

Where Our Feet Fall: A Hula Journey into Knowledge*

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Abstract

In this paper I present my vision of a Hawaiian epistemology as I have found it through my studies as a *haumana hula* (hula student). In this context I have experienced an approach to knowledge best compared to a virtue epistemology. In taking up this pairing my point is not to use western philosophical parameters as a measure of the worth of Hawaiian thinking, nor to find out where Hawaiian epistemological thought fits into a western conceptual map. Rather, I hope to open up the philosophical discussion to alternative points of view that can expand and enrich epistemological thinking by including, on its own terms, a perspective that presents Hawaiian thought as a partner in exploring how cognitive success is identified and experienced. This approach offers virtue epistemology theorists a concretely lived method that demonstrates some of its key theoretical points. And, by engaging virtue epistemology, Hawaiian epistemology can connect with a cross-cultural companion that draws its contribution into broader dialogue, not only about what constitutes knowledge, but about its goals and the means by which knowledge is engendered, nurtured and validated.

Keywords: Hawaiian epistemology, virtue epistemology, hula, knowledge.

Before beginning I would like to explain something of my path to this essay. As I began my academic study of Philosophy I found that taking up the physical disciplines of different cultures allowed me to experience their unique sensibility of being and knowing in other than strictly intellectual terms. I found in each a unique practice that provided a portal of entry to a set of values, a way of knowing, and a mode of being. In this regard hula revealed itself as more than a dance form. It presented a philosophical text of continually unfolding layers, an invaluable epistemic resource that continues to disclose its insights as I am able to read them. I am a *haumana hula*, a student of traditional hula. I have had the privilege of studying with two *kūmu hula* (hula teachers) from the same tradition for more than twenty-years. I continue to practice with hula sisters to remember and explore the repertoire we have been taught. But I do not speak for any tradition or practice. I present only my own *mana'ō* (thoughts, perspective) drawn from my practice and my reflections as a philosopher. If any of the claims I make misconstrue Hawaiian customs, culture, or thinking, the error rests with me.

While my hula practice is the grounding for this effort, I also weave in the work of native scholars, practitioners and others who have been companions for my thoughts and who helped lay the path for this vision. I begin with a brief summary of contemporary virtue epistemology and establish *ka 'imi loa* (the long search) as an epistemological goal within Hawaiian thinking. I then present my view of a Hawaiian epistemology organized around four primary pillars, drawn from my studies of hula.

Virtue Epistemology

Virtue epistemology focuses its questions about knowledge on the qualities that make someone a reliable, or responsible knower. It draws attention to the “dispositional properties of persons that bear on the acquisition, maintenance, transmission, or application of knowledge and allied epistemic goods such as truth, justification, warrant, coherence and interpretive fineness” (Roberts & Wood, 2003, p. 257). Less driven to consider the logical relations among truth claims and the often-privileged status by which knowers stand in relation to those claims, virtue epistemologists turn their attention to the knowers themselves, to the context and normative contours of knowing. Given this shift in how knowledge is investigated we avoid what Catherine McKinnon labels as “the fallacy of epistemology,” wherein “[t]he less the subjectivity of the knowing agent intrudes, the more unsullied and more value-neutral the facts are, the purer the knowledge is” (McKinnon, 2003, p. 227). This kind of thinking has long fostered the notion that knowledge can and ought to be completely objective by allowing the knower to be effaced by facts and by the means through which the fact status of truths is conferred. In contrast, virtue epistemologists are willing to acknowledge a knower’s identity, interests and unique point of view, accounting not only for the manner in which beliefs and knowledge are acquired, but also the way in which they are culturally expressed and nurtured.

Virtue epistemologists approach questions of knowledge analogously to the way virtue ethicists approach questions of human goodness as they apply to character and behavior. Both look to personal qualities or character traits, motivation and purpose, rather than abstract principles, rules and procedures, to better understand and resolve issues about what is good or right in human acting and thinking. In this respect, virtue epistemologists push into the foreground a value component implicit in concerns about knowledge. They loosely align as either reliabilists or responsibilists. Apart from the emphasis that these labels suggest, a primary difference between the two concerns what counts as, and how one acquires, intellectual virtue. Reliabilists include among intellectual virtues such inborn faculties as good memory, perceptual acuity, intuition—qualities that can be relied upon to produce successful cognition and consistently bring us to truths or accurate knowledge claims. Responsibilists, on the other hand, see intellectual virtues as cultivated character traits, such as being open-minded, having intellectual courage or tenacity, being attentive, that support an epistemic goal. McKinnon (2003) identifies three factors that distinguish responsibilists in ways that will be important for the case I hope to build. First, virtue responsibilists find the value placed upon knowledge derives from culturally specific practices and motives. It is because of the way the knower acquires her knowledge *and* because she is motivated “by a desire to find out how things really are” that her knowledge increases its status (McKinnon, 2003, p. 245). Secondly, they recognize that knowers emerge from and are in important ways regulated by a community. Knowers “reflect communal decisions about what counts as responsible exercise of cognitive faculties and traits” and “are made in the context of the normative practices of the epistemic community and the obligations to act in a cognitively responsible manner that membership in an

epistemic community imposes” (McKinnon, 2003, p. 246). Thirdly, they “argue that criteria for the epistemically best kinds of belief cannot be specified independently of the notion of the proper exercise of intellectual virtues” (McKinnon, 2003, p. 229). These points reiterate Linda Zagzebski’s (1993) emphasis on the role that motivation plays in the quest for knowledge, which “leads a person to follow rules or procedures of belief formation that are known to her epistemic community to be truth conducive” (p. 181).

The attention virtue epistemology places on these issues offers a more welcoming discursive space for Hawaiian approaches to knowledge. Cultural practice, motivation, and community link to responsible acting and knowing in Hawaiian thinking. While I see elements of both camps in what counts as virtuous in Hawaiian epistemology—a fine memory and perceptual acuity, for example, are acknowledged as admirable qualities, and they form the basis from which individuals are identified, mentored and given access to specific knowledge, for example—a responsibilist orientation seems to reflect more consistently the pitch and purpose of Hawaiian epistemological thought as I have come to understand it. This approach accepts the fundamental role of an epistemic community in which passes on knowledge through a system of selection and mentoring. It recognizes more intuitive ways of assessing how knowledge is appraised and validated. To make the case that a responsibilist virtue epistemology fits Hawaiian epistemology I first consider what constitutes intellectual virtue and identify the epistemic goal these virtues serve.

Intellectual Virtues and Epistemic Goals

“The first thing that can be said about a virtue is that it is an excellence . . . [Its] practical importance lies in the fact that we can use it in making decisions and in evaluating others” (Zagzebski, 1993, pp. 84-85). Intellectual virtues draw forward a normative element in the way one approaches the tasks of knowledge acquisition and transmission, as well as its use and maintenance. They qualify what it means to be a good thinker and how to use cognitive faculties well. It is by the use of these faculties that we evaluate the character of those who claim to have knowledge—and important to the Hawaiian context—of those to whom knowledge is imparted. We find such traits are valued across different cultures, and they are believed to be qualities worthy of emulation. Virtue epistemologists consider integrity, open-mindedness and curiosity, as well as understanding and wisdom among these traits, either as the goal of cognitive effort or supportive of that goal. Zagzebski’s list includes such qualities as sensitivity to detail, intellectual adaptability, humility, perseverance, diligence and thoroughness, as well as recognizing reliable authority, a capacity to think of coherent explanations, and insight (1993, p. 114). Wayne Riggs (2003), argues that understanding holds a central place among traits that contribute to a life of wisdom. He includes such qualities as creativity, epistemic responsibility, inquisitiveness, self-reflection, and intellectual honesty (p. 215). Reliabilists tend to favor excellences in perceptual faculties such as acuity in observation and hearing, strong memory, and responsive intuition; faculties that are reliably counted on to get us to truth. Responsibilists, on the other hand, tend

to acknowledge the cultural context in which such virtues arise and are recognized. Such qualities require cultivation—often through imitation of a virtuous person—to become settled dispositions (Zagzebski, 1993, pp. 157-158).

Hawaiian scholar, Mary Kawena Pukui identifies a *kanaka makua* as such a virtuous person, one worthy of the kind of imitation Zagzebski alludes to. “The *kanaka makua*,” she says, “is a ‘mature person.’ He is even-tempered. He thinks things through instead of jumping to conclusions. He takes responsibilities and cares about other people’s happiness. He is kind and unselfish, generous and forgiving. He is hospitable, and he accepts hospitality with graciousness” (Pukui, Haertig & Lee, 1972, p. 295). Such a demeanor sets a *kanaka makua* apart and exemplifies the kind of character valued in a culture over-rich with virtues. Early in hula training, students learn about the qualities of *laulima* (cooperativeness), *lokomaiika’i* (generosity, good heartedness), *pono* (virtue, moral correctness), *mahalo* (gratitude), and *aloha* (compassion, kindness). *Kuleana* (responsibility), *kūpono* (integrity), *koa* (courage), *’olu’olu* (kindness, gentleness), *ha’aha’a* (humility) are qualities valued not only in the *hālau*; they are cross culturally recognized as worthy of cultivation. Qualities such as *pa’ahana* (diligence), *ho’omanawanui* (patience, persistence) when linked with *akamai* (intelligence), *’ike pono*, *hakilo pono* (acute observation), *no’ono’o* (thoughtfulness), *lololo* (deep thinking), and *na’auao* (wisdom) support our efforts to acquire knowledge and to understand. When linked to the high value placed upon attentiveness, self-reflection, keen memory and observation, they introduce us to “a thinking people, a *po’ē no’ono’o*” (G. Kanahale, 1986, p. 64).

John Charlot (2005) explains how Hawaiian intellectual virtues and vices, expressed as pairs of correlative opposites, align with either knowledge or ignorance.

Knowledge is connected to light and clarity (*na’auao* ‘entrails of light’); ignorance to darkness and confusion (*na’aupō* ‘entrails of darkness’). Correct knowledge, . . . is straight (*pololei*); inaccuracy and dishonesty are crooked (*’apake’ē*). Knowledge is careful and neat (*maiau*); the lack of it leads to entanglement and confusion. Knowledge is faultlessly effective and moves straight to its results; the opposite is to blunder and wander without result, often with a connotation of immorality. Knowledge is calm and settled; agitation is a sign of mental overexcitement or even instability (p. 3).

We can see in the imagery of light and dark, careful and sloppy, direct and wandering, criteria for cognitive success, and an orientation toward stability and reliable outcomes. Indeed, in all its practices Hawaiian culture oriented toward results. Manulani Meyer (2003) claims that “[f]or Hawaiians, knowledge for knowledge sake was a waste of time. Everything, absolutely everything had a function” (p. 57). This strongly stated view—that knowledge cannot be divorced from its end purpose—can easily be misinterpreted to imply that *only* instrumental knowledge had value; but this would be too narrow. What is conveyed is that knowledge is purposeful and goal directed. The goal of the hula dancer is to perform and incite sympathetic response; as the goal of the planter is to produce food, or the goal of a *kahuna la’au lapa’au* is to heal. This might suggest a

reliabilist orientation, but the question becomes: Are these discreet purposes the end point of learning and knowledge, or are there epistemic goals that take one beyond the functional knowledge of specific practices?

Taking up this question, we quickly encounter the concept, *ka 'imi loa*. The term *'imi* (to search, to seek) is intensified here by the modifier *loa* to mean profound, deep seeking inquiry. In a famous passage, the Hawaiian historian, Kepelino observes, "*Ahu kupanaha ia Hawaii imi loa! E noii wale mai no ka haole-a, aole e pau na hana a Hawaii 'imi loa*" (Beckwith, 2007, p. 143). The passage is challenging to translate. Charlot renders it: "Wonder heaped on wonder in regard to Hawaii searching far! Let the haole [foreigner] freely research us in detail, but the doings of deep delving Hawaii will not be exhausted (1983, p. 117).

In identifying Hawai'i itself as *'imi loa*, Kepelino uses an epithet common among Hawaiians in the late 19th - early 20th centuries (Arista, 2007, p. xi), and in his gloss on the passage Charlot (1983) discloses both a life-making enterprise and an epistemic motivation that unfold, often non-consciously, as the seeker is pulled toward deeper understanding.

The simple, traditional movements of everyday life work their way into one's insides, gradually form one's character. One starts by going uncomprehendingly through the motions one has learned and gradually comes to an understanding that could not be formulated in words and for which one was earlier unready. One memorizes the ancient texts, and season by season, they disclose their depths. . . . The consciousness of searching explains why humility is so highly prized a virtue in Hawaiian culture. The road before one is always long, and help is always needed. On the other hand, the search is a source of authentic greatness (p. 118).

This image of the long search contextualizes Hawaiian intellectual activities (Charlot, 1983, p. 119). We see that in the seeking itself, through the effort to learn, we are led toward ever deepening and expanding knowledge, an unfolding of awareness and understanding. As knowers we do not necessarily initiate the knowing but rather receive what is to be known. This requires that we be sufficiently primed. Through a practice we come into a way of being, becoming a richer version of ourselves, acquiring both knowledge and the qualities of character that allow us to continue the effort. *Ka 'imi loa* is a journey; a life-long process seeking both how to know and how to live in a way that is *pono* or right in relation to ourselves and our environment. "Life for the Hawaiian is *ka 'imi loa* . . . an ever deepening appreciation of the universe into which one is born and of which one forms an integral part" (Charlot, 1997, p. 49).

We have identified an epistemic goal in Hawaiian thinking that grounds cognitive effort—it is a journey that comes to define a way of being and how to live a human life oriented toward understanding and knowledge of one's self and one's environment. Knowledge, in this context, has no fixed end point; there is no singular meaning, no final truth to be had. Rather, as Noelani Arista (2007) tells us, "a satisfying sense of knowing" for Hawaiians assumes "a multiplicity of meanings" and a "fluidity of

action and process”(p. xii). Hawaiians recognize that there is always more to know, more to absorb and understand. Knowledge is “an ever expanding experience” (Meyer, 2003, p. 67), and “[a]ll learning and experience are part of the great search, *ka ‘imi loa* (Charlot, 2005, p. xiii).

In her work, *Ka Honua Ola* (2011), hula practitioner and Hawaiian philosopher, Pualani Kanahēle’s intention is “to expose Hawaiian *mele* as a pursuit of knowledge”(p. xiv). Through *mele* and *oli* (chants) we experience the essential polysemy of the Hawaiian language as they mediate streams of associative, imagistic meanings that welcome multiple, simultaneous interpretations. *Mele* are the stuff of hula, the texts brought to life through dance. The juxtaposition of imagery woven into *mele* frequently requires deep cultural knowledge and an intuitive approach to interpretation. The meanings found in older *mele* have often been obscured due to the passage of time and the disruption to cultural continuity brought about by colonial dominance. In the interplay of sound, rhythm, and the flow of the Hawaiian language, *mele* contain centuries of cultural knowledge compressed into poetic verse, recording stories of the elemental forces present in the ocean, the land, and in the lives of the people who have occupied it. By interpreting *mele* through dance, hula becomes an entryway into a series of integrated, unfolding experiences and layers of meaning through which knowledge deepens and broadens as it is explored. Kanahēle ends each chapter of her book with references that elicit core ideas, and with the phrase, “*‘eli‘eli kau mai.*” *‘Eli‘eli* means to “dig often,” and it can take a figurative meaning of being “firmly rooted, profound, deep,” with implications of reverence (Pukui & Ebert, 1986, p.41). She translates the phrase as “descend, deepen the revelation” (p. 169). Her purpose is “to move the reader’s mind away from the text and into one of the many possibilities of emblematic imagery to deepen the revelation and allow the analytic mind to trigger yet another question”(P. Kanahēle, 2011, p. 169). Here, she recognizes our impulse toward analytic thinking as well as the need to balance it. In welcoming the poetic to spark our minds to think more and arrive at deeper levels of understanding, she presents an epistemic practice that echoes the journey of seeking and discovery that is implicit in “*ka ‘imi loa.*” How we “seek understanding and wisdom from a higher plane, no matter what level we are currently at” enlarges the idea that the path to knowledge never finds its end, (P. Kanahēle, 2011, p. 169).

This was a lesson I learned in hula, where I encountered the constant expectation that present knowledge and understanding was merely a platform for something more, requiring connections I could not yet begin to make. We were encouraged to go beyond hula, to study and broaden our knowledge in other areas of Hawaiian culture and practice. *‘Ōlelo No‘eau* were nuggets of knowledge that we were offered to chew on, and I incorporate several of them in what follows. *‘Ōlelo No‘eau* are condensed bits of Hawaiian cultural knowledge, collected and collated by Mary Kawena Pukui over her lifetime. Translated as “wise sayings” or “proverbs” (Pukui & Ebert, 1986, p. 284) *‘ōlelo no‘eau* are easily dismissed as non-philosophical because they are not expressed in discursive or argumentative form. As with other Indigenous traditions, identifying *‘ōlelo no‘eau* as “proverbs” or “folk wisdom” trivializes the depth of cultural knowledge they contain, discouraging an exploration of their full epistemological implications. In this

paper they function as premises that help secure the foundation of my understanding. Hula, however, is the grounding experience for this vision, and I structure it around four pillars. The first establishes that a person's grasp of knowledge occurs on a continuum and shows a way of transferring knowledge predicated on the virtues of both the *kumu* and *haumana*. The second pillar follows from this, arguing that knowledge is effectively embodied and performative nature. This embodiment turns us toward the third pillar, which establishes knowledge as inherently perspectival and contextual insofar as one can only explore and acquire knowledge from one's own embodied circumstances. Finally, given this individual standpoint, we come back to the character of the individual knower. The fourth pillar shows how knowledge acquisition is intimately tied to correct practice, motivated by a desire to know, not for its own sake, but to maintain the cultural context of knowledge as a practice and continual journey of seeking understanding.

The First Pillar: Learning and the Knowledge Continuum

This first pillar can be expressed in the *'ōlelo no'ēau*, *O ke kahua mamua, mahope ke kūkulu*, (first the foundation, then the posts) (Pukui, 1983, p. 268, #2459). The foundation must come first and be firm so that the structure will be solid and lasting. In *hālau* our foundation began with a basic vocabulary of steps and hand gestures that express a text, a *mele*. Like all dancers, we learn by observing movement and imitating it. Many dancers never go beyond this level of *'ike kumu* (basic knowledge), the first strata in a long continuum. Proceeding further is in the hands of the *kumu* (teacher). A *kumu* is a respected repository of knowledge and an epistemic exemplar. The term has several distinct and mutually reinforcing associations, illustrating how imagistic language embraces and reveals multiple meanings that are understood concurrently. *Kumu* means base, foundation; the main stalk of a tree; a teacher; a source; a reason (Pukui & Ebert, 1986, p. 182). As teachers, *nā kūmu* are sources and foundations of knowledge. In sharing what they know they carry cultural traditions forward. Such a title was traditionally conferred only after one had demonstrated knowledge and skill, as well as their personal commitment to *mālama* (to keep, to care for) what they had learned. As a firm trunk they provide the support that allows knowledge to branch out and seed further knowing. As transmitters of knowledge, it is incumbent upon them to negotiate whether or not, and if so what, when, and how to pass on specific knowledge. Thus, while everyone learns the *'ike kumu*, access to anything beyond this is based on the *kumu's* judgment.

While the journey of seeking is one dimension of epistemic motivation, dissemination of what is found is another. It does no good to acquire knowledge if it is not shared. But knowledge must be handled responsibly and so a *kumu* is responsible for choosing how it is passed on. Among Hawaiian cultural practitioners we often hear, "*Nānā ka maka. Ho'olohe ka pepeiao. Pa'a ka waha. Ho'opili.*" Pukui translates this as "Observe. Listen. Keep the mouth shut. Imitate" (Pukui, Haertig & Lee, 1972, p. 48). Encapsulated here are techniques of teaching and learning. We begin with observing. This skill, used throughout one's life, was valued and cultivated as a basis for any advance in thinking (Charlot, 2005). Our *kūmu hula* knew if we had observed (and our

aptitude to be observant) by our ability to accurately imitate nuances of demonstrated movements; if we had been listening, by our attentiveness to what was chanted and to corrections given; and our motivation, by our retention of what had been previously taught. They would judge our attitude toward learning—and our readiness for further instruction—not only based on whether we had learned the manifest level of dances, but on how we exhibited our interest and care toward what had been presented to us. The expectation was that we would remember, so that we would perform correctly.

Ho'opili is translated as to imitate, but it literally means to make close, to adhere, suggesting relationship. While all dancers learn by watching and imitating, in hula we are called upon to imitate nature in order to incite a sympathetic response. *Nānā* and *ho'opili* open a hula dancer's awareness to the larger environment. They allow her to build the platform of her knowledge and the relationships to what must be understood in order to perform hula well. The call to observe, to listen to and imitate nature as the ultimate teacher, continually divulges layers of knowledge about a wider environment as she takes in how the winds sing through the valleys, how the ocean climbs up along the shoreline, how the mountains lift our eyes skyward, how the leaves of a tree shimmer in the sunlight. Gathering and preparing materials for *lei* or instruments introduces plant life and the micro-environments that support them. This in turn encourages further observation of the seasons, the movement of rains and winds, and the passing phases of the moon. Through *mele* she learns stories of natural history and the gods, as well as social-political history. In the normal activities of *hālau* she practices the virtues of *laulima*, *mahalo*, *ho'omanawanui* experiencing the value they hold for continued learning. She moves into these directions naturally, from the single focal point of hula to draw in and connect what initially might appear disconnected.

The imperative to use our ears has broader purposes as well (see Chun, 2011, p. 85; Charlot, 2005, pp. 176-177; Meyer, 2003, p. 132;). Listening links us to myriad shades of sounds—to voices, language, and the power of words. It encourages motivation to learn, and focuses our attention as we must sometimes *lolohe* or strain our ears to hear, to really listen. *Ho'olono* implies the complementary virtue of attentiveness, as we must respond in time to what we hear. It requires, *ho'omanawainui* (patience) as we must sometimes wait and interpret the silence. It signals respect and deference to the authority of others and indicates a kind of humility (*ha'aha'a*) that recognizes the limits of our knowledge and the need to continue the path of learning.

But knowledge does not come solely by tuning into what the senses take in. Malcolm Chun takes particular note of the third directive, *pa'a ka waha*. Often this expression is translated as "shut the mouth." I first experienced this as a directive not to ask questions. Over time, I came to understand that it signaled respect and inculcated a discipline of focused thoughtfulness (Rowe, 2013, pp. 25-26). Charlot observes that questioning was "considered to be a distraction from observation, which requires more effort, engages more of the senses, imprints the information more firmly in the memory, and exercises the individual's own thinking capacity" (2005, p. 178). Chun adds to this, interpreting the directive in terms of reflection. "Instead of jumping to conclusions, it is better for one to reflect on all the options, putting experiences of observing and listening together" (Chun, 2011, p. 87). Developing skills of discernment

(*kuhi*) and self-reliance, synthesizing knowledge one's self—rather than expecting the *kumu* to answer questions outright—strengthens the epistemic capacity of the attentive knower. The word *pa'a* means “to hold, to withhold,” and I came to understand the directive to mean: restrain your impulse to question until you have taken the time to consider on your own what you really need to know. Consideration of what has been taught, and what may already in fact be known are all wrapped in the call to *pa'a ka waha*. This call enhances the virtues of intellectual self-reliance and self-confidence as knowers reflect upon what they have learned, and what they can learn for themselves. Finally, when they have exhausted their personal knowledge resources, *nā kūmu* are available for *nīnau*, (questions). This practice develops self-assurance and allows “the creative process of thinking to take place” (Chun, 2011, p. 94). In the learning process *haumana* develop experiences that support the acquisition, maintenance and growth of knowledge. But equally as important, they support personal character traits that allow knowledge to develop from one's own experiences as they are tested, reflected upon and interpreted. Each knower's potential can be nurtured in a way that enables individuality and creativity to develop within a supportive knowledge community. This in turn facilitates successive generations of knowers to add to the stores of cultural knowledge.

In this first pillar we find a way of inculcating how to sense and how to be receptive in a way that secures the learning process as the fundamental platform for how to know. We approach knowledge first through our senses (by seeing, hearing, even tasting and smelling), then by developing our sensibilities (by watching and listening) and finally, in order to better understand ourselves and our place in an environment, by cultivating the capacity to reflect. We imitate what we sense, feel, and experience through embodied engagement, bringing ourselves closer in relationship to each other and the environment with the goal to engage with them as a reciprocal and sympathetic actor. Through reflection we are better able to situate ourselves with respect to how our understanding can be put into action, whereby it can be shared with others and validated. This constitutes but one of many cultural epistemological practices available to *haumana hula*. It explains how knowledge is acquired; how, through methods of constraint, it is transmitted and perpetuated, and how it can develop individually and creatively, adapting to new problems and changing circumstances. This first pillar also illustrates what McKinnon (2003) highlights in a responsibilist virtue epistemology. For while a *haumana* may be motivated to acquire knowledge, a wider epistemic community, “in the context of normative practices,” both determines “what counts as responsible exercise of cognitive faculties and traits,” and imposes obligations “to act in a cognitively responsible manner” (McKinnon, 2003, p. 246). In this way knowledge and understanding are passed from *kumu* to *haumana*, cultivated and played out in the performing bodies of dancers.

The Second Pillar: Knowledge is Embodied, Hence Performative

Three *ōlelo no'ēau* will help me to secure the second pillar—that knowledge is inherently embodied and hence performative. *Ma ka hana, ka 'ike* (In the work is the

knowledge)(Pukui, 1983, p. 227, #2088), *ʻike ʻia no ka loea i ke kuahu* (The skill is known by the altar) (Pukui, 1983, p. 131, #1208), and *Ho aʻe ka ʻike heʻenalu i ka hokua o ka ʻale* (Show you can surf on the back of a wave)(Pukui, 1983, p. 108, #1013). Each expression incorporates the word, *ʻike*, a fundamental epistemological concept that expresses knowledge in its broadest sense, and each implies physical engagement. In hula, knowledge comes to us through our efforts as individual dancing bodies. Manu Meyer's analysis of Hawaiian epistemology teaches us three things in this context, first that "[k]nowledge is not simply an intellectual/mind experience, but a full-body, full-mind one" (2003, p. 12). This in turn tells us that "[b]ody and mind are not separate. Naʻauao teaches us this" (Meyer, 2003, p. 65). From here we understand that *naʻau* and *naʻauao* associate with a way of "'knowing' that is not divorced from awareness, from body, from spirit, from place" (Meyer, 2003, p. 180). In Hawaiian thinking knowledge is lodged in the *naʻau*, the intestines. This visceral connection draws knowledge into the core of our physical being, to experience ourselves and the world in and through the body. P. Kanahale unpacks the epistemological implications of this fundamental notion, exposing not only its embodiedness, but its intellectual and performative aspects as well. "To me," she says, "naʻauao is . . . understanding . . . not only with the level of intelligence, of thinking about it, but the level of practicum, of having done it somewhere, understanding how it works, understanding why it works" (cited in Meyer, 2003, p. 181). Understanding here derives from practice, from physical engagement. Through the effort, through the tasting (*hoʻaʻo*), comes understanding of how and why things are as they are.

The meaning of *naʻauao* combines the word for daylight, *ao*, with the term for the intestines, *naʻau*. It invokes intellectual virtues ranging from being learned and enlightened, to intelligence, knowing, and wisdom (Pukui & Ebert, 1986, p. 257). It evokes an understanding that emanates most profoundly from the physical core of our being—the source of digestion. Knowledge acquisition is thus understood as a process that nourishes us. It implies receptivity and assimilation at a cellular level, beneath conscious control. Rather than something acquired by the sheer effort of an active intellect, at a fundamental level knowledge is something that happens to us. It is something that nurtures us through a process of consumption, supporting growth and development. Knowledge, from this viewpoint, is what we become in and through our day-to-day performances, whatever activity we engage in.

Ma ka hana, ka ʻike speaks generally to the fact that knowledge is shown in the work displayed, whether it be a product or a performance. Sometimes this *ʻōlelo noʻeau* is translated as "we learn from doing" and is associated with "hands-on" learning. Certainly this is one layer of meaning. We learn hula by doing hula. We learn, really learn, planting by getting into the earth and planting. We learn to navigate, to surf, or to paddle only by getting into the ocean. This is basic. But knowledge as embodied performance is not kept to oneself. Indeed, as embodied, its very expression means it will be publicly displayed, seen by others, and thus shared. "A characteristic of Hawaiian culture is the active spreading, *laha*, of knowledge" (Charlot, 2005, p. 10). This tells us that we do not acquire knowledge to hold it, or claim it as our own individual possession. It is not something we discover on our own; rather we arrive at

a place of knowing only through a practice, supported by a community. It is in this sharing and the witnessing of performance by the community, that it comes to count as knowledge. I must be able to show what I know. This is the meaning of *hō'ike*, but there must be someone to show it to. While in contemporary usage *hō'ike* is often reduced to the idea of a "recital," in *hālau* it means being constantly tested. In this context *hō'ike* becomes a means of validation. Among the more significant "*hō'ike*" were informal situations in which we were called on to show what we knew. If we had returned from a workshop, or even at the whim of our kumu, certainly if we ever said we "knew," we were met with, "Ok, show me." Sometimes it was simply signaled with a slap of the *ipu* (a gourd drum) and a shout of "*mākaukau!*"(ready!) If we truly *knew* it, no rehearsal was required. *Hō'ike* thus provides a means to demonstrate our knowledge competence and our capacity to produce apt performances, thus verifying our knowledge both to the community and ourselves.

'Ike 'ia no ka loea i ke kuahu indicates that when one knows, one can do; there is something to show for it. It is also implied that the quality of the product reflects the level of knowledge. And quality performance was expected. Implicit in this culture of demonstrating knowledge through performance, we find a striving for perfection (Charlot, 2005, pp. 122-132; Pukui, Haertig & Lee, 1972, p. 52). This feeds into the aesthetic sensibilities of Hawaiian thinking. It is not just efficiency that is admired but a style of performance as well. Care to polish a performance reflects individual effort and creativity, but also a respect for what one has learned. *Ho a'e ka 'ike he'enalu i ka hokua o ka 'ale* (Show you can surf on the back of a wave). Yes, there is skill here, but to be so faultless in performance that no error can be seen, reflects a dancer's abilities to observe, to pay attention to detail, and to have the patience to take the time to get it right. This demands another stream of virtues that includes confidence (*mana'o i'o*), courage (*koa*, *wiwo'ole*) and discipline (*a'o ikaika*). It also engenders a dispositional attitude that speaks to how we care for what has been learned. Here qualities of *aloha*, *'ihi* (reverence), *mahalo* (gratitude) imply a love and respect for the knowledge that has been shared.

Finally, we can understand knowledge as performative in a way that distinguishes it from the strictly intellectual. Knowledge simply for its own sake garnered no value (Meyer, 2003, p. 57). This is true across any practice. Traditionally, the imitative performance of hula dancers was intended to draw an audience of human and non-humans into sympathetic participation to achieve balance and harmony. Knowledge, as useful and productive, must perform for the betterment of the community. But this is not simply how-to knowledge. Everyone recognizes levels of knowledge, and a level of skill-knowledge is basic. While performing a simple hula shows a certain amount of knowledge, no one would recognize this alone is sufficient to describe the dancer as knowledgeable. Such a description applies to someone who demonstrates awareness and understanding, which is displayed in how and why the activity is performed. Higher levels of knowledge entail a certain disposition, reflected through how we behave, interact and communicate with others and with the environment. Knowledge at these levels is not reducible to propositional knowledge, nor is it only a how-to knowledge. It encompasses understanding that, as P. Kanahele

reminds us, incorporates awareness of how and why a thing is as it is and works as it works. While knowledge needs to be practically applicable, offering value to the community in some way, practicality can range from basic survival skills “to the highest speculation on the origin and structure of the universe that provided [Hawaiians] a mental context for their lives” (Charlot, 2005, p. 10). Knowing, here, is an understanding that requires a fuller, ever broadening context, and it sets a more philosophical framework than does strictly knowledge-how.

The model of knowledge we have, then, is that of a vital practice among individuals coming to know by creating meaning and understanding together. In *hālau* we came together to dance but also to know. At our best we performed, learned, and remembered as one body, one mind. From this I came to understand that knowledge is not the product or property of individuals but reflects a collective effort to understand, to remember, to know. As knowers, we are in some essential sense dependent on one another. Knowledge is dialogic, relational, communal. In performance it is made public, shared with a community where it can be critiqued, accepted (or not), and incorporated to a continually growing body and practice of knowledge. Performance establishes a means of verifying what and how well one knows. It also reflects back upon the *kumu* and thus upon a wider community of knowers wherein responsibility for knowledge maintenance is recognized as a broader cultural responsibility. The exacting demands placed upon hula dancers in learning and performance ensure that knowledge is acquired and maintained properly. The dancers also support an epistemic responsibility to care for the knowledge received. This responsibility is assumed by individual hula dancers and their *kumu*, nurtured and supported by traditions that comprise a larger community of knowers. It requires a willingness to respect other ways of learning and presentation that represent different traditions and viewpoints. This takes us to the third pillar.

The Third Pillar: Knowledge is Contextual and Perspectival

The *’ōlelo no’eau* that summarizes this pillar is one known to all hula dancers; indeed it is one of the first lessons presented: *’A’ohe pau ka ’ike i hālau ho’okāhi*, (Not all knowledge is held in one school only)(Pukui, 1983, p. 24, #203). It implies that no single individual or school has a lock on knowledge or is privileged in its point of view. Knowledge is always partial, and there are many ways of perceiving the same phenomenon. This opens us to accept—and enjoy—different ways of seeing and presenting knowledge. We delight, for example, in the way a simple *mele* is performed, how its choreography re-creates the story, how the nuances in the chanting inflect different layers of meaning.

The context of an interdependent community “is at the heart of what it means to know something in a Hawaiian worldview” (Meyer, 2001, p. 135). Given that knowledge is embodied in individuals and communities as cultural practices, it is inherently perspectival—first and foremost from the individual vantage point of a unique, embodied knower. It is equally contextual—reflecting context of time, place, culture, and the experiences of the knowing individual. Once we accept that knowledge is a

matter of lived experience, coming to us through our own embodied engagement, we easily recognize the inescapable incompleteness of our knowledge. This is the lesson of *ha'aha'a*. Often translated as humility, *ha'aha'a* does not imply self-deprecation; rather it conveys deference to one's *kumu* and the tradition she represents. It is a prerequisite for continued development and growth. As an intellectual virtue, it inculcates receptivity, patience and perseverance, even gratitude. It allows us to welcome the views of others to expand and enrich our own. Indeed, in this context, higher degrees of knowledge are only possible when relationships are maintained such that individual, partial knowers can come together, communicate and share. There is no place for the individual ego to rise above the practice because the practice has a purpose beyond the individual.

Laha, the spreading of knowledge, brings us to the epistemological implications in the concept, *makawalu*. Literally, meaning "eight eyes," the term is used as an epithet for someone who is aware and skilled; for example, *Pe'ape'a maka walu* (Pe'ape'a was "eight eyed") (Pukui, 1983, p. 288, #2621). As an epistemological method it indicates that in order to know a thing we must look at or have seen it from multiple viewpoints. P. Kanahale uses the imagery of the *hapu'u*, a slow growing tree fern that presents itself first in tightly coiled fronds that gradually arch skyward as they open up allowing spores to spread and reproduce, to explain the broader concept of *papakū makawalu*.¹ It links epistemology and ontology to illustrate how knowledge and reality were understood and categorized vertically and horizontally in space and time (The Kohala Center). The image captures the fractal way knowledge develops from a foundational base that then opens up, spawning new platforms, which in turn support further growth and knowledge. In nature we observe such phenomena all around us. They model how knowledge continually opens up through unfolding layers, changing knowledge landscapes and our orientation in them. Most directly the idea speaks to the need to see a phenomenon from different vantage points before we can lay claim to knowing it. It also illustrates that new realities are continually being generated. It follows that knowledge too must be a continual engagement, an incessant seeking for further understanding.

'Ike i ke au nui me ke au iki, (Knows the big and small currents) (Pukui, 1983, p.131, #1209). The message of this *'olelo noe'au* brings us back to observation and the need to take the time to sit and watch in order to know. The image of ocean currents draws attention to the interplay of movement and time, to the contextuality and fluid character of knowledge. It also takes us to images of submerging ourselves in the flowing reality that brings us knowledge. Currents large and small conjure immersion, interconnection, and movement—all part of a fully embodied experience of knowing and being. In her "seascape epistemology" Karin Ingersoll (2016) draws on her surfing experiences, immersed in and embraced by the ocean, to challenge dominant

¹ P. Kanahale identifies *papakū makawalu* as a "Hawaiian method of studying and understanding the universe" (The Kohala Center). Meyer identifies it as "[a] Hawaiian interpretation and practice of interdependence" (2013 p. 98). (See Nu'uhiwa, 2019, pp. 39-49).

knowledge paradigms. She views knowledge as “an always moving interaction” (p. 15). Her *kanaka* (native Hawaiian) epistemology argues for plurality and multiplicity, for breaking down oppositions that ossify identity and seek fixed, finite and absolute truths (Ingersoll, 2016). In her vision, a seascape epistemology “is about knowing through movements of the body situated within places—movements that have the potential to (re)create the places we inhabit” (Ingersoll, 2016, p. 38). In the imagery of currents, we envision knowing and reality as movement. Such imagery allows us to see our knowing selves as beings embedded and embraced by other beings, pulled by deeper undercurrents even as we are buoyed at the surface. This is clearly a different ontology of knowing. To live in such a dynamic environment one must be receptive, patient, accepting, and deferential. These virtues support our understanding that knowing and living-well are intimately interconnected.

The Fourth Pillar: Knowledge Cannot Be Divorced from Correct Practice

Rubellite Johnson has said, “Responsibility in training rests on the teacher. The receptivity to learn rests on the learner. This is why Hawaiians don’t teach people who aren’t interested. Information, values and morality come into play here” (cited by Meyer, 2005, p. 181). In the *hālau* we were taught that hula is more than learning step vocabulary, gestures and even dances, more than performing. While simply wanting to learn dances may be an instigating desire to come to hula, for study over time such an attitude is wholly insufficient. I found it strange at first when I was told that I needed to view myself as representing the *hālau*, not just in performance but beyond *hālau* activities as well. Western philosophy—perhaps uniquely—has long invested in the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, assigning different values to distinguishable, even utterly disconnected disciplines of knowledge and experience. This was my default understanding. But for Hawaiians no such distinction is conceivable. Because knowledge was viewed as effective, it was seen as powerful. Thus a moral component comes into play (Charlot, 1983, 1997, 2005). The power of knowledge explains, in part, why its transmission was guarded by *kapu* (restrictions, taboo), ceremony and prayer, and why students were carefully chosen, not just for aptitude but attitude as well. We were taught that we had a *kuleana* (responsibility) to *mālama* (care for) what we had been taught. While our *kumu* struggled to live the *kuleana* they felt, to convey hula to us in its fullest context and to *mālama* the practices of teaching and performance they had experienced, we as *haumana* continue to struggle with its fullest implications.

Receptivity, understanding and motivation all play a critical role in this context. Zagzebski has argued, “[t]he primary motivation underlying the intellectual virtues is the motivation for knowledge.” To be so motivated “leads a person to follow rules or procedures of belief formation that are known to her epistemic community to be truth conducive” (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 181). *Hālau hula* is such a community. It moves us toward understanding that our practice must be *pono*, and what that means in terms of how we interact with one another, how we present ourselves in public as dancers and as individuals, and most importantly how we take care of what we have been

taught. From *loea*—those rare and noted experts whose critical appraisal functions to place boundaries around acceptable practice and interpretation, to offer encouragement and validation—to *haumana*, all are expected to maintain hula values and traditions. Knowledge comes with responsibility. These responsibilities are part of the body of knowledge that is our hula education. At this juncture moral and intellectual values meet.

Meyer (2003) notes that the mentors she consulted in her research frequently “brought up the notion of *pono* (righteous) behavior with regard to knowledge,” linking virtues “such as humility, balance, harmony, respect, patience, kindness, hospitality and caring” with “intelligence, responsibility and knowledge” (p. 153). *Pono* is an overarching value concept in the Hawaiian language. It means what is good or excellent, what is right in a moral sense, what is correct, just and fair. It is also a qualifier of many intellectual virtues (*hakilo pono*—to observe closely, *‘ike pono*—acute observation; *lohe pono*—listen carefully, be attentive; *no‘ono‘o pono*—to think carefully, to concentrate). It indicates that the thing qualified is done in the right way, for the right reasons. These virtues derive their value from the epistemic goal and their worth lies in the motivation and the character of the seeker. Motivation addresses intention, what moves us from inside. It is not enough to have correct knowledge of choreography, of even the *mele*, the *pa‘i* (rhythmic accompaniment), and other aspects of performance. It is a matter also of having correct feeling and understanding.

...[A]ll activities and aspects of culture—are supposed to come *mai nei loko* ‘from the inside,’ that is, to be interiorized or connected to genuine emotions. . . .

[I]ndeed, one does not really know something unless one has the appropriate feeling for it, whether respect, fear, awe, or love (Charlot, 2005, p. 109).

Moving from the inside, from *na‘auao*, takes us beyond *‘ike kumu*. Gradually we move toward understanding that, if sustained, can lead to intelligence, *akamai*, which in turn promotes further learning, and perhaps a perspective recognizable as wisdom.

Conclusion: Where I Cannot Go

When asking permission to enter the space of the *hālau*, hula dancers chant, “*Mai pa‘a i ka leo! / He ole kahea mai, e!*” (Give voice and make answer / Dead silence—no voice in reply) (Emerson, 1965, p. 40). To experience the silence of no reply reminds us that knowledge is not there for our taking, that our agency as knowers is not unassailable and that we cannot always be the determiners of what we will know. Taupōuri Tangarō is a hula practitioner who has experienced profoundly transformative moments through dance. In *Lele Kawa: Fire rituals of Pele*, he reflects on his own journey to knowledge and higher awareness by explicating chants taken from the epic story-dance tradition of Pele and Hi‘iaka, which he interprets as a “journey toward maturation” (Tangarō, 2009, p. 10). When enacting these stories dancers take on the realities that are being portrayed with the purpose to effect, to influence or mesmerize an audience of human and non-human participants. The chants he highlights reflect personal moments along the way—of self-dialogue, sensory awareness, heightened intuition and profound enlightenment (Tangarō, 2009, p. 11-

13). The ritual elements of hula performance establish a liminal space, and the imagistic elements of chant and *mele* inform and recreate experiences that open up transformative levels of awareness and understanding. At this level the phenomenon of hula performance engenders, if only for a moment, a “oneness with the living aspect of native phenomena, that is with spirits and gods and other personas as souls, . . .” (Handy & Pukui, 1972, p.117).

Here, perhaps, we find a fifth pillar, one that supports a wider range of knowledge experiences. In this cultural space there is something instinctive, ancestral. Meyer (2003) identifies it as “spiritual,” and she defines spiritual as a “way of discussing the organic and cultural mediation of experience, and hence knowledge” (p. 93). It presents itself in such modes as dreams, reading signs from nature, sudden inspirations, insights that offer deeply profound knowledge experiences, in *‘ike pāpālua* (twice seeing), and intuitions that may be ineffable or otherwise not readily expressible in direct, discursive terms. We can label such knowledge experiences as “mystical,” but I see that label as a way of dismissing them, casting them beyond the boundaries of legitimate epistemological inquiry. Yet such experiences are included within a uniquely cultural space that is Hawaiian epistemology. This theoretic space enlarges the conceptual boundaries of knowledge experiences to include those sensitive to details within an environment seen and unseen, tied to one’s relationship to the land and sea, to ancestral knowledge, and to collective experience. Such experiences are integral to understanding the fullness of Hawaiian epistemology. But this is not a space available to me, and so I stand at a point beyond which I am unable to speak.

Ka hohonu i hiki ‘ole ke ana ‘ia, aka, ua ‘ike ‘ia no kahi mau papa.
(The depth is unfathomable, but several strata have indeed been seen.)

*This effort is dedicated to Kumu Hula Cecilia Kawaiokawa‘awa‘a Akim.

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