequacy as tool in claims of cross-cultural interpretation where a high premium is placed on avoiding anachronistic and ethnocentric interpretations.

Taking stock of the way in which it is used in New Testament studies will not only establish its usefulness as a tool, but may contribute to the general
quality of theoretical thinking on cross-cultural interpretation. The very first
task will, however, be to establish its use as a tool in the anthropological work­shop.

2 EMICS AND ETICS: CONCEPTS WITH A HISTORY

Contrary to the belief that (all) anthropologists make a distinction between
emics and etics (see Elliott 1993:38; Neyrey 1990:13), it should be realised
that they are concepts with a history in anthropology. In fact, they were popular­
ised within the confines of a particular theory of science and a distinctive defi­
nition of anthropology as a science. It is in this light that the history and signifi­
cance of the concepts should be evaluated.

Furthermore, while the emic-etic distinction is well established in (some)
cultural anthropological studies, their meaning is not always clearly defined. In
the words of Young:

Emics and etics appear to be terms that we anthropologists are probably certain we
can define, until, that is, we try to define them, at which point the range of defini­

The question therefore arises whether they are not frequently misused and often
misunderstood. The first objective will be to present the framework within
which they customarily operate in anthropological studies.

2.1 The history and significance of emics and etics

Coined by Pike, a linguist, in 1949 (see Pike 1990:30), emics and etics were
popularised in anthropological studies by Harris—first in 1964 (see Harris
1990a:48). It should, however, at the outset be realised that while emics and
etics are used for phenomena as well as concepts and methods, their use for
merely designating the concepts used by different cultures is stating the obvious.
If emics is used for categories and concepts in their culture and etics for cate­
gories and concepts (even if it is that of social sciences models) in our culture, it
is stating the obvious dilemma faced in cross-cultural interpretation. That does
not contribute in any way to bridging the gap between cultures.

Emics and etics have come to designate different ways of bridging the dis­
tance between cultures; that is to say, different methodological approaches to
cross-cultural interpretation. In the words of Harris:

1 The detail of the arguments to be presented in this section has been presented elsewhere
(see Craffert 1994). That study, as well as the present study, are revised versions of a pa­
per read at a subgroup meeting of the NTSSA on 22 November 1993. Not only has that
paper been revised, but due to its length, been divided into two independent studies.
Emic statements refer to logico-empirical systems whose phenomenal distinctions or 'things' are built up out of contrasts and discriminations significant, meaningful, real, accurate, or in some other fashion regarded as appropriate by the actors themselves. An emic statement can be falsified if it can be shown that it contradicts the cognitive calculus by which relevant actors judge that entities are similar or different, real, meaningful, significant, or in some sense 'appropriate' or 'acceptable'....Etic statements depend upon phenomenal distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers. Etic statements cannot be falsified if they do not conform to the actor's notion of what is significant, real, meaningful, or appropriate (1968:571, 575; and see 1990a:48).

This definition of emics and etics needs, however, to be evaluated within the naturalistic theory of science and consequently also the definition of anthropology advocated by Harris.

Anthropology, in his view, defined as cultural materialism, should deal with etics in order to reach its 'scientific potential' (Harris 1990a:50). Following this theory of science, emics and etics correspond to the two opposing definitions of anthropology: respectively a mentalist (idealist) and a behaviourist (materialist) perspective (see Harris 1968:569; 1990a:55-56). The hallmark of emic accounts is the ability by an outsider (as judged by an insider) to 'talk, think, and act like an insider' (Harris 1990b:77). An analysis or description from the native's point of view thus means not only using the terms, categories and concepts regarded as meaningful by the insiders, but passes the test when it reaches the consensus of the native informants as matching the shared perceptions characteristic of their culture (see Lett 1990:130). Etic accounts cannot be falsified if they do not conform to the subject's notion of what is significant, real, meaningful or appropriate (see Harris 1976:575). They are cross-culturally applicable and pass the test when they are 'in accord with the epistemological principles deemed appropriate by science; in other words, any and all etic constructs must be precise, accurate, logical, comprehensive, replicable, falsifiable, and observer-independent' (Lett 1990:131). Emics, then are valid culturally and etics cross-culturally.

Suffice it to say that in effect Harris advocates that 'the Western scientist may exercise her/his ethnocentrism unchecked' (Fisher & Werner 1978:204 n 17). Furthermore, he arbitrarily, Fisher and Werner maintain (see 1978:202-203), opposes cultural validity (meaning and appropriateness for natives) with scientific validity (the scientific study of the natives). It is foreign to his view of scientific ethnography that the people's understanding of phenomena informs the ethnographer whatsoever (see Paul & Rabinow 1976).

Emics and etics, then, are not only concepts with a naturalistic theory of science history, but are also the true heirs of that legacy. As tools shaped by that history they represent different definitions of anthropology and consequently
different ways in bridging the distance between cultures—respectively an interpretive way and a scientific way. It is, however, not at all surprising that due to the interpretive turn in the social sciences, the epistemology underlying this position is fundamentally challenged in interpretive anthropology.

2.2 The challenge from interpretive anthropology

It should at the outset be stated that interpretive anthropology is not a coming to fruition of what Harris refers to as idealist anthropologies. Interpretive approaches to anthropology are firmly rooted in the interpretive turn which took place in the social sciences.

The interpretive turn in a variety of disciplinary circles agrees on the essential role of interpretation in all human inquiry (see Bohman, Hiley & Shusterman 1991:10). The result has not only been a refiguration of social theory, but also altered notions of what anthropological knowledge is and what we want to know (see Geertz 1980:178). Instead of uncovering universal laws of human conduct and providing law-like explanations independent of the views of the subjects, interpretive anthropology is in search of meaning and the illumination of context (see Geertz 1973:5). That is to say, instead of the universally valid statements that have characterised the anthropological enterprise in previous generations, a new holism is at stake in interpretive anthropology, namely, to ‘represent a particular way of life as fully as possible’ (Marcus & Fischer 1986:22).

Although interpretive anthropology can hardly be seen as an unified approach, in contrast to the natural science definition of anthropology, at least the following characteristics can be mentioned.

Firstly, the incommensurability between cultures is assumed which implies that the intersubjective meaning of cultures (their webs of significance) is regarded as constitutive of social life. Thus, doing justice to the categories of thought and patterns of behaviour in cultures different from that of the anthropologist, constitutes probably the central issue in interpretive anthropology.

Secondly, since humans are enmeshed in a particular culture, interpretation is a fundamental condition of being human. Contrary to the idea of observer independent, scientific accounts of cultures, the notion of noninterpretive science of any sort has not yet been invented. This notion (hermeneutic universalism), together with the context-bound nature of interpretation (hermeneutic contextualism), forces the interpretive debate into questions about interpretive methodology (see Bohman, Hiley & Shusterman 1991:7). An interpretive stance needs to be put into operation by means of an adequate interpretive methodology which, in my view, should do justice to the fact that knowing interferes with what is known as well as to the fact that humans are not necessarily trapped within their perspectives.
Thirdly, the avoidance of ethnocentrism is an issue hotly debated in the context of interpretive theory. Unless the intention of avoiding ethnocentrism is put into motion by a definite interpretive procedure which is focused on doing that, it remains a mirage. What it boils down to is the development of an interpretive methodology which neither formulates the interpretive problem nor describes the interpretive process as a dichotomy between distinct perspectives. Instead, it acknowledges the dialectical character of both; two phases of the single interpretive process need to be kept in tact: sorting out what the subjects are up to while at the same time moving towards a position of conversation between independent cultural systems. The enquirer is placed in a single process of interpretation, forever shuttling between two focus points, which can be identified but not easily separated.

This position not only rejects the natural science model but also its false ally which Taylor calls the ‘incorrigibility thesis’. That is the thesis that each culture must be interpreted in its own terms, and consequently ‘rules out an account which shows them up as wrong, confused or deluded’ (1985:123).

Taylor helps us to move beyond the point of distancing from one's own and drawing near to the foreign culture. He rejects the idea that 'the language of a cross-cultural theory has to be either theirs or ours' (1985:125). Interpretive social science, he maintains,

requires that we master the agent's self-description in order to identify our explainanda; but it by no means requires that we couch our explanantia in the same language. On the contrary it generally demands that we go beyond it (Taylor 1985:118).

Making sense of the agents is something different from showing that their actions make sense. Therefore, interpretation need not be in the terms of the agents, but should not bypass their self understanding. This he calls 'human understanding' (1985:118). It will almost always be the case that

the adequate language in which we understand another society is not our language of understanding, or theirs, but rather what one would call a language of perspicuous contrast. This would be a language in which we could formulate both their way of life and ours as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both (1985:12).

Due to the interpretive turn, both the formulation of the interpretive problem and the description of the interpretive process are altered. In short, interpretive anthropologies provide an alternative discourse on the notion of cross-cultural interpretation and a different way of bridging the distance between cultures. While avoiding ethnocentrism is highly regarded, interpretive anthropology attempts to do justice to understanding foreign cultures from within. Thus, within
interpretive anthropology the tools of the trade are redefined and reshaped to fit an interpretive discourse where neither the ubiquity of interpretation nor the avoidance of ethnocentrism is neglected.

2.3 Emics and etics in an interpretive discourse
The suggestion that anthropologists make the distinction between emics and etics is a (misleading) favourite viewpoint from a natural science position. In an interpretive discourse the focus is on an encounter and not a distinction between two separate cultural systems. Interpretive anthropology is scientific in that the web of significance spun by the subjects and the interpreter's cultural system are mediated in a process of interpretation (and comparison).

Ultimately cross-cultural interpretation aims at making intelligible within the researcher's world the ideas and phenomena encountered in an alien culture. Therefore, it is realised that whether the subjects' or the researcher's concepts are used, the very same dilemma has to be faced in that the gap between different sets of concepts and categories and the meaningful experience of those involved, are to be bridged. Turning native is just as unrewarding for crosscultural interpretation as ethnocentric imposition. Using the natives' concepts and categories can be just as misleading to outsiders as imposing outside concepts and categories onto them. Neither the natives' web of significance nor the researcher's framework should be ignored or bypassed.

Therefore the central question in interpretive anthropology is no longer whose set of concepts is used, but whether the distance between the two cultural systems is successfully bridged; whether a comparison succeeded in bringing into focus both cultural systems at the same time. Knowing, as well as being confronted with, the own cultural system is in this process just as important as unlocking and encountering the alien cultural system. Therefore questions about who interprets by means of which perspectives and which interests gain significance.

Within such a discourse my suggestion is that emics and etics may be rehabilitated. On the one hand they may be used for designating the researcher's concepts and categories in distinction to those of the subjects. Used in this sense they express the obvious fact that each culture is constituted by means of its own concepts and categories.

On the other hand, emics and etics may be used for describing different interpretive interests within the single interpretive process. In such a case they do not contribute to the way in which such interests are pursued or the research is conducted but indicate the focus points of research.

What is of paramount importance in interpretive anthropology is not which set of concepts is used or which interest is pursued, but whether the interpretive methodology facilitates the interaction between distinct cultural systems. The
question is whether justice is done to the web of significance of the subjects while a comparison with the cultural system of the researcher is simultaneously conducted. In the discourse of interpretive anthropology, in other words, there is no longer room for a distinction between two separate and distinct ways of doing anthropology. Instead it is admitted that all attempts are subject to interpretation. Different ways of interpretation may be identified which bring the criteria for avoiding ethnocentric imposition into focus. If that is highly valued, one's interpretive methodology should also be designed for avoiding just such imposition.

Taylor's example in which he refers to the role of magic makes perfectly clear what this involves (see 1985:127-128). He rejects the natural science view which sees magic as proto-science which therefore in comparison with modern science, is to be rejected. The alternative view, that magic should be seen as the integration of meaning through symbolism is equally ethnocentric in his view. According to this view there might not be something corresponding in a scientific world to magical practices and such practices should thus be seen for their symbolic or expressive functions. They (for example, rain rituals) are not intended to get things done in the world and can therefore not be judged in these terms.

The solution to understanding magical practices, Taylor puts forward,

might be to see them not through the disjunction, either proto-technology or expressive activity, but rather as partaking of a mode of activity in which this kind of clear separation and segregation is not yet made (1985:128).

This means that in a language or perspicuous contrast a language is found in which account is given of procedures in both societies. That is to see each culture as a network of meaning where activities can only adequately be understood as part and parcel of that cultural system.

3 WHAT ARE NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARS DOING WITH EMICS AND ETICS?

It should by now be apparent that the choice of emics and etics, or any other tool from the anthropological toolkit for cross-cultural interpretation, is first and foremost stamped by the prevailing theory of science. And although no general agreement exists in the social sciences on the definition of emics and etics, they were shaped by their natural science history. Therefore, the questions to be examined are whether the natural science legacy of emics and etics has rubbed off on New Testament users, and if so, what role they play in conceptualising the cross-cultural enterprise in those circles.
3.1 Emics and etics and the natural science legacy

It is not at all difficult to determine the definition of emics and etics in New Testament studies. Generally speaking, a natural science model informs most New Testament attempts at defining them. This becomes clear from at least two aspects.

First, on a formal level the use of Harris by Elliott (1993:39) and Neyrey (1990:13), Gottwald by Van Staden (1991:70-71) and Van Eck (1993:175-176) and Silverman by Moxnes (1991:251) in defining these terms.

It has already been argued that Harris not only popularised the use of emics and etics, but that he also was the driving force behind the natural science definition of these terms. In this he is followed by Silverman (see 1977:9-10) who shares the very same theory of science: emics and etics represent distinct definitions of anthropology. Regarding Gottwald, Brett argues that it is certainly true that his overall emphasis is on law-governed explanations (see Brett 1991:16). Etics, that is, law-governed (and specifically cultural materialist) explanations are in Gottwald's view the most scientific way of dealing with history and cultures.

Second, the natural science model becomes apparent in the meanings attached to emics and etics respectively.

Elliott maintains that one of the several means available for distinguishing between an ancient biblical and a modern conceptual point of view is 'the conventional distinction in anthropology between “emic” and “etic” information and perspectives' (1993:38). He then continuous that emic descriptions are accounts as perceived, narrated and explained by the indigenous narrator and etic accounts are external analyses and explanations by the social scientist. In his own words:

All commentaries and scientific studies of the Bible and the ancient world work with emic data but necessarily shift to etic categories when they seek to explain evidence from one culture with social and cultural constructs drawn from their own time (1993:39).

There is a subtle but important development in his formulations. From emic and etic information and perspectives he moves to emic and etic accounts and analyses. While the first refers to the obvious differences between cultures (each has its own concepts, categories and perspectives) the second resembles the language of a naturalistic social science; that is, emics and etics actually refer to two alternative ways of arriving at anthropological knowledge. They represent different ways of doing anthropology; either by using emic or intuitive knowledge (which happens to be available in the New Testament) or by using scientific knowledge (which is provided by social science models). To be sure, etics
do not only refer to a different set of concepts and categories, but refer to the researcher's job of analysis, which is a scientific presentation of the natives' emic data. Emics and etics, in Elliott's description, are more than our versus their concepts but refer to two distinct approaches in bridging the gap between cultures.

In my view, these definitions of emics and etics are explosively packed with dangers and pitfalls for the New Testament cross-cultural enterprise. They have serious implications not only for the formulation of the interpretive problem and for conceptualising the interpretive process but also for the interpretive claims made in such studies. I start with the latter.

3.2 Emics and etics and interpretive claims
At least two claims regarding the advantage of the use of emics and etics are prominent in the literature. The first is that cross-cultural interpretation is facilitated by them and the second that ethnocentrism is avoided by using them.

First, it is believed that the emic-etic tool facilitates cross-cultural interpretation of the New Testament.

Elliott, for example, maintains that the emic-etic distinction 'acknowledges the fact that different cultures may have different ways of construing, describing, and explaining "reality" as they experience it' (1993:39). This is also the view of Van Staden who says that the emic-etic distinction is a useful one which 'allows us to understand the fact that we work with material that refers to a reality vastly different from our own and that we should therefore be sensitive enough not to modernize the meanings' (1991:71). Van Eck (1993:177), claiming to follow Malina, also says that the emic-etic distinction helps us to overcome the hermeneutical gap.

In my view Van Eck misrepresents Malina in saying that the recognition of the emic-etic distinction helps us to overcome the so-called hermeneutical gap. Although I disagree with him, Malina's point is that 'the articulation of the emic in the etic mode overcomes the so-called "hermeneutical gap"' (1986:190).

However, as noted above, anthropology is about the comparison between cultural systems and the history of anthropology is a history of bridging the gap between them. Not the acknowledgement of differences but the particular theory of science and methodology applied in dealing with the differences contribute to bridging the gap in one way or another. Contrary to Malina's view, my argument is that not the articulation (translation?) of emic into etic modes (a natural science view), but the interpretive process of interaction between separate cultural systems brings us to an understanding of alien cultures which may claim the avoidance of ethnocentrism (see further par 3.3).

Secondly, claims that the emic-etic tool in one way or another facilitates the avoidance of ethnocentrism, find their way into New Testament studies in a
variety of ways.

Some believe that the use of etic models ensures that ethnocentric imposition is avoided. Neyrey claims that since we have Paul's letters, we have ‘emic interpretations of Paul’ (1990:14). However, given our tendency towards anachronistic and ethnocentric readings of him, we need formal help in learning to perceive Paul in his world. What we need are

etic, or professional, lenses to help adjust to a culture totally different from ours and immeasurably removed in time from ours. Just such help can be offered by cultural anthropology (Neyrey 1990:14).

Ethnocentrism is avoided by the etic models of the researcher.

Others believe that the use of emic concepts will contribute towards the avoidance of ethnocentrism. Garrett (1992:97) argues that Malina and Neyrey ‘do not escape the problem of ethnocentrism, nor do they enable us to read the texts “in terms of the meanings familiar to the original audience of those texts”’. Her solution is that they have to ‘incorporate 1st-century concepts and categories into their analysis in a much more thoroughgoing fashion’ (1992:97) if they are to reach that goal. Thus, emic concepts will do the job of avoiding ethnocentrism.

What should be made of these claims regarding the avoidance of ethnocentrism? Since the avoidance of ethnocentrism is the language of interpretive anthropology, the above positions will be evaluated from the point of view of an interpretive discourse.

The fallacy on both sides is to think that the set of concepts used determines the nature of interpretation, that is, whether an interpretation is ethnocentric or not. However, neither the use of native categories and concepts (emic) nor that of modern scientific models (etics), but the methodological finesse with which two cultural systems are engaged in the interpretive process may prevent ethnocentric imposition. Ethnocentrism is avoided when the interpretive process is designed in a way which facilitates the sorting out of what the subjects are up to while at the same time moving towards a position of conversation between independent cultural systems. Therefore, such claims should have the backup of an interpretive theory and methodology which aims at doing just that.

If the natural science legacy is not to be held responsible for the above views on the avoidance of ethnocentrism, then the blame should be placed on the neglect of a truly interpretive stance on cross-cultural interpretation. Besides the, to my mind, misguided claims of avoidance of ethnocentrism based on the emic-etic distinction, emics and etics contribute to the misformulation of the interpretive problem and misrepresentations of the interpretive process—at least where claims of avoiding ethnocentrism are made.
3.3 Formulating interpretive problems and conceptualising the interpretive process

Viewed from the point of view of the interpretive approach presented in the first part of this study, an inadequate formulation of the interpretive problem and a misrepresentation of the intricate process of interpretation underlie the emic-etic toolkit. This is to be seen from the implicit, but unmistakably present, assumptions in the definitions of emics and etics.

Emics are only of value in that they provide the data to be explained (interpreted) by means of scientific models (see Malina & Neyrey 1988:137; Neyrey 1990:13 and Van Eck 1993:177). The New Testament is, in this view, turned into an anthropologist’s field book full of emic data (see Malina 1986:190; Van Eck 1993:176). Consequently, interpretive strategies are developed around the notion that the emic data is readily available and only in need of an etic analysis by means of social-scientific models (see Van Staden 1991:154). Thus, an etic account allows an analysis which is not only alien to the informants but might even be unacceptable to them (see Brett 1991:18). Such accounts need only be defended before the bar of the modern sciences (see Brett 1990:362; Segal 1990:21).

A variation on this view is found in Osiek’s description of emics and etics as a view from within and a view from without respectively. She argues that since it is impossible to know another culture from within, especially the first-century Mediterranean culture, etic observations are all we have (see 1992:91).

The fallacy in this view which turns the New Testament into an emic sourcebook is that it disregards the intricate process of interpretation. That is to say, the search for the native’s point of view is underplayed while the comparison between cultural systems is brushed aside by means of the scientist’s act of explanation.

From the point of view of an interpretive epistemology, the New Testament is erroneously turned into a sourcebook full of emic data in need of etic analyses. If the New Testament world is that much different from contemporary Western views, and if words and deeds have meaning within a particular cultural system, then emic data (in Neyrey’s sense) would still be inaccessible to modern researchers and the best possible etic models will not open up that information. The task of cross-cultural interpretation consists in understanding data from within while remaining sensitive to the lenses of one’s own culture.

The New Testament should, in my view, rather be seen as the written evidence of a people’s expression of some of their cultural luggage which is in need of being understood from within. The New Testament texts are like the evidence perceived by an anthropologist when looking at some cultural phenomena. Interpreting such phenomena as rituals, prayers, or acts of entertainment depends on the anthropologist’s interpretive skills and method. Armed with the
best available lenses or models the social sciences can provide, the task of understanding those texts runs through a confrontation between two cultural systems where the researcher has to do justice to both the native's point of view and his/her own set of models. For this reason Osiek's remark is misleading. In principle (although not in practice), a New Testament scholar is faced with the very same dilemma as the anthropologist, namely, to understand the cultural evidence at hand in view of his/her own cultural system. New Testament scholars may have much less to go on from the alien cultural system than an anthropologist usually have, but the nature of the dilemma remains the same—at least if ethnocentric imposition is to be avoided.

If the foregoing debate is perhaps too theoretical, four particular examples will indicate that the emic-etic distinction contributes to either/both the misrepresentation of the interpretive process and/or the misformulation of the interpretive problem. It should at the outset be noted that from an interpretive point of view, what is present in these examples is just as important as what is missing. It should secondly be noted that what seems to be minor differences in the formulation of a problem or solution, sometimes have major effects on the outcome.

3.3.1 Van Eck and a confusion of the cross-cultural enterprise

Amongst others, due to the emic-etic distinction, the formulation of the cross-cultural interpretive problem and process really becomes obscure in the hands of Van Eck. Consequently, it is difficult to exorcise the feeling that if justice is not done to the shared meaning of the subjects, the claims of avoiding ethnocentric and anachronistic interpretations are nothing but rhetoric.

Following Van Staden and Van Aarde, Van Eck claims that once the emic data have been gathered, the information can be interpreted by means of a social-scientific model (see 1993:177). This point of departure finds concrete expression in the structure of his interpretation of Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark's story of Jesus. An emic reading of Mark is done by means of insights from narratology which as a second step is interpreted (etically) by using a social-scientific model. Three remarks will suffice to put this argument in perspective.

First, this is a perfect example of what Vorster calls 'the mixing of metaphors' (1989:61). He warns against the tendency to combine incompatible methods which not only share different epistemologies but depart from different views on texts and meaning. This mixing of metaphors starts with Van Eck's claim that a narratological reading can provide the emic data to be interpreted by means of social-scientific models. In his view a narratological reading of Mark suddenly becomes an emic reading (see 1993:264-306).

While this mistake is very much the product of a fallacious association between social-scientific and literary approaches, my present concern is with the
way the emic-etic distinction functions in his research.

Therefore, secondly, while emics by Van Eck’s own definition ought to provide one with understanding from the native’s point of view, his account reveals a disregard for the search of the native’s point of view. His narratological analysis reveals no single aspect about the first-century peoples’ shared meaning. In fact, it is the construction by a modern reader of patterns in a narrative by means of a contemporary narratological model. The one task of the dual interpretive process, that of establishing the native’s point of view in the process of interpretation is given no attention.

To my mind, this position is very much the result of his natural science way of defining the interpretive process.

Thirdly, the interpretive problem (the gathering of emic data to be interpreted by means of etic or social-scientific models) is formulated in a way rather typical of the natural science paradigm. Was it not for the misleading clue in the natural science definition which allows the distinction between a descriptive (emic) and a scientific (etic) approach, this would not have been that easily worked out. In a truly interpretive formulation it is acknowledged that the gathering of the data is already part of the process where two distinct cultural systems meet (see Geertz 1973:9).

3.3.2 Neyrey and a disregard for understanding from within
It is easy enough to state what is not an interpretive approach. The data are not to be interpreted by means of some model—that is a natural science approach. An interpretive stance acknowledges both that the data are not transparent and that scientific models cannot be imposed onto the data. Instead it establishes a process of simultaneously sorting out what the data are, and what they are data for, and how scientific models can best interact cross-culturally with such data. Both the data and the models are illuminated and brought into clearer perspective while comparison, that is, cross-cultural interpretation, takes place. With this in mind I turn to the notion of understanding from within as it functions in a New Testament instance where the emic-etic tool is used.

By now it is no longer a secret that in some (most?) New Testament uses of emics and etics, the emic side is rather limited in that if we want to understand any particular segment of human behaviour, it needs to be interpreted by means of etic (scientific) models. In a strange way this position opens the door for a subtle disregard of the search for the native’s point of view and for the fact that New Testament data have to be interpreted. Such a position is not interpretive and cannot contribute to doing justice to the native’s point of view. One example will suffice to illuminate that the use of the emic-etic distinction contributes to blurring the interpretive problem as well as the interpretive solution.

Neyrey’s arguments (see 1990) on purity demonstrate the neglect of the na-
tive's point of view in his work. The term purity he rightly claims, is a 'general, abstract word whose utility lies in its abstractness, and it applies to many different, specific cultural systems' (1990:22). This general social-scientific model of purity is used to describe the patterns of order and the system of labelling and classification. However, what is considered pure, differs from culture to culture (see 1990:23). The key element in a labelling process he maintains, 'lies in learning the operative cultural context of a group' (1990:24). So far so good.

He then introduces the emic-etic distinction: purity has 'both emic (specifically Jewish) and etic (general) meaning' (1990:25). It is with this specific Jewish (emic) perspective that I think Neyrey does not do justice to the subjects' shared meaning. He provides us with a comprehensive account of purity in the Jewish world. Biblical passages are cited in their numbers in support of the view that in both creation and the temple system, God created and maintains order. In this exposition God is outside the emic version, acting as creator. However, a proper understanding of the Jewish worldview cannot but take account of the central role of God within their cultural system. Compared to other cultural systems, God is perhaps the primary motor in the Jewish culture and understanding from within can hardly disregard that fact. Seen in this way, understanding from within is more than repeating their words and prescriptions, their confessions about creation and their beliefs about the temple. It entails an understanding of their worldview in a holistic way where purity becomes intelligible as part and parcel of their whole cultural system. As LaFargue points out:

'God' exercises a dominant influence on the meaning of everything in Paul's life-world, but the essential content that 'God' has for Paul is itself determined by the totality of other elements in that world. This God cannot then be placed in another cultural world, such as the medieval or modern one, and remain self-identical (1988: 349).

An outsider with totally different views on creation needs to understand God as a character within the stories about creation and consequently of purity. Similarly, the role of the temple in the purity system needs to be opened up as an aspect within the magical worldview which gave meaning to it. What we cannot do as New Testament ethnographers, is assume that a repetition of their words (by means of scriptural quotations) necessarily provides an insight into their cultural system. It does not do so unless we succeed in understanding stories about God, creation and temple within the framework of their cultural system. The same point is made by Peacock on a similar issue. Spirits and G/god are for many people not something to believe in, but an essential part of who and what
they are (see Peacock 1986:18).

What is needed, in short, is that in our drawing close to them, they become what they are for us, real strangers. In Neyrey's so-called emic account, they do not yet appear as people with a strange purity system—strange at least to modern eyes. Part of the problem, to my mind, is the fact that the emic-etic distinction prevents him from confronting both cultural worlds, his own and that of the New Testament, head on.

3.3.3 Pilch and the formulation of the interpretive problem

Pilch is to be admired for introducing the field of medical anthropology in a systematic and comprehensive way into New Testament studies. He has opened the court to an entirely new perspective on Jesus's healings. However, the emic-etic distinction together with its natural science legacy of formulating the interpretive problem has, to my mind, prevented him from reaping the ethnocentric-free fruits promised by that approach.

A thorough analysis of Pilch's view will have to focus on at least three aspects: the formulation of the interpretive problem regarding illness and healing in Jesus's world, the way he goes about solving the problem, and finally his conclusions and results. Although it has far reaching effects on the latter two, in this study the focus will mainly be on his formulation of the interpretive problem. However, we should first turn to his definition of the concepts which are used in describing the interpretive problem.

Pilch adheres to the received view on emics and etics as the insider's-outsider's perspectives respectively (see 1985:142). The emic data of the New Testament need to be understood by means of etic models to such an extent that they are acceptable to insiders. Following Kleinman, he furthermore distinguishes between disease and illness (see 1985:143). He then continues by charting the interrelationship between illness and disease:

Etic-Disease-Biomedicine (distinctive western medicine) with an interest in causes.
Emic-Illness-Sociocultural perspective with an interest in symptoms, classification, and interpretation (Pilch 1985:143).

Consequently, he rejects the biomedical model for understanding illness and healing in the New Testament as medicocentristic (see 1985:149; 1993:154, 159). Sickness and healing would both be perceived differently in the first-century Mediterranean world to the way they are comprehended in contemporary Western worlds (see Pilch 1992:31). One of the implications of this view is that people in the first-century world were ill in terms of their health care system, but were also cured in terms of their health care system. Jesus and all healers of that period could only perceive illnesses and not disease (Pilch
1985:149). Therefore, Jesus healed illnesses, he did not necessarily cure diseases (see Pilch 1991:192).

Since the healing of illnesses should be viewed in terms of the cultural construction of the illness, (since Pilch accepts the assumption that 'all illness is culturally constructed'; Pilch 1993:154), Jesus provided social meaning for the life problems resulting from sickness. Those illnesses (such as instances of unclean spirits or demon possession) should not be identified with instances of epilepsy, mental illness, and the like, [since they] are 'pseudo-etic' interpretations' (Pilch 1985:149).

The use of a biomedical model for understanding illness and healing in that world which Pilch rejects, corresponds to what Taylor calls a scientific view on magic (see par 2.3 above). His own formulation of the problem however corresponds to the incorrigible thesis rejected by Taylor as part of the naturalistic model.

This is apparent from Pilch's formulation of the problem. While the uncritical application of a biomedical model is obviously to be rejected, the solution does not lie in going native. The problem is that in Pilch's conceptualisation of the interpretive problem, he basically disregards the modern interpretation of those healings. At the same time he presents the apparent native's point of view, but without enabling his reader to evaluate the first-century Mediterranean stories within their proper context. In the end, he is just as ethnocentric as those who claim that it did not happen if measured by the yardstick of a biomedical model.

In an interpretive approach, the assumption that 'all illness is culturally constructed' (Pilch 1993:154) which I share with him, together with the notion of health care systems as cultural systems, leads me in a different direction in constructing the interpretive problem regarding illness and healing in Jesus' world. Without going into the detail of an alternative construction of the interpretive problem and the interpretive process, the direction of such an approach will illustrate why his formulation of the problem fits the incorrigible thesis.

First, the very distinction between disease and illness is the product of a modern view on sickness since the distinction did not exist in the first-century world—neither does it exist in most indigenous healing systems. Both disease and illness should be seen within the framework of what Kleinman calls a health care system (see 1986:37). The distinctive feature of modern western health care systems is that they tend to treat disease but not illness whereas in general indigenous systems treat illness not disease (see Kleinman & Sung 1979:8). The point is that western notions are criticised for neglecting people's experience of their illnesses and overemphasising the biomedical nature of illness (see also Capra 1982:118-165 for criticising this situation). The fact remains that indigenous systems which do not even make the distinction between disease and ill-
ness, cannot be evaluated merely on what they describe as the cause and cure for sickness. The whole point of cross-cultural interpretation is bringing their accounts into dialogue and meaningful comparison with what an interpreter takes to be the case.

Secondly, it is not the case that modern people think only in terms of disease and ancients (or indigenous people) in terms of illness. Every health care system is constituted by both. Illness is the culturally determined perception, labelling and response to disease by the people involved (see Kleinman 1986:38).

Thirdly, for a cross-cultural comparison of health care systems, the two-fold nature of healing has to be taken into account, that is to say, 'provision of control for the disease and of meaning for the illness' (Kleinman 1986:45). What is true for cross-cultural comparison of the efficacy of health care is true for the cross-cultural interpretation of health care systems. As Kleinman says

The healing of illness must be evaluated separately, if cross-cultural comparisons of the efficacy of health care are to hold any significance (1986:45).

This means that for adequate cross-cultural comparison we cannot accept merely the subjects' expression of their sickness, in other words, their illness descriptions. We have to ask the question about the efficacy of both their disease and illness treatments. In the kind of examples discussed by Kleinman the question of efficiency overshadows that of cross-cultural understanding since he is able in most instances to describe the sickness in terms of his modern categories as well.

The problem facing New Testament scholarship is making sense of the New Testament accounts of sickness and healing while doing justice to both their exposition of it (and by means of only their versions of it) and the modern day understanding of sickness. Our challenge in other words is determining by means of their culturally stamped versions of illness and healing, what it all was about. If it was only a restoration of someone within the community or of purifying a polluted person (as Pilch suggests), then the phenomena at stake had nothing to do with what is today seen as illness responses to diseases. Then the question remains, what about their health care system? Our challenge is more than granting them their cultural versions of illness, but to understand those versions in terms of our knowledge about sickness, which include psychosomatic illnesses.

3.3.4 Garrett and the emics of Lukan magic
The emic-etic dichotomy finds another supporter when Garrett aligns herself to the emic side in her treatment of magic in Luke's writings. In opposing those who, in her view, operate with etic definitions of magic (see 1989:27,30,32) she
allegedly avoids a distinct and bounded preconceived definition of magic. Instead she employs an interpretive stance along the lines of Geertz's example of interpretive ethnography (see 1989:35). The advantage is that she claims to proceed inductively, observing a particular witchcraft society and trying to relate its patterns of accusation to other patterns of action and thought characteristic of that society's culture (1989:34).

This means that she strives 'to “hear what is being said” in social discourse by identifying the culture-specific “vocabulary” in which it is expressed' (1989:35). In order to do this, she focuses on the narrative world of Luke.

The main problem with this account is that it presents only part of what Geertz calls the double task of interpretive ethnography. The task of interpretive ethnography

is to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' acts, the 'said' of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures, what belongs to them because they are what they are, will stand out against the other determinants of human behavior (Geertz 1973:27).

One of the consequences of the employment of an emic analysis is that Luke's accounts are not understood or interpreted, but his propaganda is taken for granted. Furthermore, Garrett cannot really avoid some kind of notion about what counts as magic and what not. In fact, not only is implicitly assumed that the concept of magic is transparent to modern people, but Garrett's analysis of related issues such as Satan, exorcisms and magical healings assumes the same status for these concepts. The result is that the reader is asked to believe that the Christians did not share some of the widely recognised traits of magicians (see Garrett 1989:70). Peter (see 1989:75) and Paul (see 1989:86) did not use magic but exercised divine authority.

Although Garrett comes close to admitting that Luke's propaganda may be misleading (see 1989:99), it should be emphasised that one man's holy man is another man's magician. Therefore, in asking what Luke was up to consists of more than accepting his propaganda, it demands that his stories be interpreted within a framework against which it becomes cross-culturally intelligible. An analysis which focuses on the social and cultural conditions and presuppositions which enabled people to level charges and countercharges of Jesus being a magician, as Garrett suggests (see 1989:26), need not and should not begin and end with emics.
4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Firstly, it has been indicated that due to the epistemological critique introduced by the interpretive turn, emics and etics can no longer be considered appropriate tags for designating different approaches in bridging the gap between cultures. If they are used, it could be for designating the researcher's concepts and categories in distinction to those of the subjects or for describing different interests within the interpretive process. Within an interpretive approach concepts and categories from both cultural systems will inevitably be employed and different interests will be pursued, but this will not affect the nature of interpretation. What is needed, in my view, is not only abandoning the notion of emics as the native's point of view devoid of contemporary models and etics as the solution to all cross-cultural problems, but a positive engagement in both phases of the interpretive process: a search for the meaningful experience of others together with a language of comparison which takes into account both subject and researcher.

Secondly, what the above analysis shows is that the emic-etic distinction in the social-scientific interpretation of the New Testament is not an innocent distinction, but carries with it the seed of a natural science legacy. In fact, since none of these studies really stands firm on interpretive grounds, the suspicion cannot be avoided that the emic-etic distinction functions as an excuse for avoiding the challenges posed by the interpretive turn. That is to say, it is not acknowledged that both emics and etics are subject to interpretation and that therefore the dichotomy between them is to be avoided. One cannot, however, go that way and claim the fruits of an interpretive science, namely, having avoided ethnocentric interpretations.

Thirdly, a positive engagement in both phases of the interpretive process is required if ethnocentric imposition is to be avoided. If a researcher and his/her interpretive community does not share the assumptions of a magical worldview or of certain healing practices, then cross-cultural interpretation takes place when both cultural systems are brought into dialogue. All possible insights from cultural anthropological studies should be used in the interpretive process for establishing as well as possible the cultural system within which Paul, Jesus and the others operated. Not only their but also our world needs to be brought into sharper focus. It is only then that the real differences appear all the more transparently.

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