

BEHAVIORIST ETHICS IN A POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY: ANUTA, SOLOMON ISLANDS

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In this essay, we explore the ethical system of Anuta, a remote Polynesian community in the Solomon Islands. We discuss the system's underlying premises, the way in which the elements fit together into a coherent whole, and how the system might be characterized in terms familiar to Western philosophers and social scientists. In particular, Anutans draw a connection between happiness, as expressed in overt laughter, and moral virtue. Thus, we argue, Anutan ethics can reasonably be described as "utilitarian" and "behaviorist" and, on that basis, be compared with ethical systems found in other cultural and geographic regions.

Introduction

This essay explores the ethical system of Anuta, a Polynesian community in the southeastern Solomon Islands. We will discuss the system's underlying premises, the way in which the elements fit together into a coherent whole, and how the Anutans' system might be characterized in terms familiar to Western philosophers and social scientists. We suggest that the system can reasonably be described as "utilitarian" and "behaviorist." As such, it may be compared with systems found in other cultural and geographic regions.

The first iteration of this work goes back to a 1971 research proposal by one of the authors while he was a graduate student at the University of Chicago

(R. Feinberg, unpublished data). A few years earlier, he had opted to pursue a career in anthropology with the intention of studying non-Western value systems.¹ Owing to a disagreement between Feinberg and members his advisory committee, that proposal was eventually withdrawn and replaced with plans to explore a more conventional anthropological topic: kinship and its connection to social structure.² Nonetheless, he remained interested in cross-cultural ethics and devoted a portion of his time on Anuta in 1972–73 to collecting data on the subject. Through the succeeding decades, he has returned to Anuta a number of times, has remained in contact with community members, and continued to pursue his interest in Anutan moral philosophy.

In 1987, Feinberg (unpublished data) presented a preliminary assessment of Anutan ethics to a Kent State University Philosophy Department colloquium and was gratified at its positive reception. Since that time, a field known as “the anthropology of morals” or “anthropology of ethics” has emerged.³ Several years later, he met coauthor, Gina Zavota, a philosopher with a long-standing interest in Asian, particularly Buddhist, ethics. We were struck by our shared commitment to understanding non-Western moral systems and agreed to explore Anutan ethics together. The result is this article. The following ethnographic data come from Feinberg’s studies dating back to 1972; most of the philosophical analysis is Zavota’s. In this essay, the term *ethics* is used in the traditional sense found in academic philosophy: namely, to describe theories about what is right or good, how humans should act, and how things ought to be. Although ethics in this context is sometimes referred to as *moral philosophy*, the terms *morality* or *morals* more often denote the way in which ethical theories and values are put into practice.

Ethnographic Context

Anuta is a small Polynesian enclave, 0.8 kilometers in diameter and approximately 120 kilometers from its nearest populated neighbor, Tikopia, with which its people share many cultural traits. Even in the twenty-first century, ships rarely visit more than three or four times a year, and despite having been Christian since 1916, much of the precontact cultural system remains intact. The community is ruled by two hereditary chiefs, and social relations are hierarchically ordered on the basis of genealogical seniority. Anutans rely on the subsistence economy and, among those staying on the home island, money rarely changes hands. The dominant cultural value is termed *aropa*, Anuta’s version of a pan-Polynesian term. Roughly, it means “love,” “pity,” “empathy,” or “compassion,” as expressed through giving or sharing of material goods or assistance. *Aropa* is the defining characteristic of Anutan kinship, the cornerstone of the islanders’ cultural and social relations.⁴

In this essay, we suggest that Anutans conceive of ethics in a way that is, broadly speaking, utilitarian. "Utilitarianism" may refer to any theory that assesses what is right on the basis of maximizing "utility," generally defined in terms of happiness, pleasure, or well-being, among humans and, arguably, other sentient beings. Perhaps the best known expression of the principle of utility is commonly attributed to Jeremy Bentham (1789), who suggested that one should act in such a way as to promote "the greatest happiness for the greatest number."⁵ Even within the wide spectrum of utilitarian ethical systems, however, two aspects of the Anutan view of happiness are noteworthy: the openness with which Anutans laugh at others' minor misfortunes and the practice of evaluating others' emotional states, including happiness, on the basis of appearance and actions. Therefore, we will argue that there is a distinctive behaviorist component to the Anutans' utilitarianism. Although Anutans do not explicitly lay out their premises and how they fit together, their thinking about ethics is systematic and consistent. While different in important ways from Western systems, it also has noteworthy points of convergence with them. Thus, we see this study as an opportunity both to create wider awareness of a distinctly non-Western ethical system and to highlight commonalities between Anutan ethics and some systems that are more familiar to most Western scholars.

While conducting research on Anuta, Feinberg found that islanders readily made judgments about other people and their actions. They willingly expressed opinions about hypothetical actions he presented to them and whether such acts were good or bad. Although few people had worked out their thoughts in elaborate detail, it gradually emerged that the central principles guiding the Anutans' moral choices were, as several of his interlocutors put it, "the ancient custom of this island" and the desire "to make us happy."⁶

Much evidence suggests that happiness is a core value for Anutans. They commonly refer to the Christian heaven as *Te Vakivaki*, which translates literally as "Happiness" or "The Happy Place." Although such a focus is common to many cultures, not least those of Western Europe and the United States, some of the ways that Anutans attempt to engender happiness in others, as well as their means of assessing others' emotional states, are distinctive. With regard to the former, Feinberg quickly discovered an unfamiliar Anutan practice during his first period of fieldwork. During his third day on the island, he wrote (Feinberg 2011a: 20–21):

I was trying to light my kerosene pressure lantern, which needed to be heated with denatured alcohol... . At first the lantern was inadequately sealed, and the flame kept going out. Each time it died, the dozen or so people in the house would howl in laughter, adding to my gradually building level of self-conscious irritation. Finally, I fixed

the leak and the lantern glowed with a bright white light, similar to an incandescent bulb. Then, to save alcohol, I removed the wick and tried to blow out the fire. Instead, I caused the flaming alcohol to drip onto my lap.

As I sat on the floor, flames shooting from my legs, I expected others to rush to my aid. Instead, they virtually rolled ... in still more uproarious laughter. Fortunately, I did not yet speak enough Anutan to express my feelings. The closest American analogy, it seemed to me, was the classic laughter at someone who slips on a banana peel. But whereas Americans might find such an episode comedic, we also recognize it as bad form to laugh at another's misfortune or discomfort. Here I was not dealing simply with discomfort but the possibility of serious injury; yet, my hosts showed not the slightest restraint in their levity.

Initially, Feinberg assumed that his hosts were making fun of his incompetence. As time went on, however, he came to understand that the Anutans, rather than ridiculing him, were trying to cheer him up. They told him that laughter is inextricably connected to smiling and happiness. In fact, they use the same word, *kata*, for "smiling" and "laughter." Moreover, laughter is contagious (cf. Austin 2023). Therefore, unlike most Westerners, when others laugh at them, they suffer neither shame nor anger; rather, they feel happiness and laugh themselves. Given the contagious nature of laughter, the reasoning is that if observers laugh at someone's minor misfortune, the luckless individual will begin laughing as well, and pleasure will grow to overcome the pain.⁷

This brings us to the second noteworthy characteristic of Anutan ethics: the identification of happiness with external expressions such as laughter. Like many other Pacific Islanders, Anutans are fundamentally behaviorists. They say that one can never know with certainty what is in another person's mind; therefore, they are more concerned with overt expressions than with subjective states.⁸ For example, many Anutans questioned a colonial official's moral character on the grounds that "he never smiles." One of his supporters, on the other hand, explained, "I know he is a good man, because I've seen him smile."

It is not that internal states are irrelevant to Anutans. In addition to happiness, they recognize sadness (*pakaruru*), anger (*konokono*), and comparable states as subjective feelings, and they infer others' emotions from such expressions as smiling and laughter. In that sense, they often draw conclusions about one another's happiness based on outward expressions. They recognize, however, that a degree of uncertainty is inevitable. Although one may deduce another's inner state from outward behavior, such inferences can be mistaken and must be viewed with caution. Anutans care about one

another's well-being, and they frequently assess the extent to which others can be trusted. Therefore, they worry about whether people's words and actions accurately reflect what they think or feel. However, they are aware that people sometimes lie or deceive, and the correspondence between outward behavior and internal states can vary from one person to another. Thus, one can never be certain of another's subjectivity and must respond to others on the basis of observable behavior. Even the word for lying (*ngutu roi*) is better translated as "to tell an untruth." In American English, one who speaks a falsehood but believes the statement to be true is not telling a lie. For Anutans, the key question is not whether the speaker believed the statement to be true but whether or not it is empirically accurate. Thus, an honestly mistaken assertion of allegedly objective fact is characterized as *ngutu roi*. Significantly, *laia*, the word for "telling a lie" in Pijin, the Solomon Islands' lingua franca, is similarly used, suggesting that this way of thinking about internal states may be widespread in the southwestern Pacific and, perhaps, beyond.

Anutans' focus on happiness, as judged by outward manifestations, is consistent with their emphasis on *aropa*. As noted above, *aropa* is the cornerstone of the Anutan cultural and moral universe. It is most easily represented in English as "love" or "empathy." However, it is only regarded as meaningful insofar as it is expressed in material terms, such as by giving or sharing of food and other objects of practical value. This was powerfully communicated to Feinberg in 1972, after he had been on the island for about a month. A ship came to visit, and he asked a traveler to convey his *aropa* to a friend on another island, in much the same way that English speakers might ask someone to "send him my love" or "send him my regards." He was taken aback when his interlocutor replied, "All right. Where is it?" Another member of the crowd explained that when one sends *aropa*, it is in the form of a material object. Feinberg ran back to his house, took out a few sticks of twist tobacco, and handed them to the intermediary with the words, "Here is my *aropa*; please take it to my friend." The message was then clear, and the transaction proceeded without further difficulties. In short, Anutans understand that one may say, "I *aropa* to you," but unless one backs up the claim with concrete action, it is empty verbiage. To put this in terms familiar to most English speakers, for Anutans, "Actions speak louder than words."

Aropa, in the Anutan view, is closely tied to happiness (*vakivaki*). Someone who is hungry or in need of material support is bound to be unhappy. Those who care about that person should do whatever is within their means to provide assistance, thereby expressing *aropa* and increasing happiness. In this way, Anutans illustrate the connection between emotional connection and material support.

Aropa, it should be added, is a two-way street. While Anutans are expected to express aropa for others through acts of kindness, they feel that recipients of such assistance should reciprocate. Before Feinberg clearly understood this connection, he felt inundated by requests for food, tobacco, and other items from his supplies. His initial reaction was annoyance, as if Anutans were taking advantage of his presence simply to acquire goods to which they would not otherwise have access. Eventually, he realized that this was their way of incorporating him into the kinship system, as well as the community at large. His hosts provided him, as a family member, with housing, food, cultural data, and emotional support; in return, they felt entitled to share his resources. Once he embraced that ethos of reciprocity, it became an integral part of his relationship with the community, and it continues to the present day.

Aropa does not apply to everyone. Outsiders are potential enemies and must either be eliminated or integrated into the kinship system. Oral traditions relate episodes of voyagers from other islands arriving on Anuta's shores (Feinberg 2018). Most of the interlopers were either killed or driven off, but a few were welcomed into the community and became part of the kinship system. The community (*te kanopenua*) is thought to be a single overarching family (*kano a paito*), and all members should abide by the requirements of aropa.

Aropa has likely been a fundamental feature of Anutan culture since the island's settlement, approximately twenty generations ago. In addition to oral traditions, the distribution of close cognates suggests its pervasiveness through time and space. Widely recognized cognates include *aloha* (Hawaiian), *talofa* (Samoan), *'ofa* (Tongan), and *aroha* (Māori); other variants exist throughout Polynesia.⁹ Despite some minor differences, the overall signification in each case is similar. In the early twentieth century, when the Anglican church was introduced to Anuta, islanders quickly embraced the principle that one should love one's neighbor and the parable of the Good Samaritan; indeed, Feinberg heard it suggested that Anutans were true Christians long before the church was introduced. At the same time, outsiders are approached with suspicion and may, to a degree, be treated as fair game. In 1973, when Taiwanese fishermen, seeking sexual gratification anchored off Anuta's coast, islanders felt little compunction about extorting money, alcohol, tobacco, fish, and rice.¹⁰ Yet, when it appeared that one crew member would be unable to return to the ship and might have to spend the remainder of his life on the island, a central figure in the episode announced plans to "adopt" the castaway, thereby incorporating him into the kinship system and mandating that he be treated with the same aropa as any other member of the community.¹¹

The emphasis on actions as opposed to words leads us to characterize Anutan ethics as fundamentally behaviorist. Behaviorism, as developed by the

psychologist B. F. Skinner in the mid-twentieth century, denied the value of introspection, or of internal experiences or physiological processes, for psychological investigation. For Skinner, only the outward manifestations of cognitive processes were significant; consciousness itself was of little interest to behaviorists (1971: 189–190). Although behaviorism had a profound effect on many schools of twentieth-century Western philosophy, such as pragmatism and ordinary language philosophy, and although its legacy is still apparent in some contemporary empirically oriented philosophical research, it has never exerted much of an influence on mainstream ethical theory.¹² Within some schools of thought in the social sciences, however, behaviorist explanations of people's reactions to ethical dilemmas are more common, in the sense that predicting how individuals will act in certain situations may be more important than understanding inner subjective experiences. We suggest that the seemingly unfamiliar aspects of Anutan ethics are a function of Anutans' fundamentally behaviorist view of social interaction.

This study is important on two levels. First, by casting the Anutans' unwritten moral code in terms familiar to Western scholars, we hope to spark greater interest in it among both anthropologists and philosophers and to advance the understanding of Anutan culture. Second, we seek to contribute to the growing literature on the anthropology of ethics. In this, we are building on the work of such scholars as Didier Fassin (2008), who argued for the establishment of moral anthropology as a valued subdiscipline.¹³

It may be useful to draw an explicit distinction between an anthropology of ethics, which this article addresses, and professional or anthropological ethics, a topic that has occupied anthropologists' attention for many decades. Anthropological ethics deals with a researcher's behavior and professional standards. How do anthropologists interact with interlocutors in the field? How do they collect data? And how do they protect privacy, while giving local collaborators appropriate recognition for important contributions? It also can involve questions of advocacy on behalf of the people anthropologists study. Should (indeed, *can*) researchers be impartial or objective observers? Or is it their responsibility to promote the interests of the people among whom they conduct research? These are important questions, and they have been long debated.¹⁴ The issue we address here, by contrast, is the study of ethical standards among the people anthropologists study. As Fassin (2008: 334–335) puts the matter:

I merely plead for an anthropology which has morals for its object—in other words, which explores how societies ideologically and emotionally found their cultural distinction between good and evil, and how social agents concretely work out this separation in their everyday

life. A medical anthropology does not cure—it is interested in local knowledge and practice about illness. A religious anthropology does not proselytize—even if researchers sometimes get converted to the doctrine or mystique they study. A political anthropology does not tell whom to vote for—although some might let their audience know where their preference lies. Similarly, a moral anthropology does not propose a code of good conduct or a guide towards a better society. It helps understand the evaluative principles and practices operating in the social world, the debates they arouse, the processes through which they become implemented, the justifications that are given to account for discrepancies observed between what should be and what is actually.

Fassin acknowledges anthropologists' commitment to cultural relativism, along with the field's "long history of erring in the name of morality" (337). Acceptance of colonial authorities and their notions of "moral progress" to gain access to the field has made many reluctant to study how various cultures distinguish right from wrong. In many respects, however, anthropologists have been studying morality throughout the discipline's history. Practically any study of social interaction at least touches on questions of what people consider appropriate, as opposed to inappropriate behavior. What an anthropology of ethics can contribute is a systematic analysis of how different communities conceptualize proper conduct, the basis for such evaluation, and the way in which the pieces fit together. Such a project, in part, should shed light on a distinction "between the unreflective moral dispositions of everyday life and the conscious ethical tactics performed in the ethical moment" (Zigon 2007, 148). By providing a context in which to understand Anutan ethics, we hope also to contribute to the establishment of the anthropology of ethics as a worthwhile field of inquiry.

In the following section, we will introduce a philosophical context for understanding how Anutans think about ethics. This will come not from philosophical ethics but from the work of ordinary language philosopher J. L. Austin. We also will build on the research of anthropologists Michael Lambek and Roy Rappaport, who have used Austin's ideas to understand the functioning of social practices such as ritual. In the final section of this essay, we will discuss the seemingly unfamiliar aspects of Anutans' utilitarianism within this context. Although the ability to be described with the terminology of Western philosophy or anthropology is by no means a prerequisite for an ethical system to be considered robust or deserving of further study, we believe that showing its compatibility with this terminology will serve as a first step toward a broader discussion of ethics on Anuta and other communities outside of the Western tradition.

Behaviorist Ethics

Skinner (1971) argued that ethical behavior can be understood in terms of positive and negative reinforcers and the behavioral consequences that they produce. On his interpretation, "To make a value judgment by calling something good or bad is to classify it in terms of its reinforcing effects" (103). He further contended that, inasmuch as we cannot depend on language to convey an individual's inner states, the community "must rely on visible evidence of the presence or absence of a private condition" (105), as Anutans do. While Skinner mostly discussed ethics and values with the goal of gaining insight into the modification of human behavior, many social scientists have applied a behaviorist approach to the understanding of human behavior as an end in itself.

Michael Lambek (2010, 39) argues that the ethical is located in action, which he defines as "specific acts (performance) and ongoing judgment (practice)." For example, a wedding ceremony not only "instantiates the state of marriage"; it also instantiates the categories of "faithfulness" and "adultery" as relevant criteria for evaluating the celebrants' future behavior (39). With this interpretation, Lambek builds on the work of Roy Rappaport (1999), who gives a behaviorist interpretation of ritual. For Rappaport, ritual is a specific kind of "meaningful act," where "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers logically entails the establishment of convention, the sealing of the social contract" (27). Such acts have two dimensions: they establish the participants' acceptance of the status conferred by the ritual and also of the ritual itself. Rappaport (125) states that "[t]o establish a convention—a general public understanding, a regular procedure, an institution—is *both* to ascribe existence to it *and* to accept it... . To perform a liturgy is at one and the same time to conform to its order and to realize it or make it substantial" (*italics in the original*). Thus, in the case of a wedding, by their very presence, witnesses to the ceremony agree to evaluate the newly married couple by the appropriate criteria and treat them the way married people should be treated. They also acknowledge the legitimacy of weddings and marriage as understood in their society. Whether or not they internally "believe in" the legitimacy of marriage is irrelevant; their actions alone, specifically their attendance at the ceremony, signal their acceptance of the "illocutionary force" of the ritual. In light of this dual function, Rappaport (1999, 125) argues, liturgies and other religious rituals are "more than simple performatives." In addition to effecting a particular status for the participants, they establish the legitimacy of the convention itself. This expansion of the notion of illocution into the explicitly social dimension of religion and morality makes Rappaport's account particularly well suited for understanding the Anutans' perspective on happiness.

It was ordinary language philosopher J. L. Austin who first introduced into philosophy the concept of an “illocutionary act”: an utterance which takes place in the presence of others who understand that it is being performed and which produces specific consequences merely by being performed (Austin 1975). Taking an oath of office, christening a ship, and reciting marriage vows are common examples of illocutionary acts, which Austin also referred to as “performative utterances,” to indicate that “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something” (6–7). One of the ways in which Austin distinguishes performative utterances from ordinary “constative” statements (those that describe facts or states of affairs) is by arguing that the former do not have truth values. Even when someone promises to do something, while having no intention of following through, “he *does* promise: the promise here is not even *void*, though it is given *in bad faith*. His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement” (11, italics in the original). In other words, it is no more possible for a promise to be false than for a bet to be; once someone enters into a bet with the statement “I bet ...” in the proper context, the bet has been made, regardless of the bettor’s internal state of mind with regard to the wager. Although Austin does admit that “the performative is not altogether so obviously distinct from the constative” (67), the fact that performatives cannot, strictly speaking, be true or false remains one of their defining characteristics.

Rappaport, contra Austin, argues that illocutionary acts do have truth values. However, he maintains that the conditions for truth that they establish represent a sort of inversion of the traditional correspondence theory of truth, in which the truth of a statement is determined by whether it accurately describes an actual state of affairs in the world. In the case of illocutionary acts such as those related to ritual, by contrast, “a fact comes into correspondence with an expression that has, for reasons independent of the fact, been granted an unquestionable status” (Rappaport 1999, 295). In the case of the wedding, for example, my *behavior* toward the newly married couple is true or false, depending on whether that behavior conforms to societal conventions governing the treatment of married people. Inasmuch as the “truth” of the marriage ceremony itself is beyond question, it is the fact, my behavior, that either corresponds, or fails to correspond, to the performative utterances that make up the ceremony.¹⁵ Rappaport refers to this as an “inversion” of traditional correspondence theories, in which an utterance is seen as either corresponding or failing to correspond to a fact (295). The undeniable fact of the marriage, bet, or christening comes from the nature of performative rituals, which Rappaport claims “is not entirely symbolic” (26) and “not only can claim to be socially or materially consequential, but to possess *logical entailments* as well,” inasmuch as it “*logically entails the establishment of convention*” (27, italics in the original).

Building on this framework, Lambek transposes Rappaport's analysis into a more explicitly ethical register. He argues that "many of [Rappaport's] arguments apply to acts and events of lesser formality" (2010, 48) and that, ultimately, "all speaking carries some of the weight that Rappaport attributes to ritual" (54). At the very least, "all utterances entail simultaneously a commitment on the part of the speaker to be understood (somehow) and a commitment to stand by the message" (48). This commitment is intensified in the case of those everyday utterances that contain ethical content, such as those by which I judge, exonerate, or agree or disagree with another person (49). Inasmuch as "rituals effect states of ethical personhood and relation" (44), then, all linguistic utterances can be seen as having some sort of ethical import. Lambek wants to classify speech under the broader category of acts, thus attributing the ethical more generally to all acts. The ethical import of the everyday acts and utterances that Feinberg documented in his fieldwork with Anutans can be understood within this framework.

Anutan Ethics

With this in mind, let us return to the Anutans' conception of happiness. Rappaport's and Lambek's behaviorist understanding of ethics in terms of performativity provides a framework for conceiving of the Anutan practice of evaluating happiness by means of external criteria such as laughter. Although laughing at or with one's friends and family does not fit the common definition of ritual, Lambek argues that Rappaport's insights can fruitfully be applied to any sort of conventional behavior whose consequences are accepted within a society. Following Austin, who designated the existence of "an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect" (1975, 26) as a necessary condition of performative success, Rappaport grounds his discussion of performative utterances in the notion of convention. Inasmuch as rituals establish conventions, they are not only performative, but also "metaperformative," in the sense that "To establish a convention ... is *both* to ascribe existence to it *and* to accept it" (1999, 125). As described above, Lambek (2010, 48) points out that, for Austin, "all utterances contain an illocutionary dimension," based on the speaker's commitment to be understood. Extending this conception further to vocal expressions such as laughter (admittedly, not exactly a speech act), we can recognize its illocutionary force as an act that confers on the actor the state of happiness, just as participation in a wedding ceremony confers on the relevant parties the status of a married couple. Likewise, much as witnessing a wedding constitutes our acceptance of the couple's status as married, seeing an Anutan laugh should cause us to know that the person is happy and to act accordingly. Indeed, on Rappaport's "inverted" correspondence theory, the Anutan's

happiness is the truth to which my actions should conform. If I believe that an Anutan who laughs frequently is actually a malcontent, it is my belief, and any actions that result from it, which are false. Likewise, the practice of laughing at others' minor misfortunes, given its ability to produce laughter in the unfortunate individual, is rightly regarded as a means of spreading happiness.

It might be argued the extension of this analysis from established rituals such as marriage to such acts as laughter is unjustified. After all, marriage is a relationship established through societal convention, whereas happiness is generally seen as a subjective internal state. For a radical behaviorist like Skinner, however, the existence of a subjective internal state is no more significant for evaluating happiness than it is for determining a person's marital status. Although not denying the existence of such states, radical behaviorism "questions the nature of the object observed" through introspection, as well as "the reliability of the observations" (1976, 18). Specifically, "what is felt or introspectively observed is not some nonphysical world of consciousness, mind, or mental life but the observer's own body" (18–19), which is ultimately a product of "genetic and environmental histories" (19). Laughter is thus a consequence of those histories and not necessarily an accurate expression of an interior state. Importantly, for Skinner as for Rappaport, in cases where there might be a conflict, the act of laughing is the more accurate guide to the individual's present state. Individuals cannot even reliably know the contents of their own internal worlds; thus, there is little reason to believe that an outside observer could accurately assess the nature of another's subjective experience. For a behaviorist, however, this lack of certainty about internal states is simply not an important issue.

Within Lambek's behaviorist framework for understanding morality, then, performative acts establish one's status and determine the parameters by which one should be judged, while also legitimizing society's conventions. There is no need to appeal to interior states to determine whether someone is happy, any more than it would be necessary to do so to determine her marital status. Although Anutans are certainly concerned about others' interior states, they also acknowledge that such states cannot be known directly, but only through external expressions. In fact, for Rappaport, it is not even necessary for those participating in a ritual to have a clear internal position on its efficacy; for example, I can pray effectively, even as an agnostic. This is because, as Lambek explains, "the point of ritual is to substitute public clarity for private obscurity or ambiguity," not to confirm or provide evidence for an internal state (2010, 46). This is particularly significant in the case of the Anutans' strategies for cheering others up, inasmuch as hearing others laugh at one's misfortunes does not, for most non-Anutans, immediately improve one's mood. Nonetheless, people often find themselves involuntarily laughing along in this

type of situation, despite not consciously feeling amused. Although members of many Western societies might describe this as an instance of laughing “in spite of oneself,” indicating a disconnect between one’s internal disposition and outward appearance, for Anutans, the individual’s laughter is not only in conformity with that person’s internal state but is, in fact, constitutive of that state. As was the case for Skinner, the precise nature of that internal state is less important than the act of laughter that arises as a result of factors in the individual’s environment.

This broad construal of the ethical has affinities with the Durkheimian tradition which, in the words of Joel Robbins, “sees all normative social action as having moral content” (2007, 311; cf. Durkheim 1915). Robbins is responding to an argument from James Laidlaw, who worries that such a broadly construed notion of the moral realm might, in fact, be counterproductive to the development of an anthropology of ethics. Laidlaw (2002, 312) states that “Durkheim’s conception of the social so completely identifies the collective with the good that an independent understanding of ethics appears neither necessary nor possible.” In its focus on routine behavior that reinforces previously existing conventions, this type of anthropology of ethics is incapable of capturing the complexity of ethical life, instead “collapsing into general questions of social regularity and social control” (315). Laidlaw suggests that such theories need to be augmented with a notion of human freedom, and he turns to the work of Nietzsche and Foucault, as well as Bernard Williams, to develop such a notion. Although sympathetic to this position, Robbins believes that both a Durkheimian model and one that emphasizes individual freedom can contribute to an anthropology of ethics but are best applied in different situations. In particular, “those cultures or cultural domains in which a single value is paramount tend to be structured such that people take moral comfort in reproducing their routines” (2007, 311). Seen in this light, the Anutan conception of *aropa* is arguably the type of value that calls for the type of approach that we have outlined here. As Feinberg has illustrated in several publications, the fostering of *aropa* through small everyday acts as well as large, dramatic ones is of central importance in Anutan culture. Thus, the broad conceptualization of ethics as permeating most, if not all, linguistic acts is warranted in this case.

A particular benefit of this approach is its ability to capture the transformative nature of ethical acts such as Anutans’ laughter and their behaviorist view of what constitutes happiness. According to Rappaport, ritual not only instantiates a condition such as being married, but it also changes the identity of those involved in a significant way. As he puts it, “Some, if not most, of the self-referential messages occurring in ritual do not merely ‘say something’ about the state of the performer. They ‘do something’ about it” (1999, 107). This

is what he means in arguing that ritual is not entirely symbolic; it literally, and without exception, effects a change in those who take part in it. While people may choose to behave in a way that conflicts with their marriage vows, to break a promise, or to refuse to pay after losing a bet, the fact remains that their nature has changed in a way that affects the moral standing of their future acts. In other words, not only, as Rappaport puts it, is the behavior of others toward the married individual judged as true or false, based on whether it is in accordance with that person's marital status, but people's actions, and even beliefs about identity, are correctly judged on the basis of their participation in the ritual. Although this may be easier to see with respect to marriage, where even a reluctant bride or groom who does not "feel married" after the ceremony has, nonetheless, undergone a change in identity, its application to Anutan laughter is no less justified. Anutans who begin to laugh along with their companions at their own misfortune have indeed been made happier despite any feelings of consternation, inasmuch as the "ritual" of laughter "brings the state of affairs into being and ... having brought it into being cannot help but indicate it" (108). Even if the individual fails to recognize it at the time, this change has nonetheless occurred. Whatever initial incongruity Anutans may experience as they laugh, while also feeling pain or embarrassment due to their minor mishaps, does eventually resolve. They experience, if not an exuberant happiness, at least the relief of their negative feelings through shared laughter. Lambek (2010, 47) makes the same point when he states that "Ultimately we must acknowledge our identification with the person we have, through a series of marked and unmarked acts and utterances, become."

Conclusions

In this discussion, we have explored the connection between Anutan notions of happiness and moral virtue as expressed in overt laughter. At the same time, we have called attention to parallels between Anutan ethics and behaviorist analyses of ritual by anthropologists, philosophers, and other commentators. In the process, we hope to have shown that the seemingly unfamiliar aspects of Anutan moral behavior can be conceptualized systematically within an anthropology of ethics, making use of familiar Western terms, while acknowledging the fundamental differences between Anutan conceptions and those of Western cultures. Although Western ethics tends to downplay external expressions, in the context of behaviorist Anutan ethics, they can and should be recognized as complete and sufficient. We have sought to demonstrate the value of studying Anutan ethical thought and hope that our analysis has fruitfully contributed to the growing and vital field of the anthropology of ethics.

NOTES

1. This is discussed in Feinberg (2005).
2. Feinberg's committee contended that moral values, famously defined for social scientists as "concepts of the desirable" (Kluckhohn 1962), are indistinguishable from "social norms," which anthropologists had been studying for decades. Therefore, his advisors felt the topic could not be clearly identified, and he switched to a more standard focus: the study of kinship as a system of symbols (see, e.g., Schneider 1968, 1984; also cf. the work of Schneider's students Gary Witherspoon 1970; Vern Carroll 1966, 1971; David Labby 1976; Bradd Shore 1976a, 1976b). Feinberg emphasized that topic for his dissertation and a 1981 book (Feinberg 1981a), as well as a number of articles (e.g., Feinberg 1979, 1981b, 1990, 2009, 2013).
3. Among the major contributors to this field have been Didier Fassin, James Laidlaw, Michael Lambek, Joel Robbins, and Jarrett Zigon. A few of their influential contributions are discussed later.
4. For an overview of Anutan society and culture, see Feinberg (2011a). A documentary film, "Anuta: Hidden Paradise" (2014), is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeABQLDRlwk>. The concept of aropa has been discussed in a number of places but see particularly Feinberg (2011a, 2011b).
5. "By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question" (Bentham 1907, 8). Other philosophers have raised questions about how to measure happiness, whether there might be different kinds of happiness, or whether extreme happiness for a privileged few may take precedence over moderate happiness for a large number. No Anutan with whom Feinberg discussed the matter sought to offer an opinion on such details.
6. These were the typical answers when Feinberg asked such questions as, "Why do you [or why do people of this island] do such-and-so?"
7. This should be qualified by the caveat that in cases of serious injury, as when blood is spilled or bones are broken, the appropriate response is not to laugh but cry. In instances of death or departure from the island, where it is unclear whether the traveler will ever be able to return, Anutans engage in demonstrative wailing, with streams of mucous dripping from their noses and eyes. Young children who have not yet absorbed the culturally stipulated protocol, may exhibit anger (*konokono*) or embarrassment (*pakamaa*) when others laugh at their misfortune. After all, life is complex, and one person laughing at another can convey a message of ridicule rather than empathy. However, the mandated interpretation and response seem thoroughly instilled in most Anutans well before they reach their teens.
8. For Anutan views on the opacity of other minds, see Feinberg (2011b). For a discussion of the problem elsewhere in Oceania, see Robbins and Rumsey (2008), as well as several of the contributions to Hollan and Throop (2011).
9. For a discussion of Polynesian philosophy as related to time and space, but with potential implications for an understanding of aropa and its cognates, see Ka'ili et al. (2017).

10. For a detailed account of these events, see Feinberg (2006).

11. Significantly, the effort to extract supplies and money was led by Anuta's catechist, who also was a brother of the senior chief.

12. See, for example, Ryle (1949); Wittgenstein (1953); Quine (1975).

13. Note here a parallel between Fassin's "call for the development of a moral anthropology" (2008, 333) and Feinberg's 1987 presentation to the Kent State Philosophy Department in which he attempted to "outline a subdiscipline of anthropology that does not exist but should. I will indicate why I think it should exist; and I will try to demonstrate what the [sub]discipline would look like if it did" (unpublished data).

14. Questions relevant to this discussion include whether anthropology is intrinsically colonialist or racist (e.g., Gough 1968; Asad 1973; but cf. Lewis 2014). One of the best-known critiques of anthropology and calls for anthropologists to do more to assist the people they study is offered by Deloria (1969; see also Trask 1991). Clifford (1988), by contrast, documents the limits on anthropologists' ability to provide effective support, at least in political and legal contexts. Similarly debated is the question of whether objective ethnography is possible at all or whether ethnography is necessarily the product of interaction between the researcher and his or her subjects (e.g., Malinowski 1922, 1944 vs. Rabinow 2007; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988). For one overview of this discussion, see Feinberg (1994).

15. For the sake of simplicity, this statement can be limited to cases in which nothing exists that would invalidate the marriage (for example, one of the participants already being married to someone else or the officiant not having the authority to perform marriages).

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