

# Anutan Epistemology: The Roots of "Knowledge" on a Polynesian Outlier

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**Abstract.**—To the people of Anuta Island, a Polynesian outlier in the eastern Solomon Islands, 'knowing' is a process or activity rather than a substantive object. A person comes 'to know' by channelling sense data, particularly visual and auditory, to the 'mind' where they are processed and made ready for use. Someone thought 'to know' a great deal is said to be an 'expert' and respected for his expertise. Intelligence and expertise are expressed in terms of 'light' in contrast with stupidity and ignorance, which the Anutans associate with 'darkness'. The Anutans' view of 'knowing', which they hold in common with other Polynesian peoples, is opposed to that held commonly by Melanesians who see 'knowledge' as an object which may be possessed, exchanged, created or destroyed, lost and found, or bought and sold. This distinction, I suggest, reflects the fact that rank in Melanesia is achieved through distribution of large quantities of objects, and possession of certain types of knowledge, both ritual and technical, facilitates the acquisition of sufficient goods for distribution, while in Polynesia 'knowing' only validates or modifies a status one already occupies by virtue of his genealogical position.

## Introduction

Vern Carroll introduced the subject of "adoption" in Oceanic cultures with the observation that:

An important part of the recent development of anthropological theory in English-speaking countries has been the continuing effort to use ordinary English words in ethnographic description without allowing the cultural connotations of these words to distort the analysis which makes use of them. However heroic the effort, any anthropological use of a term like "marriage" or "family" or "kinship" seems destined to prejudice the central issues by introducing unspecified assumptions derived from the anthropologist's culture. No sooner does an anthropologist provide a working definition of a crucial term than other anthropologists discover an ethnocentric bias (Carroll, 1970: 3).

This observation is no less true for "knowledge" than it is for "marriage," "family," or "kinship." In fact, to presuppose existence of a concept in a foreign culture which is isomorphic with one found in Western cultures and labelled by an English word, often proves unwarranted. Yet, if we are to make a foreign concept comprehensible to bearers of our culture and speakers of our language, somehow we must translate it into familiar terms.

The object of this paper is to examine the concept of 'knowledge' found among the people of Anuta Island, a tiny, isolated Polynesian outlier, located approximately seventy-five miles northeast of Tikopia, its nearest populated neighbor, in the Eastern District of the Solomon Islands. It should be noted, parenthetically, that a single

English word sometimes must be used in several different senses, and I have adopted certain conventions in order to help make it clear in which sense I am using a word at any given time. Inverted commas indicate that I am using an English word to denote a concept in another culture which, while resembling to some degree the concept designated by that word in our language, does not mean quite the same thing. Quotation marks indicate that I am using an English word to designate a concept which is something like that denoted by the word in common English usage, but which may not have a precise equivalent in any one particular culture, or else, to indicate that I am referring to the word, itself, rather than its referent. When a word appears without either quotes or inverted commas, that indicates the word is being used in (one of) its common English sense(s).

"Knowledge" is an English word, referring to a concept extant in our culture. Other cultures may have parallel conceptions, but it is in error to assume that every culture must. Therefore, our first task in the cross-cultural investigation of "knowledge" must be to determine, in each instance, if the culture under study distinguishes a concept which, in some way, resembles ours. If it does, we must proceed to ask, specifically, in what respects is the concept similar to ours and in what ways does it differ.

Homonymy, metaphor, polysemy, and unlabelled categories preclude a precise congruence between linguistic labels on the one hand and conceptual categories on the other. Language, nonetheless, provides our most substantial clues as to the structure of a people's cultural domains. The logical starting point for an investigation of the Anutans' 'knowledge' system, therefore, is an examination of their repertoire of words relating to a cultural domain which English speakers might be prone to label, "knowledge."

The semantics of obtaining, using, and controlling information and ideas suggests that the Anutans see "knowledge" not as a substantial object or commodity, but as a process or a type of action in which one may engage. There is some evidence, moreover, that this view is found in other Polynesian cultures and that it contrasts with typical Melanesian patterns.

Once the contours of the general domain have been delineated I shall address the more substantive epistemological questions: What sorts of thing are 'knowable'? What sorts of people 'know' which sorts of thing? And how is it that we come 'to know'? The final section will address the issue of how what we would label "knowledge" is used by the Anutans. What are the social implications of controlling different forms of information, having skill, or expertise? At this point the apparent tendency of the Anutans and other Polynesians to view "knowledge" as a process or activity as opposed to the Melanesian tendency to view it as an object or commodity will be discussed with some speculations as to how this might be understood in light of social structural considerations.

### What is it 'to know'?

In our language "knowledge" is a noun, implying that it is a kind of "thing" or "object." It may be gained or lost, possessed or utilized. The Anutans have no word which is directly comparable to our "knowledge." Their closest equivalent is probably *iroa*, which means 'to know' in the sense of understanding, having control of information, or of knowing facts. It is more or less equivalent to the Spanish *saber* 'to know how to' or 'to understand' as opposed to *conocer* 'to be acquainted with'. For the latter the Anutans would use the rather different word, *perave* 'to meet' or 'to encounter'. Hence, the closest an Anutan can come to asking, "Do you two know each other?" would be *Ku oti na koru perave?* 'Has finished its your (dual) meeting?', and "I know the chief" is most likely to be rendered, *Maaua mo te ariki, ku oti na ma perave* 'The chief and I, has finished its our (dual, exclusive) meeting'. *Kau iroa te ariki* is awkward, and would carry the implication of knowing something about the chief; the predictable reaction would be *Ko tea te mea ke iroa ki ei?* 'What is it that you know about him?'. In short, 'knowing' for the Anutans is a process or action in which one may engage; there is no word for "knowledge" as an object which may be possessed as if it were a "thing."

At the annual meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania in 1977, and again in 1978, sessions were held dealing with the conceptualization, acquisition, utilization, and control of "knowledge" in the Pacific. In both sessions observations similar to these repeatedly were made with reference to other Polynesian cultures, and such observations stand in striking contrast to what has been reported for much of Melanesia. In Melanesian cultures "knowledge" tends to be regarded as a "thing," existing in the world. It may be possessed in varying degrees. It may be transmitted or withheld. It may be bought and sold. It may be lost or found. And prominent among Melanesian forms of "knowledge" is "knowledge" of magical rites and spells. In the concluding section of this paper I shall attempt to account for this Melanesia/Polynesia dichotomy with respect to "knowing" in light of social structural divergences between these culture areas, particularly as pertains to concepts of rank and authority.

One might suspect that if we were to substitute "information" for "knowledge," the Anutans would, indeed, be found to have a concept of a substantive object, similar to that which we call "knowledge." A precise equivalent to our "information," however, is also absent in the Anutan language. About the closest analogue they have is *rongo*, which, in its plural form, *nga poi rongo*, means 'news'. Primarily, however, the word means 'to hear' or 'to obey', the implication being that 'news' consists of 'items which one hears'. On the other hand, despite the lack of a monolexemic label, one may speak of 'things' which 'are known' or 'things' which it is possible 'to know', and in this sense one may speak of 'information' as a construct extant in Anutan culture.

There are several other words denoting concepts which relate to 'knowing' in the Anutans' sense as well as ours. *Maanatu* 'to think' indicates a similar process, but implies less certainty than does *iroa*. *Pakamaanatu*, literally, 'to cause to think', means more precisely, 'to remember'. Connoting still less certainty is *matea*, which means 'perhaps' or 'maybe', or the verb, 'to guess'.

### How does one come 'to know'?

There are several questions, forming an articulated set, which must be asked in an ethnography of "knowledge." What kind of person is capable of "knowing?" What are the characteristics of an individual who "knows?" Are "knowledge" and access to "knowledge" finite or unlimited? Who creates it? Who imparts it? How does one "know" when he "knows?" How does one "know" what he "knows?" What kinds of evidence are accepted as diagnostic? Do the people in question place their emphasis upon "perception" or "conception", or some interpenetration of the two, as paths to "knowing" or as evidence which may be adduced in support of epistemological propositions? [See Shore (1978) for a discussion of "concept" versus "percept" as pertains to "knowledge" in one Polynesian culture.] Once again I shall approach these questions via the linguistic route.

A person we would characterize as "intelligent" or "capable of knowing" is said by the Anutans to be *rotomaarama*. *Maarama* refers to 'light' and may be contrasted with *pouri* 'darkness', but very much as in English these terms may denote intellectual achievement. The Church is said to have come to the *tangata pouri* 'men of darkness', dwelling upon *penua pouri* 'islands of darkness', and brought them the *maarama* or 'light'. Similarly, the personal names of the type used in pre-Christian times are now known as *ingoa pouri* 'darkness names', to indicate that they were used in days when people 'dwelt in darkness', and they are contrasted with the *ingoa pakamaatuaa* 'parental name' or 'marital name' on the one hand and the *ingoa pakauku tapu* 'baptismal name' on the other. *Roto* refers to the center or inside of any object, including the human body, and sometimes specifically to the heart or some other internal organ. *Rotomaarama*, then, indicates that an intelligent or knowledgeable person is 'light inside', or as we might say, is 'bright'. The symbolic identity of 'knowing' with the inside of the torso is associated further with the idea of thought as ultimately proceeding from the stomach, and perhaps with the position of food as a central symbol in Anutan culture (see below; also see Feinberg, 1978a, 1978b).

A person who is *rotomaarama* may be contrasted with one who is *vare* 'stupid' or 'foolish'. A *tangata rotomaarama* is 'intelligent' or 'capable of knowing'. He has the ability to learn skills or to solve difficult problems, and his actions are appropriate to the situation. A *tangata vare* is incapable of 'knowing', 'understanding', or of any form of penetrating insight. He cannot master common skills or can only master them marginally. He is unable to solve ordinary problems. He cannot (or will not) carry on a normal conversation. And his actions generally are inappropriate.

*Varea* 'stupidity' or 'insanity' may be a temporary condition, or it may be permanent. During the period of my field study there was one man on the island generally known as the *tangata vare*. He would never work in the gardens or engage in productive labor. He would wander on the reef or in the bush alone at night, often stealing betel nut from other people's gardens. He would swim out to sea on stormy days, forcing other men to risk their lives in the attempt to bring him back. He would not listen to the chiefs, would pick fights, and shout in church. He was a reputed liar, and often his speech was wholly incoherent. This case was the most dramatic that I

witnessed, but other people manifested some of the same symptoms for short periods of time, and during those periods they were also characterized as *vare*, or sometimes it was said, *na atamai ne reku* 'he lost his mind'. Persons who are slow to understand when spoken to or to find solutions to the problems they encounter sometimes are termed *vare*, and as among ourselves, Anutans on occasion tease each other with this epithet. Finally, a child who has not reached the age where he is expected to wear clothes on a constant basis is regarded as a social incompetent and referred to as *koi vare* 'still foolish'.

A more subtle contrast is sometimes drawn by the Anutans between the concepts, *rotomaarama*, and *poto*. *Tangata poto* usually refers to someone who is 'wise' or 'expert'. *Rotomaarama* carries connotations of having ability to figure things out or to solve problems—the ability 'to know'. *Poto*, on the other hand, implies that one already 'knows' something well; that one is 'knowledgeable'; that one is in control of information; that one has understanding. The concepts are related very closely, and the distinction is not always upheld with great rigor, but in general it may be said that a *tangata rotomaarama* is one with the ability to become *poto* irrespective of whether or not he has, as yet, attained that status.

Many types of expert are described as *poto*. A *tipunga* is a 'carpenter'; an accomplished builder of houses or canoes. In addition, a tattooer may be known as a *tipunga*, as is the surgeon who performs the circumcision operation during the male initiation rites. A *tau tai* or 'sea expert' is also seen as someone who is *poto*. There are three types of *tau tai*. A *tau tai kumi ika* is an expert fisherman. Physical dexterity is of more importance than intellectual accomplishment in this endeavor, and many Anutan men are thought to be sufficiently expert at catching fish to be called *tau tai*. Greater skill and knowledge are required of the *tau tai pakamaironga*, an expert at locating fishing grounds. Most fishing is done at offshore reefs within several miles of the island. The proper vicinity is calculated by lining up with various points on the island and estimating the angles between lines of sight extending from the canoe to each of the onshore points. Once the area is reached the precise location is determined by looking down into the clear blue water, generally around eighty feet in depth, for the dark outlines revealing the exact position of the reef. *Pakamaironga* is a 'memory' or a 'memorial'—a physical object which evokes some memory in the observer—and the use of this term in the present context suggests that the expert is dependent on his memory of detailed geographical features as well as skill at estimating lines and angles from a distance.

The rarest, most highly specialized, and most esteemed 'sea expert' is the *tau tai pakaterevaka* or the 'expert navigator'. Most men have some basic knowledge of the stars and of which constellations one should follow in order to reach which archipelagoes or islands, but some men are much more knowledgeable than others. Not only must one know the stars and their movements; one must estimate the winds and currents, the drag of the outrigger, and other such factors. Moreover, in the daytime or on cloudy nights the stars are useless, and the Anutans sail by wave configurations, which can tell the expert where the nearest land might lie. In addition, the *tau tai pakaterevaka* must be able to instill confidence in the members of his crew,

maintain order and smooth social interaction among those on the craft, and cope with emergencies which inevitably appear aboard the vessel.

Rote memorization of formulae or lists of facts are not significant at present for most endeavors of concern to the Anutans. In many of Firth's writings, however, he relates formulae recited by Tikopians in various situations and in conjunction with other ritual acts, in order to procure assistance from the deities. It is difficult on Anuta, which has been Christianized for more than half a century, for which written records are almost nonexistent, and where even the oldest individuals were children when they observed the last pagan rites, to reconstruct pre-Christian beliefs with any certainty. Yet, the close cultural and linguistic similarity as well as frequency and ease of social intercourse between the two communities for many generations suggests that the Anutans' old religion may well have resembled that on Tikopia. Thus, it seems likely that reciting formulae from memory in order to invoke one's deities was common practice for Anutans in pre-Christian times.

An individual who is especially adept in areas of oral history or genealogy is said to be *tangata poto*, as is anyone with special expertise in a particular arena, over and above that of the average person on the island. This may be a matter of special effort and training, as in the case of the *tipunga*, or it may be a matter of exposure, as in the case of immigrants or native islanders who have traveled overseas, coming back with skills and information unavailable to persons who have never left the island. Generally, it involves what we would call "factual knowledge," but it shades into *rotomaarama*, as someone who makes useful suggestions, who has insight or who is good at understanding and at solving problems, also is called *poto*, and the word, itself, is often translated as 'wise' by Anutans who speak some English.

At one level *vare* is contrasted with *rotomaarama*, and means 'stupid' or 'inept' or 'foolish'. At a different level of contrast it may be opposed to *poto*, and means 'ignoramus'—one who does not know what people feel he should.

While the Anutans seem not to view 'knowledge' as an object, but a process, 'information' (i.e., 'things' which it is possible 'to know') exists in the phenomenal world. Of *ngamea* 'things' in the most general sense, it is said that they *e tuku* 'are kept', 'are preserved', *e i ei* 'are in it' (i.e., in the world), or *e pai* 'are made', 'are done'. Something which exists it is possible to *ako* 'learn', and a teacher is a *pakaako* 'one who causes (others) to learn'. *Pakaako* also is the word Anutans use to designate a 'catechist', the lowest ranking clergyman in the Anglican Church, and the highest on Anuta at the time of my investigation. The role of the *pakaako* is to preach sermons, and in this way, to elucidate the character of proper Christian actions and belief for the population's benefit. Thus, he is seen as a 'teacher', very much as if his role were wholly secular.

The word, *atamai*, means 'mind' or 'meaning', either in the sense of signification or intention. 'Meaning' in the sense of cause, reason, motivation, or significance is designated by the word, *tapito*. Someone who is of sound mind has an *atamai*, which enables him to know and understand the world, while of someone who is *vare* or 'deranged' it generally is said, *na atamai ne reku* 'his mind has disappeared'; 'he lost his mind.'

The ultimate source of all that exists is God. People may create things, but people, themselves, exist only by the grace of God (or in pre-Christian times, the traditional Anutan spirits). To be known, an object (God's product) must be brought into contact with a 'mind,' which also is an object and one of God's creations. This is accomplished through the medium of sense organs and the application of intelligence to sense data.

'Mind' for the Anutans, has two locations in the body: the stomach and the head. Data received by our sensory perceptors are transmitted to the stomach, where they are processed. These refined impulses, then, are transmitted to the head where they are processed further, transformed into conscious thoughts, fed into the vocal apparatus, and channeled out the mouth in the communication process. Thus, 'thinking', 'knowing', and 'communicating' constitute a structural inversion on a temporal and spatial plane, of the eating and processing of food, i.e., that which makes life, and hence, thought possible. Even the Anutans' "theory of knowledge," then, is modeled on their focal symbol, food, along with its production, distribution, and consumption.

Direct experience enables one 'to know' with greatest certainty. Particularly important is visual perception, as is suggested by the prevalence of the 'light' metaphor in describing 'intelligence' or the 'knowing' process. 'Hearing' (*rongo*) is important, more or less on a par with 'seeing'. 'To hear' is *ke rongo*, and 'news' (i.e., information which has been brought to one's attention) is *nga poi rongo* (*nga* = definite article, plural; *poi* is an individuating particle; *rongo* = 'hear'). Touch and smell are somewhat less important as sources of information, and in order of importance, taste is least of all.

While direct experience is the most reliable means of obtaining information, secondary sources inevitably are used. Hearsay may be accurate and myths (*nga araarapanga mai mua rea* 'stories from long before'), in the Anutans' view, might well be true. Such sources, therefore, sometimes are acceptable as paths to 'knowing'. However, people can and do lie or make mistakes. Anutans recognize that our own senses can mislead us as well. Everyone has dreams. Hallucinations do take place, especially when one is ill. Sprits, whose existence seemed to be accepted universally by the Anutans, may playtricks on people and deceive them. But when one is dealing with secondary sources the potential for error is multiplied several fold. Not only must the immediate observer still rely on his own imperfect senses, but even with the best of intentions he may communicate his information and ideas with less than absolute precision. One may misinterpret his informants' words, and even if communication does take place with due precision the intentions of the speaker may be less than fully honorable.

It is at this point that intelligence comes into play. One must be in a position to judge his informant. How reliable a person is he generally? How plausible is his story? Is he known as a generally honest person? Does he have an "axe to grind?" Does he have a reputation as a liar? Is he regarded as a mental incompetent? What is the state of his health, and what was it at the time of his alleged observation? (Derangement is seen as a type of illness, and it is recognized that people who are *ngaengae* 'sick' may perceive things which are not there. The most spectacular case of this nature to occur

during the course of my investigation was that of a woman who claimed to be possessed by God, insisting that the people treat her as the Christian Deity. She was recognized as being 'sick', and I was told that if she were possessed at all it was most likely by the Devil.) Has he been drinking? (The Anutan phrase for 'being drunk' is *ku varea, varea* being an intensified form of *vare*, indicating a conceptual identity between being mentally incompetent due to inebriation and as a result of other causes.) Was he asleep and, presumably, dreaming? All these factors have to be considered, weighted in accordance with their relative importance, and their resolution determined in each case.

### Uses of "knowledge"

As has been observed for people ranging from the Navajo (Kluckhohn, 1949) to the Kaulong (Goodale, 1977), for the Anutans 'knowing' is a source of "power." 'To know' gives one efficacy; it enables one to accomplish what he wants. It provides one with and confirms the presence of *manuu* 'power'; 'efficacy'.

*Manuu* is the Anutan variant of the common Polynesian *mana*, a term which also is in use by the Anutans, but which appears with considerably less frequency (see Feinberg, 1978a). It is possession of *manuu* that justifies the holding of positions involving honor and authority among the Anutans. An individual with great *manuu* is expected to provide for the well being of those with less, and in return the weaker persons owe obedience, respect, and honor to those above them in the ranking systems. Ultimately, *manuu* is inherited through a line of males from the line's founding ancestor, a person who is known as the *tapito* 'source', 'base', 'cause', 'basis', or 'reason'. This individual, as is true of all ancestors from the grandparental generation back, is also known as his descendents' *tupuna*, which is, itself, a modification of the word *tupu* 'grow', and implies that the founding ancestor is the source of 'growing' or 'growth'. In our terms, "power," and "intelligence" and their corollary, "knowledge," are passed down from the ancestors. In the Anutan conceptual framework, on the other hand, they grow up from the 'source', much as a tree grows from its *tapito* or 'base', and thus, we may refer to the ancestors and deities as constituting 'roots of knowledge', or better still, 'the roots of knowing', without doing violence to the Anutans' cultural schema.

It is assumed that as *manuu* ascends to members of the later generations from those who came before, it tends to follow the paths of genealogical seniority. Hence, the individual most qualified to be a chief on the basis of possessing superordinate *manuu* is normally the previous chief's eldest son. Yet, to assume the presence of *manuu* is insufficient, it must be demonstrated if one is to be accepted as possessing it. Incompetence, stupidity, and ignorance are indications that one lacks *manuu*, in which case he is likely to be bypassed and the office or title given to the most genealogically qualified individual who does have competence, intelligence, or expertise.

Skill at crafts and control of information do not convey authority in a generalized sense, nor do they confer ritual honor. However, they do confer a kind of prestige and



even authority in specific contexts. People respect experts. They look up to the great warrior, the master carpenter, the skillful gradner, the expert navigator or fisherman, and they admire a knowledgeable, insightful, or persuasive person. Not only are such individuals given admiration, moreover, but they may assume leadership roles over and above their genealogical qualifications.

Anutans recognize that it makes sense to follow the advice of competent individuals (i.e., persons who 'know' how to do things well), particularly in sensitive or dangerous situations. In 1966 a canoe was blown off course in a gale during a voyage to Patutaka, an uninhabited island thirty miles away. The winds precluded a return to Anuta, and the nearest reachable land was Tikopia, across some eighty miles of open ocean. The senior chief was on this voyage, but in the emergency, turned the helm over to his younger brother, Pu Tokerau, whose navigational skills were deemed superior. The chief did not abandon his title, honor, or formal authority, but until the crew had landed safely, a full day later, Pu Tokerau was in charge.

A second case, with even greater implications for formally recognized social relations, is that of Pu Paone and his position in the *pono* 'general assembly of the island's population'. Every week the two chiefs and their *maru*, the men of the two senior *kainanga* 'clans', meet to discuss the island's affairs and make policy decisions. The following day the island's population gathers and is informed by the leading *maru* of the previous night's decisions. One of the men who regularly addresses the 'assembly' is Pu Maravai, the senior member of his generation in the senior line next to that of the high chief. The other, however, is Pu Paone, one of the junior men from a middle ranking line of the senior 'clan'. From a genealogical viewpoint he is among the less appropriate members of his 'clans, to assume this role. However, it has been assigned to him because of his recognized position as the "wisest man on the island" at the present time, and as far as I know his assumption of this role has gone unchallenged.

A third area in which control of information leads to the assumption of authoritative roles is that of the Church. In pre-Christian times the senior chief was also the high priest, assisted by the junior chief and leading men of the two 'clans'. Due to their positions, based primarily on genealogy, they were responsible for the welfare of the island and were expected to invoke assistance from the deities through the performance of ritual activities.

Today the genealogical prerequisites have largely been abandoned; unlike other areas of political authority and ritual esteem, participation in the Church hierarchy is not based formally on genealogical considerations. Anyone with proper training in the understanding of the scriptures may take on the role of catechist, and membership in the Companions of the Brotherhood of Melanesia, a kind of Church auxiliary, is also voluntary (for further discussion of the structure of the Church and the role and composition of the Companions, see Feinberg, 1978a). Persons of high status in the traditional Anutan ranking system continue to feel a responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the island, and the chiefs and leading men have assumed prominent positions in the local Church. The only actual requirements, however, are competence

to carry out one's assigned duties and a willingness to accept the burdens of responsibility. And "knowledge," once again, makes possible attainment of a status by an individual which differs from his genealogically ascribed position.

At this point we are ready to return to our observation that for the Anutans, as for other Polynesians, 'knowing' is a process or a type of action while for many Melanesians it is viewed more as a "thing." This distinction may be comprehensible in light of the types of social and political structure characterizing the two culture areas.

In Melanesia one expands his following by distribution of goods in greater quantities than his competitors can muster, and ritual knowledge provides a mechanism for increasing one's supply of property for purposes of distribution as well as for diminishing competitors' supplies. Moreover, "knowledge" is an entity which can, itself, be exchanged for other forms of wealth, and the services of one with "knowledge" of magic or witchcraft may be exchanged for wealth. This wealth, in turn, may be distributed directly or exchanged for other objects to be given out at future feasts.

In Polynesia, on the other hand, rank tends to be primarily a function of one's genealogical position. It is useful to know how to do things, and such skills or expertise may provide a way for someone of low rank in genealogical terms to obtain prestige, respect, and a degree of influence. Yet, with the exception of an individual who, due to a glaring lack of competence, is passed over in succession to positions of political authority or ritual honor in favor of the next most genealogically qualified person who does display at least the minimum degree of competence, "knowledge" is not something which may be exchanged for formal rank. In general, while an expert is admired, a commoner who becomes an expert gardener or fisherman remains a commoner, and while an individual of rank is expected to display some expertise, "knowing" helps to validate a rank which one already is assumed to have on the basis of his genealogical position.

### Conclusions

To the Anutans, "knowledge" is a process or activity rather than an object. Information is obtained by applying one's intelligence to sense data, particularly visual and auditory. Someone with the capability of understanding and resolving problems is 'intelligent' or 'bright', while someone in control of esoteric information is *poto* 'expert'. However, rather than being rigidly distinguished categories, these shade into one another, and there are contexts in which either word would be appropriate. While "knowledge" is not a commodity to be "sold" or "exchanged" in return for material possessions or for formal status in the ranking system, as is the case in much of Melanesia, 'intelligence' and 'expertise' provide a mechanism through which one may confirm or alter the social position to which he is entitled by virtue of his genealogical status. And while the Anutan social hierarchy is not "open" in the way made possible by many Melanesian cultures, the element of competence, in which 'to know' is a vital component, provides a degree of openness in what, on the surface, seems to be a rigidly determined hierarchy based on genealogy.

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