



## 2. *Toward a Pedagogy of Responsive Attunement for Higher Education*

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*Abstract:* In a context of “fake news” and associated disillusionment, this article explores what it means to nurture a capacity to concern ourselves with what matters for our living, among both students and teachers in higher education. In addressing this issue, I highlight responding through attunement to particularities of importance. A contribution of this article\* lies in proposing that we direct student learning toward responsive attuning to what matters in the fields or professions to which they aspire, providing renewed direction for pedagogy and curricula. Enhancing such a capacity, moreover, has the potential to broaden the scope of possible ways of being in, and directed to, the communities to which these aspiring professionals belong. An additional contribution of the article is in exploring what responsive attunement can mean for higher education settings, both as a focus for learning by students and a modus operandi for teachers.

*Keywords:* attunement, attuning, fake news, respond, responsive

### *Countering “Fake News” in Higher Education*

The current context that is being referred to as “post-truth” has seen a proliferation of “fake news” or “alternative facts.” As Nesta Devine points out, however, the term “post-truth” is a misnomer, as it does not refer to “post”

\* An earlier version of this article was presented at the Philosophy of Higher Education Conference in London, 2018.

in the sense of post-structuralism or post-modernism, “which means something like ‘beyond but built upon.’”<sup>1</sup> Rather, she argues post-truth is used to refer to “generally an unapologetic delivery of statements that are not true (in the sense then they have no justification) in order to sway opinion.”<sup>2</sup> Such fake news provides a troubling sense “that arises when enough people are brought to assent to something made up.”<sup>3</sup>

This context of fake news and associated disillusionment brings into sharp focus a challenge for contemporary higher education. If truth and truthfulness are under threat, then the expertise of those educated and employed within higher education institutions may be lost or diminished in the throng of public opinion. This, in turn, has the potential to undermine the critical tradition with which higher education institutions historically have aligned themselves and to which they purport to contribute. Conversely, an argument can be made that responsive, enlightened expertise is needed now more than ever, especially in countering ill-informed opinion and restrictive views of what our societies can be.<sup>4</sup>

In taking up the latter argument, this article considers the issue of concerning ourselves with what matters for our living. More specifically, *a key question relates to how we can nurture a capacity for concerning ourselves with what matters, among both students and teachers in higher education.* In addressing this question, I highlight responding through attunement to particularities of importance, especially to how situations, encounters, ideas and things are experienced when we are called upon to respond. In doing so, this article makes a twofold contribution. The first contribution relates to proposing such a notion of responsive attunement as a focus for pedagogy and curriculum. The second contribution is in exploring what responding through attunement can mean for higher education settings, both as a focus for learning by students and a modus operandi for teachers. While potentially significant, these contributions cannot be regarded as a panacea for the challenges of our current context, including fake news.

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<sup>1</sup> Nesta Devine, “Beyond Truth and Non-Truth,” in *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher Education*, eds. Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvönen, and Tina Besley (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 164.

<sup>2</sup> Devine, “Beyond Truth and Non-Truth,” 164.

<sup>3</sup> Sharon Rider, “On Knowing How To Tell the Truth,” in *Post-Truth, Fake News. Viral Modernity and Higher Education*, eds. Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvönen, and Tina Besley (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 27.

<sup>4</sup> See also Henri A. Giroux, “What Is the Role of Higher Education in the Age of Fake News?” in *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher Education*, eds. Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvönen, and Tina Besley (Singapore: Springer, 2018).

### Consequences of “Fake News” for Societies

Although the fake news phenomenon is not new,<sup>5</sup> the advent of the internet and social media have substantially boosted its dissemination.<sup>6</sup> While increased connectivity has many potential benefits, including for those with limited mobility or living in remote communities, the rapid dispersal of fake news has been a negative side-effect of this connectivity.

In examining fake news that pre-dates the internet, Hannah Arendt argues that “the deliberate falsehood deals with *contingent* facts, that is with matters which carry no inherent truth within themselves, no necessity to be as they are; factual truths are never compellingly true.”<sup>7</sup> This contingent quality allows some latitude for alternative interpretations and, therefore, openings for misinformation, which we see exploited in contemporary societies. As Arendt points out, “it is this fragility that makes deception so easy *up to a point*, and so tempting.”<sup>8</sup> In contrast, she regards “truth that can be relied on” as the “chief stabilizing factor” in the continuing flux of public affairs.<sup>9</sup> In addition—and, arguably, related to this stabilizing function—she considers that truth trumps deception:

For the trouble with lying and deceiving is that their efficiency depends entirely upon a clear notion of the truth which the liar and deceiver wishes to hide. In this sense, truth, even if it does not prevail in public, possesses an ineradicable primacy over all falsehoods.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in contemporary society Kathleen Higgins notes “that politicians who benefit from post-truth tendencies rely on truth, too, but not because they adhere to it.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Michiko Kakutani, *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump*. (London: William Collins, 2018); Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvönen, and Tina Besley, eds., *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher Education* (Singapore: Springer, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Will J. Grant and Rod Lamberts, “Merchants of Misinformation Are All Over the Internet. But the Real Problem Lies With Us,” *The Conversation*, September 25, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/merchants-of-misinformation-are-all-over-the-internet-but-the-real-problem-lies-with-us-123177>

<sup>7</sup> Hanna Arendt, “Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers,” *New York Review of Books*, November 18, 1971, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Arendt, “Lying in Politics,” 2.

<sup>9</sup> Arendt, “Lying in Politics,” 3.

<sup>10</sup> Arendt, “Lying in Politics,” 10.

<sup>11</sup> Kathleen Higgins, “Post-Truth: A Guide for the Perplexed,” *Nature* 560, no. 7631 (2016): 9.

In posing a threat to stability, then, a key reason that fake news is troubling concerns the consequences for societies which rely upon truthfulness, when fake news begins to become normalized. As Jeff Malpas points out, drawing upon Arendt, and economist and philosopher, Adam Smith:

truth is not itself democratic, and yet, precisely because truth tolerates no tyranny but its own, truth is also a powerful force for democratisation—indeed, the freedom demanded by truth, which is freedom *for* the truth and also for the human and the humane is very closely related to the sort of freedom that Smith argues underpins the market and is manifest in the democratic polity he associates with it. In this respect, the threat to the critical tradition is also a threat to the very structures that underpin the wealth about which contemporary politicians, business and economists so often speak.<sup>12</sup>

As these reflections from Arendt and Malpas suggest, an implicit feature of the consequences of fake news for societies relates to trust. If we cannot trust one another in our encounters, this carries risks for the fabric of social, intellectual, political and economic life. However, given that the critical tradition to which Malpas refers has a prolonged history of portraying truth in a manner that is gendered, sexed, dis/abled, classed and raced in exclusionary ways, it has contributed its own deceptions.<sup>13</sup>

It is this troubled history and the fragility of truth that prompts Devine to argue for rethinking what she considers to be misleading binaries of truth and nontruth:

To think beyond the binaries of truth and non-truth means abandoning the privileged position of being able to adjudicate what truth is. It does not mean, however, abandoning a proper respect for interrogating truths and demanding justification.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar vein, Sharon Rider and Michael Peters assert that “truth-seeking and truth-telling require a certain degree of skepticism [*sic*] to conventional accounts, but not cynicism toward the endeavor itself.”<sup>15</sup> In this process of

<sup>12</sup> Jeff Malpas, “Wisdom’s Limit: Truth, Failure and the Contemporary University,” in *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher Education*, eds. Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvönen, and Tina Besley (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 72.

<sup>13</sup> For examples, see Charles W. Mills, “Criticizing Critical Theory,” in *Critical Theory in Critical Times: Transforming the Global Political and Economic Order*, eds. Penelope Deutscher and Cristina Lafont, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Isabelle Stengers, *Another Science Is Possible: A Manifesto for Slow Science*, trans. Stephen Muecke (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Devine, “Beyond Truth and Non-Truth,” 167.

<sup>15</sup> Sharon Rider and Michael A. Peters. 2018. “Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher Education,” in *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher*

truth-seeking, Malpas points out there are inevitably limits to our knowledge. While we may strive to achieve justifiable truths, they will necessarily be incomplete and, thereby, partial. For Malpas, this means that “failure is the inevitable accompaniment of all human activity. ... To recognise the inevitability of failure is to recognise the essentially limited character of human life and activity.”<sup>16</sup>

While acknowledging the fragility of truth and limits of knowledge, the link Malpas makes between a critical tradition and the market is not to be misunderstood as advocating “a corporatist and market-oriented conception of higher education,”<sup>17</sup> which he explicitly rejects. In contrast, increasing attention to an employability agenda for higher education among both politicians and universities in several countries<sup>18</sup> risks unduly directing students’ attention to simply becoming “qualified” to work. While gaining employment, understandably, is both a concern for students and given consideration in the efforts of many of their teachers, as Peters and colleagues point out “taking a strategic and instrumental route alone through university, does not guarantee future work.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, reducing higher education to a route toward individualized employability is to overlook the social and material conditions in which diverse students find themselves,<sup>20</sup> and also to sell them short of the broader potential benefits of such an education.<sup>21</sup> These benefits include widening the scope of their possible ways of being in, and directed to, the communities to which they belong.

### *“Fake News” and Human Existence*

A second reason that fake news matters, related to the first, is existential, as we see in the frustration and disillusionment that follow in settings where fake

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*Education*, eds. Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvönen, and Tina Besley (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Malpas, “Wisdom’s Limit,” 64.

<sup>17</sup> Malpas, “Wisdom’s Limit,” 61.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Joy Higgs, Geoffrey Crisp and Will Letts, eds., *Education for Employability: The Employability Agenda* (Leiden: Brill Sense, 2019); Le Huu Nghia Tran, *Building Soft Skills for Employability: Challenges and Practices in Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 2019); Melanie Walker and Samuel Fongwa, *Universities, Employability and Human Development*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Peters, Petar Jandrić, and Sara Hayes, “The Curious Promise of Educationalising Technological Unemployment: What Can Places of Learning Really Do About the Future of Work?” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 51, no. 3 (2019): 242.

<sup>20</sup> Walker and Fongwa, *Universities, Employability and Human Development*.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Macfarlane, “Student Performativity in Higher Education: Converting Learning as a Private Space into a Public Performance,” *Higher Education Research & Development* 34, no. 2 (2015).

news gains the upper hand. These emotive reactions are comprehensible in the light of Martin Heidegger's argument that for human being "in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it."<sup>22</sup> In other words, our being matters to us, as humans. Furthermore, for Heidegger, human being "when understood *ontologically*, is care."<sup>23</sup> More specifically, our experiences, attitudes and emotions "are grounded existentially in care."<sup>24</sup> Unlike the usual English meaning of the term, this ontological notion of care signifies that as we go about our everyday activities, projects and endeavors, we concern ourselves with people and things that matter to us in our living. Heidegger refers to our "concernful dealings" with others and things as we go about our tasks.<sup>25</sup>

Given we are personally invested in what matters to us, truth and untruth are necessarily of concern. Heidegger argues that as we go about our lives, we usually "fall in" with a crowd; adopting what "they" commonly say, think and do. For human beings, "absorption in the 'they' signifies that it is dominated by the way things are publicly interpreted," which Heidegger refers to as being in a state of "untruth" in an ontological sense.<sup>26</sup> This means we often say, think and do what is usual in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. For instance, if we lead a seminar, we would generally contribute ideas, as well as engaging others in doing so. As we do not constantly scrutinize all we say, think and do, we are typically absorbed in our tasks and routines in a mode of "average everydayness."<sup>27</sup> This is not to be evaluated negatively, as it allows us to carry out our tasks and achieve our endeavors.

In surrendering ourselves to falling in with a crowd, however, we constrain the possibilities open to us. For example, by according with common practices in teaching, we relinquish other possible ways of proceeding and, ultimately, of being teachers. As Heidegger notes, "the average everydayness of concern becomes blind to its possibilities, and tranquillizes itself with that which is merely 'actual.'"<sup>28</sup> This carries a risk that we busy ourselves by carrying out our tasks and activities as others do, while being inauthentic as we avoid making these endeavors genuinely our own.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1927/1962), 32. All quotes from Heidegger's *Being and Time* are from the translation by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, except translation of "Befindlichkeit" to "attunement" by Joan Stambaugh in the 1927/1996 edition, which is cited in note 40 below.

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 238.

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 264.

<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 225.

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 239.

The fake news phenomenon is a striking example of “losing” oneself through “falling in” with what others say, think and do, even when it means “to assent to something made up.” It carries a “susceptibility to falling prey to error, illusion, the distortions of memory”<sup>29</sup> and so on. The broad dissemination of fake news signals “lostness in the everydayness of the they-self,”<sup>30</sup> which entails drifting toward alienation from oneself. This “alienation *closes off* from [human being] its authenticity and possibility, even if only the possibility of genuinely foundering.”<sup>31</sup>

While being in such a state of untruth, Heidegger considers human being is also “in the truth” in the sense of truth as disclosure or “uncoveredness,”<sup>32</sup> although being in the truth does not come as readily as falling in with a crowd. Rather, as Magda King notes, for Heidegger “the truth of existence has to be *wrested* from the covering over that characterizes the everyday and disowned way of existing,”<sup>33</sup> which follows from falling in with a crowd. For instance, it generally takes courage to speak out or take action in addressing commonly overlooked injustices, especially when this threatens the status quo.

As we are both in the truth and untruth, “truth and being belong together. The disclosure of being that happens in and with [human] being as care is the original phenomenon of truth itself.”<sup>34</sup> Heidegger regards the conventional notion of truth of assertions as derivative of, and less central than, this original phenomenon of truth, as King explains:

Far more important to us than a correct cognition of things is the openness or pretence that concerns our own existence, on the basis of which we make our vital decisions and which determines the genuineness of our relations with other human beings.<sup>35</sup>

So, we are not only concerned about the correctness of fake news or alternative facts but also, more significantly, about what they un-disclose—or cover over—about us, as human beings. Since our being is an issue for us, we care about the truthfulness of our existence. Hence, we react to what we consider to be deceptions and half-truths.

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<sup>29</sup> Arendt, “Lying in Politics,” 2.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 307.

<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 222.

<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 265.

<sup>33</sup> Magda King, *A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 107.

<sup>34</sup> King, *A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> King, *A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 106.

## *Tuning In*

The consequences of fake news for trust and truthfulness in societies, and also for human existence, which have been discussed above, provide a background for exploring the issue of concerning ourselves with what matters for our living, in the remainder of the article. As a counter to fake news and disillusionment, this section considers tuning in to what matters during higher education programs.

A significant consideration in this exploration is Heidegger's argument that our fields of knowledge, such as astronomy, pharmacy or visual arts, depict ways of being in the world.<sup>36</sup> For example, being astronomers entails working with others across continents in investigating questions and issues related to celestial bodies and events, using instruments such as telescopes and spectrosopes in studying celestial phenomena, and so on. These features contribute to the world of astronomy, with its particular ways of being in this practice world, for the purpose of enhancing our understanding of the universe in which we find ourselves. In taking up specific ways of being, we become part of sociomaterial practice worlds.

In educational settings in which we prepare students for practice worlds, if we take seriously how students are learning to be, Nel Noddings points out "we have to set aside the deadly notion that the ... first priority should be intellectual development."<sup>37</sup> While acknowledging that intellectual development is important, she draws on Heidegger's notion of "care," with its ontological emphasis on "concernful dealings" with people and things that matter in our living. Noddings emphasizes the importance for education of promoting development of such a capacity to care. She argues that "if we decide that the capacity to care is as much a mark of personhood as reason or rationality, then we will want to find ways to increase this capacity."<sup>38</sup> With Heidegger, she also notes that "all aware humans care"<sup>39</sup> in this ontological sense, so the grounds for developing such a capacity are already in place.

## *Attuning Here and Now*

In addressing this capacity to concern ourselves with what matters, I turn to the notion of tuning in or being attuned. Heidegger illustrates this form of

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<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 408.

<sup>37</sup> Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>38</sup> Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, 17.



attunement<sup>40</sup> when he describes an apprentice learning the craft of cabinet-making, in which he says it is necessary to:

answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood—to wood as it enters into man’s dwelling with all the hidden riches of its nature. In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole craft. Without that relatedness, the craft will never be anything but empty busywork.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, Yang Li, a contemporary fashion designer, notes:

When I’m looking at fabric, I have to touch it. ... Half the time, my design starts with fabric. You see something, feel something, and think about how it could be nice on a big shirt, huge cuffs, collar, whatever.<sup>42</sup>

Attunement of nursing staff to young children was also evident in Nick Hopwood’s ethnographic research in a residential parenting service that supports parents in responding to their children’s behaviors:

[Nurse] Julia comes down to the corridor towards the nurses’ station, carrying a 6 week old baby. I’m struck by how at ease she is walking while holding something (somebody!) so fragile and precious. She is relaxed, and talks to the baby in her arms. She comments to me: “Can you hear that snuffy noise? That’s the reflux.” She goes behind the nurses’ station and sits down, still cradling him. She strains her neck back and tilts her head so she can see his face. “Oh, he’s gone a bit blue round the mouth. He’s got wind. When you see a white frill around

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<sup>40</sup> Heidegger uses the German term, *Befindlichkeit*, to point to “a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we encounter something that matters to us” (*Being and Time*, 177). The term has been variously translated into English as “state-of-mind” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, 172), “attunement” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1927/1996, 126) or “disposedness” (William Blattner, “Anonymity, Mineness, And Agent Specificity: Pragmatic Normativity and the Authentic Situation in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*,” in *Giving a Damn: Essays in Dialogue with John Haugeland*, 2017, 56). In the present article, I do not use “attunement” primarily in the sense of disclosive submission to world, although my use of the term assumes such disclosive submission. As my interest is pedagogical, I am concerned, rather, with how to further enable responsiveness to the world on the basis of tuning in or being attuned, as we learn ways of being in the world.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Row, 1968), 14-5; see also Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Konrad Marshall, “New Wool Order,” *Good Weekend SMH*, October 20, 2018, 28.

the mouth just coming out.” She pats him on the back and rubs his back. “I can feel it.” She lays the child down and wiggles him a bit to help the trapped wind escape.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, Kay Toombs, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), highlights the consequences when attunement is lacking in our relations with others. The physical changes her body underwent due to MS were described in terms of complex medical terminology, creating a distance that failed to capture the “actual experience of bodily disorder.”<sup>44</sup> Instead, the changes she experienced were better captured “in terms of the impossibility of taking a walk around the block or of carrying a cup of coffee from the kitchen.” While medical knowledge is necessary for diagnosis and treatment, it is not sufficient for medical practice that is attuned to the experience of illness or disability. If we tune in to the experience of bodily disorder, this has the potential to influence how we act.<sup>45</sup>

Such attentive tuning in is incompatible with bustling about in a state of distracted busyness.<sup>46</sup> Busying ourselves in comparable ways to others is both tempting and tranquilizing,<sup>47</sup> as it allows us to evade the challenge—indeed, the anxiety—of facing up to the many possibilities before us. However, by plunging into “the groundlessness and nullity of inauthentic everydayness,” we risk immersing ourselves in busywork with “a sham of authenticity.”<sup>48</sup> In doing so, we forgo our “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” or, in other words, “the possibility of *authentic existence*.”<sup>49</sup>

### *Learning from Others and Things*

If we endeavor to tune in, through carefully attending to others and things, how can we go about this? In arguing for the necessity of attentiveness to others, including in pedagogical settings, Sharon Todd employs a distinction made by Sigmund Freud between learning about and learning from. She scrutinizes the way we relate to others, posing the question: “In seeking

<sup>43</sup> Nick Hopwood, *Professional Practice and Learning: Times, Spaces, Bodies, Things* (London: Springer, 2016), 225.

<sup>44</sup> S. Kay Toombs, “The Lived Experience of Disability,” *Human Studies* 18 (1995): 10.

<sup>45</sup> Fiona Watson and Annessa Rebar, “The Art of Noticing: Essential Nursing Practice,” *British Journal of Nursing* 23, no. 10 (2014): 514-17.

<sup>46</sup> For example, see Kathleen Lynch, “Carelessness: A Hidden Doxa of Higher Education,” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 9, no. 1 (2010): 54-67.

<sup>47</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 222.

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 223.

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 307.

to learn *about* them, can we be negligent of learning *from* them?”<sup>50</sup> In order to learn from others—in an always asymmetrical relation—Todd advocates “giving up on the idea that learning about others is an appropriate ethical response to difference.”<sup>51</sup> Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas, she notes, instead, that:

if I am exposed to the Other, I can listen, attend, and be surprised; the Other can affect me, she “brings me more than I contain.”<sup>52</sup> Insofar as I can be receptive and susceptible, I can learn *from* the Other as one who is absolutely different from myself.<sup>53</sup>

A similar argument can be made about how we relate to the natural world, so we can learn from other animate organisms and inanimate things, if we permit ourselves to do so.<sup>54</sup> Allowing ourselves to be receptive and susceptible enables us to learn from both diverse others and varied things, as well as reflexively becoming attuned to our own ways of responding, both as individuals and collectively.

However, there is a potential impediment in that Gemma Fiumara argues western philosophy has “an aversion—almost—towards listening to the rich multiplicity of ‘reality.’”<sup>55</sup> Instead, she notes, it has tended to emphasize telling or explaining. In so doing, knowledge is reduced “to a set of principles from which nothing can escape.”<sup>56</sup> Higher education in the west, arguably, has also neglected the development of receptive listening in favor of a capacity to tell or explain what we know. In contrast, attuned listening enables us to perceive particularities of importance, through learning from others and things.

Fiumara points to “the requirement that we dwell with, abide by, whatever we try to know; that we aim at co-existence with, rather than knowledge-of.”<sup>57</sup> In education, Henri Giroux suggests “developing discourses and pedagogical

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<sup>50</sup> Sharon Todd, *Learning from The Other: Levinas, Psychoanalysis, and Ethical Possibilities in Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Todd, *Learning from The Other*, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 51.

<sup>53</sup> Todd, *Learning from The Other*, 15.

<sup>54</sup> Aislinn O’Donnell, “Spinoza, Experimentation and Education: How Things Teach Us,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50, no. 9 (2018): 819-29.

<sup>55</sup> Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (London: Routledge, 1995), 21.

<sup>56</sup> Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language*, 21.

<sup>57</sup> Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language*, 15.

practices that connect reading the word with reading the world.”<sup>58</sup> Gert Biesta, too, asserts the importance of promoting a capacity for being receptive to the world: “Knowing then is not an act of mastery or control ... but can perhaps better be described as a process of listening to the world, of having a concern for the world, of caring for the world, and perhaps even of carrying (the weight of) the world.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Charles Guignon advocates “releasement” from “bondage to ego” by “becoming responsive to the call of something greater than yourself.”<sup>60</sup> This openness to the world “that concerns our own existence” is antithetical to the pretence that is fake news.

### *Responding with Attunement*

In order to avoid fake or “empty busywork,” I propose higher education provide heightened emphasis on tuning in to the world as a means to developing informed, care-filled responses, which I refer to as “responsive attunement.”<sup>61</sup> This includes, but extends beyond, “noticing” or perceiving salient features of a situation,<sup>62</sup> such that the point and purpose of tuning in is responding with attunement to who and what addresses us. Responsive attunement entails, then, *responding* to the particularities and complexities of a situation on the basis of *tuning in* to others and things in the social and natural worlds, with reflexivity. While I acknowledge the contribution of intellectual development to both tuning in and responding, responsive attunement relies upon more than the intellect, as I discuss below. Moreover—with Noddings—I consider we need also to build “the capacity to care” about what matters as “a mark of personhood,” while—with Levinas—becoming receptive to others and things that bring me “more than I contain.” Developing responsive attunement provides a means of doing so.

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<sup>58</sup> Henri A. Giroux, “What Is the Role of Higher Education in the Age of Fake News?” in *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher Education*, eds. Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvönen, and Tina Besley (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 213.

<sup>59</sup> Gert Biesta, “Freeing Teaching from Learning: Opening Up Existential Possibilities in Educational Relationships,” *Studies in Philosophy of Education* 34 (2015): 239.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 8; see also Gert Biesta, “The Rediscovery of Teaching: On Robot Vacuum Cleaners, Non-Egological Education and the Limits of the Hermeneutical World View,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48, no. 4 (2016) and Todd, *Learning from The Other*.

<sup>61</sup> Gloria Dall’Alba, *Learning to Be Professionals* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 68.

<sup>62</sup> Christine A. Tanner, “Thinking Like a Nurse: A Research-Based Model of Clinical Judgment in Nursing,” *Journal of Nursing Education* 45, no. 6 (2006).

### *Tuning In for Responding*

In countering fake news and negotiating untruth, developing a capacity to respond through being attuned or receptive to what matters is critically important in educating students toward being and becoming professionals who can contribute to societies in informed, responsible ways. As Guignon notes:

since the projects you can take over are all inherited from the historical culture into which you are thrown, to take a stand on what matters is always at the same time to be engaged in the shared undertakings (Heidegger calls it the *destiny*) of a larger community.<sup>63</sup>

Contributing in informed, responsible ways is a key purpose of the professions in the varied service roles they provide to their communities, which has conventionally afforded them both status and some degree of authority.

Responding through tuning in involves sensate, motile, feeling persons—both individually and collectively—directed toward others and things in the situations in which they find themselves. It also implies attending to how those responses are received, through cultivating reflexivity. Responsive attuning relies, then, upon embodied being in the world. Marjorie O’Loughlin points out that “to be embodied is to be in touch with the world.”<sup>64</sup> The embodied understandings we bring to a situation are, nonetheless, highly influential upon what we attend to.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the extent to which we reflexively attune to others and things through our embodiment can vary substantially. Receptive, informed attunement is, then, not necessarily spontaneous or habitual, so it warrants development. As Hopwood notes, “attuning is an expression of practical understandings, and is accomplished through them.”<sup>66</sup> Responsive attuning is embodied in and through these practical understandings, directed toward others and things, with reflexivity.

### *Learning Through and for Responsive Attunement*

Being in touch with the world, while concerning ourselves with people and things that matter, can be harnessed in ways that promote tuning in and

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<sup>63</sup> Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, 134.

<sup>64</sup> Marjorie O’Loughlin, *Embodiment and Education: Exploring Creatural Existence* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 125.

<sup>65</sup> Judith Burrows, Gloria Dall’Alba, and Adam La Caze, “We Are All Patient-Centred Now, Aren’t We? Lessons from New Pharmacy Graduates,” *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning* 12, no. 5 (2020); Dall’Alba, *Learning to Be Professionals*; Hopwood, *Professional Practice and Learning*.

<sup>66</sup> Hopwood, *Professional Practice and Learning*, 216.

responding according to this attunement. Enabling students to respond with attunement to particularities of importance within the practice worlds they seek to enter has the potential to enhance clarity and focus in directing their learning. Such clarity and focus can be signaled through highlighting what matters in achieving key purposes for the practice world in question, as well as exploring how informed, ethical responses might be embodied and further developed.

This is not to suggest that enhancing clarity and focus implies the task is straightforward or self-evident. On the contrary, it furnishes directedness for efforts within challenging, multifaceted contexts in which attention to particularities is crucial if responsive attuning is to be achieved. At the same time, highlighting responsive attuning to what matters for this situation, at this point in time can reduce the risk of irrelevance or domination. For instance, in the natural sciences, tuning in to the natural world in a manner that is receptive to its wonder and complexity is necessary for attuned responding. This wonder and complexity are not limited to localized events or challenges but also extend to considering impacts of practice on local environments, the planet and, where relevant, the broader universe. Natural scientists are also required to learn to work with others in their investigations, including ethically building upon the prior work of others and through collaboration. Learning to embody informed, ethical responses in tune with—while not dominating—the natural world becomes a key consideration in promoting responsive attunement.

Similarly, in health care, responding with attunement begins with carefully tuning in to the person's experience of dis-ease or bodily disorder, including how the person responds to their situation. This response to their situation can include the involvement in their care of family and/or friends, as well as the person's experience of their broader social and material living situation. Fostering responsive attunement entails enabling informed, ethical responses that tune in to this particular person in this situation, with these concerns and requirements. In addition, health care professionals respond to their own situation in providing health care to others, which may include interactions with patients' families and/or friends, working with other health professionals, the circumstances around the health of the community and wider impacts of health care practice.

Promoting a capacity to concern ourselves with persons and things that matter encompasses attending to individuals, communities and the natural world, at both local and global levels. It includes developing practical understanding of key questions, concerns and challenges within a field or profession, as well as how we might approach them in our practice. This is a broad

and complex remit, with differing emphases in line with the field or profession in question. At the same time, as noted above, attending to particularities is necessary if we are to respond in tune with what is required in specific situations, with awareness of how our responses are received and their potential consequences. In contrast, when we neglect to concern ourselves with what matters, including to attend to self-care, we risk engaging in empty or potentially destructive busywork.

### ***Responsive Attuning in Pedagogy and Curriculum***

Supporting and challenging students toward responsive attuning to what matters in the fields or professions to which they aspire gives renewed direction for pedagogy and curricula, including in countering fake news and negotiating untruth. Efforts to enable students to become attuned and responsive to what matters demand, in turn, that pedagogy and curricula, themselves, are designed for tuning in and responding accordingly, in promoting such learning among diverse students, as elaborated below. Importantly, as William Blattner points out, “to be tuned in to what matters is not just to ‘detect’ some feature of the situation. It is to be responsive to it, *to be guided by it*.”<sup>67</sup>

### *A Pedagogy of Responsive Attunement*

If it is necessary to be receptive and responsive in this manner, what can pedagogy offer? A key principle follows from Fiumara’s argument that “one of the first ‘cognitive’ effects of listening suggests that there is not much that can really be seen from one point of view, and that parallel perspectives on the same ‘object’ may actually reveal different worlds.”<sup>68</sup> This is evident in the differing perspectives provided by Newtonian and quantum physics, or analytical and Continental philosophy, even in relation to the “same” object of study. Furthermore, it is apparent in the unique experiences and perspectives of each person we encounter, “as one who is absolutely different from myself.”

It is our openness to the varied perspectives, the different worlds our students, colleagues and subject matter bring, that can guide our pedagogy and curricula. This openness enables us, as teachers and students, to avoid simply assimilating diverse others and things into our own pre-existing knowledge

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<sup>67</sup> Blattner, “Anonymity, Mineness, And Agent Specificity,” 56, emphasis added.

<sup>68</sup> Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language*, 43.



systems “from which nothing can escape.” More significantly, it means we can learn from them and harness this multiplicity toward responsive attuning. Through being receptive and susceptible, we can also enhance reflexivity—both individually and collectively—relating to our ways of responding.

Developing respectful, attentive receptivity becomes essential in such an endeavor, not simply telling or explaining. Attentive receptivity with a view to learning from—not simply about—others and things entails yielding to them in their uniqueness. It provides a means of being perceptive in the face of other perspectives and worlds that open before us. This does not imply that all views proffered by others are considered equal, regardless of their basis, implicit values or supporting arguments. On the contrary, informed, critical, respectful challenging and questioning by teachers and among students themselves are essential to responsive attuning, if irrelevance and distraction from what matters are to be negotiated and diminished. Moreover, dialogue of this kind takes seriously the views and perspectives put forward in good faith. It also enables ongoing scrutiny of what matters, how, why and in what circumstances. Nurturing care about what matters can never be imposed, then, by one person on another, as this would be “to take away ‘care’ from the Other.”<sup>69</sup> Instead, its purpose is to expand perspectives and experiences, not coercion to conform.

In supporting such an endeavor, pedagogy involves particular forms of both “what” and “how.” What is to be taught (and learned) concerns deepening practical understandings and expanding perspectives relating to particularities that matter for responsive attuning in being informed, ethical professionals within the field or profession in question. How this teaching occurs requires that teachers embody ways of valuing and responding to the rich wealth of perspectives and worlds that are opened through such attunement. The purpose is not merely to encourage imitation of the teacher by students. Rather, as Iain Thomson explains, “*to teach is to learn in public*, a public learning (to respond) from which other students learn to learn by example.”<sup>70</sup> Through being taught in this way, students can take up or discard ways of being they witness from others. This allows them to contribute to shaping their own ways of being professionals, embodying and making them authentically their own.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 158.

<sup>70</sup> Iain Thomson, “Rethinking Education after Heidegger: Teaching Learning as Educational Response-ability,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48, no. 8 (2016): 847–48.

<sup>71</sup> For elaboration, see Dall’Alba, *Learning to Be Professionals*.



While teachers can direct student learning in meaningful ways, Max van Manen points out that responding tactfully in educational settings can also mean the teacher holds back,<sup>72</sup> if this is what the situation requires in allowing students the necessary time and space for attuning and responding. Pedagogy that is tactful avoids hastening to take over from students, leaving them disengaged or disempowered, when supporting or simply giving space for students' own efforts would be more beneficial for their learning. Heidegger argues that the key task in teaching is "to let learn."<sup>73</sup> Making attuned judgments about what to contribute, when to intervene and when to hold back are inherent to the complexity of tactful pedagogy that is attuned to student learning.

In a context where students regularly encounter fake news, pedagogy has a crucial part to play in directing their attentiveness to particularities that matter, while enabling students to recognize and set aside distracting deception or misinformation.<sup>74</sup> However, directing attention to what matters is no guarantee that students will respond accordingly.<sup>75</sup> This capacity to respond on the basis of tuning in to what matters must also be developed, through attuned pedagogy.

A vital feature of enhancing such responsive attuning among students is that due recognition is given to the enacted and embodied character of tuning in with the purpose of responding. Nurturing a capacity to respond through being attuned or receptive to what matters is not solely a cognitive endeavor; it relies upon practical understandings that are enacted and embodied in meeting the specific requirements of particular situations. This means that responsive attunement is not reducible to knowing and/or doing, but entails a way of being in the world, relating to others and things with reflexivity. It follows that a crucial feature of pedagogy and curricula are that they develop the person in responding with attunement to the social and natural world, as well as knowledge and skills.

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<sup>72</sup> Max van Manen, *The Tact of Teaching: The Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness* (Ontario: Althouse Press, 1991), 149-52.

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 15

<sup>74</sup> Tracy Bowell, "Response to the Editorial 'Education in a Post-Truth World'," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49, no. 6 (2017); Giroux, "Role of Higher Education."

<sup>75</sup> Tara Barnhart and Elizabeth van Es, "Studying Teacher Noticing: Examining the Relationship Among Pre-Service Science Teachers' Ability to Attend, Analyze and Respond to Student Thinking," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 45 (2015); Donna Rooney and David Boud, "Toward a Pedagogy for Professional Noticing: Learning Through Observation," *Vocations and Learning* 12 (2019).

### *Teachers' Expertise and Experience*

What are the implications, then, for the expertise and experience of the teacher? Teachers' expertise and experience become crucial in situations that require tuning in, based on practical understandings, with a view to being guided by this attunement. Such responsive attuning is necessary for cultivating "freedom *for* the truth," in contrast with the misinformation and deception that is fake news. In particular, as alluded to above, teachers' expertise and experience of central concerns and challenges in the field or profession can helpfully direct students' learning toward responsive attunement to what matters, while encouraging reflexivity. For instance, when political science students are considering changes to national policy to boost the economy or international standing, teachers may encourage them to consider less immediately apparent and unintended effects, including impacts upon neighboring countries or regions. Alerting and attuning students to what matters for the field in question has the potential to expand their perspectives on possible ways of being the professionals in question. Biesta describes the process by which teachers expand students' perspectives and experiences in profound ways as "truth giving" in the sense of "existential truth, that is, truth that matters for one's life."<sup>76</sup>

Further, when teachers tune in through careful attention to students' learning experiences, struggles and achievements, this can bring additional breadth and novel perspectives to what is being studied, for both students and teachers. For instance, in pointing to features of a music student's creative interpretation of a well-known melody, a teacher can engage in "public learning," while drawing students' attention to innovative ways in which to make music with familiar material. Also, if an aspiring teacher seems compelled to "fill the silences" while teaching, an experienced teacher may take an opportunity to note the value of pauses and silence for providing students with space for attuning and responding. Witnessing another's struggles or achievements can make students and teachers aware of features of course material or professional practice that were previously taken for granted or even overlooked. While these opportunities may be readily available when dealing in person with a manageable number of students in laboratory classes, seminars, or art and architecture studios, attentiveness to struggles and achievements in large or online classes is also possible. For instance, the questions students pose, as well as their responses to tasks or questions, including in assessable work, reveal their uncertainties and accomplishments. The teaching-learning

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<sup>76</sup> Gert Biesta, "Receiving the Gift of Teaching: From 'Learning From' to 'Being Taught By'," *Studies in Philosophy of Education* 32 (2013): 450.

process can be, then, a genuinely collaborative and forward-looking endeavor that values difference, so students and teachers can learn from each other.

### *Responsive Attunement in the Curriculum*

Curricula have a key role, too, in making explicit, and directing attention to, the centrality of tuning in to what matters for responding accordingly. It is necessary that such a focus on responsive attunement is integrated throughout an educational program, not simply included sporadically in few or disparate courses. This means educational goals signal this focus, while the teaching and learning activities for each course or unit of study, in an integrated manner, are directed to attuned responding within the field or profession in question. Given the impact of assessment on student learning,<sup>77</sup> it is necessary that assessment reward responsive attuning to what matters in being and becoming professionals. Through directing attention toward responding on the basis of tuning in to what matters, assessment confirms its importance for student learning and professional practice, beyond rhetoric. When a focus on responsive attuning is maintained from program goals, through curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment, it signals to both teachers and students that this is where the priorities lie.

Integrating this focus throughout an educational program entails promoting receptivity to particularities among others and things in the social and natural worlds, as a means to being guided to respond in tune with what matters in specific fields or professions. In contrast to a curriculum structure that highlights component parts of a field of study, this places emphasis squarely on being and becoming responsive, attuned, reflexive professionals within the context of diverse communities and sociomaterial settings. As enactment of practice varies with settings and circumstances, including over time, the purpose and significance of actions and activities must be given careful, critical consideration and continually reevaluated with attuned judgment. Prior and ongoing exposure to other views, experiences and worlds can contribute to developing capacity for such attuned judgment and evaluation, while assisting in discerning, taking stock of, and negotiating misinformation.

### ***Concluding Reflections***

In introducing this article, I pointed to some consequences of a proliferation of fake news, including erosion of the stabilizing functions in societies of trust

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<sup>77</sup> George Brown, Joanna Bull and Malcolm Pendlebury, *Assessing Student Learning in Higher Education* (London: Routledge, 1997).

and truthfulness, as well as threats to the authenticity of human existence. As the artist and activist, Ai Weiwei, has pointed out, “without trust, people’s immune system against lies breaks down. In the public sphere, all belief becomes ungrounded belief. Statements float like clouds, beyond truth or falsity.”<sup>78</sup>

In countering the challenges of fake news and negotiating untruth, in this article I argued that higher education has a crucial contribution to make to societies, through nurturing a capacity for concerning ourselves with what matters. More specifically, I highlighted responding to particularities of importance on the basis of tuning in, when called upon to respond to diverse others and disparate things in the social and natural worlds. A contribution of this article relates to proposing the notion of responsive attunement in providing renewed direction for pedagogy and curricula in these uncertain times. A second contribution is in exploring what responding through attunement can mean for higher education settings, both as a focus for learning by students and a *modus operandi* for teachers. Through expanding possible ways of being attuned and responsive to who and what addresses us, higher education holds promise for educating informed, ethical professionals. In a continually dynamic world, it thereby provides a way forward for reinforcing the stabilizing functions of trust and truthfulness in the sense of justifiable knowledges. There are, however, risks involved in this complex, arduous and potentially rewarding endeavor. As Todd cautions, “the very force of education to change lives and instantiate new modes of relationality is where its dangers as well as its aspirations lie.”<sup>79</sup> While acknowledging this caution, responsive attunement as explored in this article provides a means of cultivating a capacity to respond in tune with situations as they emerge. This encourages being grounded in the present, while coping and flourishing in a world in flux into the future, as we strive for a socially and ecologically just world.

### ***Acknowledgments***

I am grateful to Jon Nixon, Carmen Oltmann, and anonymous reviewers for thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this article.

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<sup>78</sup> Weiwei Ai, “China Is Ill, But It Goes Much Deeper Than the Coronavirus,” *Guardian Weekly*, March 13, 2020, 46.

<sup>79</sup> Todd, *Learning from The Other*, 6-7.

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