



UBUNTU AND BUDDHISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

AN ONTOLOGICAL (RE)THINKING

David W. Robinson-Morris



Ubuntu and Buddhism in Higher Education

Ubuntu and Buddhism in Higher Education theorizes the equal privileging of ontology and epistemology toward a balanced focus on “being-becoming” and knowledge acquisition within the field of higher education. In response to the shift in higher education’s aims and purposes beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, this book reconsiders higher education and Western subjectivity through southern African (Ubuntu) and Eastern (Buddhist) onto-epistemologies. By mapping these other-than-West ontological viewpoints onto the discourse surrounding higher education, this volume presents a vision of colleges and universities as transformational institutions promoting our shared connection to the human and non-human world, and deepens our understanding of what it means to be a human being.

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Ubuntu and Buddhism in Higher Education

An Ontological (Re)Thinking

David W. Robinson-Morris

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For Jo Ann and Josephine.

And the ancestors—genetically, spiritually,
academically—who dreamt, hoped, and prayed me to
this space/time; all giants on whose shoulders I stand.



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1 Turning Reality on Its Head, (Re)Imagining a New Way

All writing is situated within the world, that is, history, reality (everyday lived experiences), and futurity are ever present—each word, phrase, and sentence is an amalgamation of a space/time trinitarian onto-epistemology intricately woven into the very matter of the communicatory medium (Derrida, 1972/1981). This inquiry is no exception. At the time of writing, the world seems to be in crisis, or perhaps my awareness¹ of the physical, spiritual, ontological, and epistemological violence has been heightened as a result of the thinking and rethinking inherent in becoming-Ph.D., in becoming more human; at any rate, it seems that we are besieged from all sides by anti-intellectualism, totalitarian political conservatism, partisan politics, and a complete disrespect for the personhood of every individual. Over the past year, this country has experienced what can only be described as a year of killing, which among other things reveals—no, necessitates—a different way of being. I argue, the murders of unarmed people of color at the hands of American law enforcement officers—i.e. Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, and too many more to name, but whose names must be spoken and most definitely deserved to be known—the mass shootings in schools and places of worship across the country; the kidnappings and religious massacres in Nigeria, the attacks of September 11, genocide, slavery, racism, war, colonialism, sexism, xenophobia, poverty, and homophobia are all symptoms of the same “dis-ease” (P. Hendry, personal communication, May, 7, 2015). This “dis-ease” (P. Hendry, personal communication, May, 7, 2015), this crisis at its core, is found the symptoms of a deficit in understanding our shared humanity or a failure in knowing we “are not, in fact, the ‘other’” (Toni Morrison, 1989, p. 9). These events “have a way of imposing themselves” (Waldron, 2003, p. 145); as we watch the nightly news, read the daily paper, and browse various digital news sites we are bombarded with images, “with the multiple faces of human evil and suffering,” and one could speculate that each of us, unconsciously, fears “an inescapably inhumane reality” (Waldron, 2003, p. 145). Indeed, to quote Shakespeare (1611/2004), it may appear that “Hell is empty, /and All the devils are here” (1.2.214–215); however,

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understanding the universe as pantareic² compels us toward radical hope (Lear, 2008), which sets in motion a new “being becoming” (Ramose, 2002, p. 233)—an onto-epistemological metamorphosis,³ which will require not incremental adjustments to thinking and doing, but a serious transmutation of Western subjectivity, a new definition of self. The convergence of Buddhism from the East and *Ubuntu* from Africa ushers in a new way of thinking the Western subject, metamorphosing the Western subject into the reconceptualized Being-Holon.

William Waldron (2003), writing on the possibility of combining the Buddhist notion of subjectivity with evolutionary science to understand the mess we now find ourselves in, posits, the ills of humanity are caused by a false human understanding of self—of the “I” that “we” become. In consonant with Buddhist and *Ubuntu*⁴ thought, he argues human suffering is the result of the “construction of and a deep-seated attachment to our sense of a permanent identity, what we mistakenly take to be a unitary, autonomous entity, independent of and isolated from the dynamically changing and contingent world around us” (Waldron, 2003, p. 146). This dominant view of the self, the “I” that we speak in the West runs counter to the Buddhist perspective, which holds we are all “ever-changing conglomerates of processes (*skandha*) formed in self-organizing patterns that are ever open, like all organic processes, to change, growth and decay based upon the natural functions of assimilation, interpenetration and dissolution” (Waldron, 2003, p. 147). Similarly, *Ubuntu* notions of the subjectivity knocks the independent and autonomous Cartesian subject off kilter by reinforcing “[t]he ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance” (Eze, 2010, p. 191). In short, through Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, we come to understand that we are beings deeply interconnected, (re)created through and in dynamic interaction with the universe (and all it encompasses), and always in the process of being-becoming. Again, I argue, the West’s misguided understanding of self, our interconnectedness and interdependence, is cause to the litany of inhumane effects that plague our existence.

We have failed, I argue, in the collective memory of humanity, to remember our interconnectedness, our shared being as human (Waghid, 2014). We—the global “we”—desperately need a dialogue on humanity; we need a dialogue on what it means to be a human being. If Nelson Mandela’s much quoted assertion, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Nobel Peace Prize, 1993) rings with any truth, then it is within the hallowed halls of the academy—the training ground of future educators, politicians, lawyers, doctors, religious, law enforcement officers, policy makers, and leaders of the world—that provides an opportune setting to dialogue on, to be, and to model our shared humanity. Educators, who perhaps are more powerful than armies, who by their example and sole utilization of the power

of voice and pen, can set about building a community—a culture—that values individuals over machines, ideas over manufactured products, and the needs of the community over our own narrow self-interest (Slattery, 2013). What, then, is the role of higher education institutions—professors, administrators, and student affairs professionals—in providing a rich educative environment conducive for human being-becoming? In this context, being-becoming can be defined as the rhizomatic formation of self, whereby the multiplicity of self in communion with other selves is always perpetually caught up in lines of flight through and emerging from ruptures and fissures created under the influence and pressures of socio-cultural, spiritual, and biological variables (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Tanaka, 2012).

Education, like life, is complex and chaotic; “the slightest perturbation has a significant impact on future patterns” (Slattery, 2013, p. 271). At the same time, education, or rather the act of and reflection on being educated, allows us to recognize just how unique and special we really are, which causes us to both bemoan that we are different only to then eventually celebrate our differences and those of others. “It is the disequilibrium [of schooling] itself that provides opportunities for creative tension and self-reflection” (Slattery, 2013, p. 271); this “creative tension” between the “what is” and “what can yet be” is the naissance of true education. What, then, is the goal of education in a complex, chaotic, and ever-evolving world rife with competing interests and global strife? Dewey (1902) asserts, “[n]ot knowledge or information, but self-realization, is the goal. To possess all the world of knowledge and lose one’s own self is as awful a fate in education as in religion” (p. 9). In the postmodern viewpoint, education should bring humanity into the fullness of itself and in right relationship with one another through an interrogation of power and discourse. More importantly, education should assist in developing the tools through which we are thereby able to fully express our soul’s purpose (Dewey, 1902; Slattery, 2013). Moreover, the endeavor of education “encourages chaos, nonrationality, and zones of uncertainty because [of] the complex order existing here in the place where critical thinking, reflective intuition, and global problem solving will flourish” (Slattery, 2013, p. 272). Education, given its permeability, flux, chaos, and complexity, “can improve in the midst of turmoil” (Slattery, 2013, p. 273); much like the universe it is “engaged in endless motion and activity; in a continual cosmic dance of energy” (Capra, 1975 as cited in Slattery, 2013, p. 275). Education should both enhance and value the human experience, while seeking to globally improve the human condition.

Background

American institutions are experiencing an erosion of the public trust, including institutions of higher education that have espoused egalitarian

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American principles and practice, in theory, the ideals of equity. Yet, even within the hallowed halls of the academy the juxtaposition of what is spoken and the “operational realities of racism, discrimination, and prejudice have trumped articulations of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Harvey, 2011, p. 3). This tension between the promises of equality and equity for all men and our national history of exclusion and segregation has been at the core of this great experiment called American democracy since its inception. The struggle between the ideals of freedom and epistemological confinement are felt no greater than in American institutions of higher education, heralded as “ethically-rooted laborator[ies] of inquiry where the initiates pursue truth and enlightenment, without regard to ideology, and with unadulterated objectivity” (Harvey, 2011, p. 5); however, in actuality they are held captive by the ideological shackles of the “hidden curriculum” that dominates them at every turn (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008, p. 248).

Historically, institutions of higher education have been complicit in *de facto* and *de jure* segregation and other systems of exclusion, and given the nature of the historical role of higher education within American society, have served as evangelist of the white and male supremacy—institutionalized “othering” (Harvey, 2011). Harvey (2011), in agreement with Dewey (1916) regarding the role of education and democratic citizenry, argues that universities function as ideological filters due to their ability to produce knowledge. In the recent history of the country, higher education has utilized this function and its prominent role in society to promulgate the assertion that people of color and women hold inferior societal status. Today, in both society and within every level of the educational system, we continue to experience the effects of higher education’s past cowardice to traverse the terrain of moral injustice (Harvey, 2011); namely, a deficient understanding of our humanity as a mutual act of creation.

Over the course of the nation’s history and the maturation of higher education, these institutions emerged as the gatekeepers and authenticators of information, and “enjoyed the consequences of the societal maxim which proclaims that knowledge is power” (Harvey, 2011, p. 5). As the procurers and purveyors of knowledge, members of the academy maintained positional authority that allowed them to intellectually justify and rationalize practices that might otherwise be deemed inappropriate or inhumane. “This capability to establish significant qualifying and sorting concepts for the larger society—determining the ‘natural order,’ creating hierarchy, and assigning place, for example—became comfortably lodged in the ivory tower” (Harvey, 2011, p. 5). From their literal ivory tower, institutions composed solely of white academics utilized knowledge—biology and historical facts—to reinforce the doctrine of Western and white supremacy through obviously flawed scholarship. Colleges and universities, as a result of the “ivory tower” posture, took

no responsibility and did not engage in social problems, especially not racial segregation, but rather reinforced institutionalized racism (Harvey, 2011).

Experiencing a shift over the last 50 years, the academy has languidly progressed from an overwhelming “ivory tower” ideological stance to one that recognizes an obligation for higher education institutions to actively engage in resolving the intellectual, financial, and technological problems of our time. Harvey (2011) posits that the commitment to resolving social problems is lacking, namely with respect to the education of minorities and the un-education of the so-called majority, “there exists some moral responsibility [of the academy] to see that minorities [and all the marginalized of the society] take their rightful places in an educated society. [The academy is] failing on that social objective, failing badly” (Tierney, 1991, as cited in Harvey, 2011, p. 10). In the long view of history, we have progressed much; however, given the current socio-political cultural milieu (the unabashed institutional and societal assault of/on black and brown bodies) it is clear we are feeling the tremors and lasting effects of the deeply ingrained stereotypes accepted and promoted by the nation’s ideological filters. Therefore, Harvey (2011) argues:

The higher education community has an obligation to help continue the forward movement toward a less racially prejudiced society, and it should seize the opportunity to help the nation progress toward fuller implementation of some of its most cherished goals. The responsibility to help implement positive change is also rooted in two inherent dimensions that coexist within the academy: ethical responsibility and practical responsibility.

(p. 10)

There is an overarching ideology that institutions of higher education are bastions of ethical and moral fortitude (Harvey, 2011). Higher education institutions must comprehend and accept their responsibility to create a positive future for society. Rather than just serving as an institution that sorts, certifies, and concentrates power within certain classes of the population, higher education must foster a diverse, racially, and culturally sensitive society (Harvey, 2011).

Recognizing our nation’s troubled past and present, the complicity of institutions of higher education, and the fact that the demographic composition is rapidly shifting—by 2050 no single racial group will be a majority of the country’s population—the importance of an onto-epistemological recalibration within colleges and universities takes on not only a moral importance, but the importance of nation building and futural global socio-anthropological paradigm shifting (Harvey, 2011; Kuhn, 1962/2012). Higher education institutions, Harvey (2011) stresses, have a moral obligation to recalibrate the moral compass of the academy

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and recognize the need for “increased diversity within the higher education community as a means of generating principled, constructive . . . positive changes in the larger society” (p. 9). Offering practical solutions for higher educational institutions to transform their hollow words into solid action, Harvey (2011) suggests:

First, [institutions of higher education] must identify, cultivate, enroll, support, and graduate substantially larger numbers of students from the underserved communities and prepare them to go forward to exercise leadership both within their respective groups and the larger society. Second, they must create meaningful academic and social opportunities for white students to engage and interact with their peers of color. The successful deracialization of American society is contingent on an informed acceptance by these students that in an evolving social order, their race offers them an equal, rather than favored, role for participation and advancement. Third, faculty members from underrepresented groups must be present in numbers that extend beyond mere tokenism so that a clear message is conveyed to all students that members of all races have the intellectual capability to hold such positions, and fourth, curricula must be broadened to debunk the myth that only people of European ancestry have been architects of and contributors to the development of American society, and acknowledge that there are antecedents to this civilization in various locations around the globe, not simply in Western Europe.

(p. 12)

In agreement with Harvey (2011), Eric Ashby contends that higher education institutions “must be sufficiently stable to sustain the ideal which gave it birth and sufficiently responsive to remain relevant to the society which it supports” (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011, p. 4). While Harvey (2011) offers curricular and policy solutions to make right historical wrongs, Ruthanne Kurth-Schai (1992) argues, “the primary barriers on the path to equity [are] philosophical rather than material or technical in nature” (p. 147 as cited in Pinar et al., 2008, p. 288). In that spirit, we turn to the philosophical questions of human subjectivity, of humanness, and the role of higher education institutions in bringing to conscious awareness our shared humanity (Kincheloe, 2004).

Why Higher Education?

A university, proclaims Barnett (2011), “has *being* [emphasis in original]” (p. 13). He continues, “A university has possibilities; and they are infinite. It has multiple options. Each university could be other than it is” (Barnett, 2011, p. 13). It is the possibilities of this *other-than-ness* of

higher education that begs to question what it might become. Following Harvey (2011) and Barnett's (2011) assertions, if higher education serves an ideological filter that (re)produces dominant ideology through the "silenc[ing] and marginalization of ideas and voices," (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 249) then it also contains the possibility and the ability to *be* differently—to resist oppressive ideology, to usher in a new order (Pinar et al., 2008). Further, Giroux asserts that curriculum and ideology, in particular, structures the unconscious of students (Pinar et al., 2008) and Apple (2013) holds that we are the result of ideology and even now we are under its spell. If the logic holds true, then it is on this battleground of American higher education, where education—the hidden curriculum—most deeply impacts "the unconscious . . . the site where social meanings and practices are negotiated *prior to* and *simultaneously with* any activity of the unconscious agent [emphasis my own]" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 282). It is not only within the hallowed halls of the academy, but the ruckus and clamoring of the student union, the exuberance of the athletic facilities, and the torporific acumen of the boardroom where we can begin to resist the imprisonment of modernist, neo-liberal ideology that dominates the educational landscape (Apple, 2013). The impacts of such a resistance are best exemplified in Kuhnian discourse regarding paradigm shifts, in which Kuhn (1962/2012) asserts that paradigms shifts are revolutions catalyzed and maintained by agents of change. Redistributing Kuhn's discourse from scientific revolutions to the context of an intended ontological revolution, we glean,

when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them. Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before. . . . We may want to say that after a revolution scientists are responding to a different world.

(Kuhn, 1962/2012, p. 111)

Similarly, in an ontological revolution, we may say that humans are being-becoming differently in the world. The resistance inherent in the perturbation of philosophical inquiry provides the energy necessary to initiate the paradigm shift within higher education discourse and practice. Ideas precede action, so it is through the dialogical engagement of discourse (the idea) from which an ontological and epistemological metamorphosis will proceed (Kuhn, 1962/2012; Freire, 1970/2000). Through a collective and intentional praxis⁵ of "a pedagogy of possibility," one which is 'not yet but could be if we change in the simultaneous struggle to change both our circumstances and ourselves' (Simon, 1987, p. 382 as cited in Pinar et al., 2008, p. 263), higher education institutions can begin to change the world as it itself is being changed.

Statement of Problem

Dewey (1938/1997) contends, “The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without” (p. 17). Adding to Dewey’s (1938/1997) debate within educational theory, the debate on the nature and purpose of American higher education has raged on from the founding of Harvard in 1636 to the modern day founding of online colleges and universities (Thelin, 2011). However, the ideas espoused in this study regarding education as an endeavor of human edification, what some term liberal education, suffered a new attack in 1967 (Berrett, 2015). On February 28, 1967, then-Governor Ronald Reagan forever altered the discourse of American public higher education. Dan Berrett (2015) recalls:

California still boasted a system of public higher education that was the envy of the world. And on February 28, 1967, a month into his term, the Republican governor assured people that he wouldn’t do anything to harm it. ‘But,’ he added, ‘we do believe that there are certain intellectual luxuries that perhaps we could do without,’ for a little while at least.

‘Governor,’ a reporter asked, ‘what is an intellectual luxury?’

Reagan described a four-credit course at the University of California at Davis on organizing demonstrations. ‘I figure that carrying a picket sign is sort of like, oh, a lot of things you pick up naturally,’ he said, ‘like learning how to swim by falling off the end of a dock.’

Whole academic programs in California and across the country he found similarly suspect. Taxpayers, he said, shouldn’t be ‘subsidizing intellectual curiosity.’

(para. 3–5)

Reagan’s “intellectual curiosity” comment was a direct blow to liberal education and the belief that education within American universities and colleges, in particular, served not as job training institutions, but environments for the purpose of intellectual development—the place for the better making of men and women, the advancement of democratic citizenship (Berrett, 2015).

Reagan’s presidency in the 1980s, bound with a national economic crisis, would see the obtainment of education shift from intellectual pursuit to technical mastery in pursuit of a job (Berrett, 2015). Berrett (2015) writes similar to our current educational discourse, “Free market ideas permeated higher education” (para. 17). According to the Freshman Survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles, roughly 72% of the freshmen in 1971 surveyed indicated they pursued a college degree to “develop a

meaningful philosophy of life” as compared to 44.8% of the freshman surveyed in 2013 (Berrett, 2015). Conversely, in 2013, 82% of the freshman surveyed indicated their pursuit of a college degree was catalyzed by “being very well off financially” (Berrett, 2015). These numbers alone indicate a societal shift regarding the pursuit of education, and the view of the university as a marketplace or a “supermarket where students are shoppers and professors are merchants of learning” (AAC, 1985 as cited in Berrett, 2015, para. 41).

Moreover, this shift demonstrates the market-driven educational discourse that shapes and restricts our thinking (Bacchi, 2000). Illustrating the active implementation of policy as discourse, Berrett (2015) writes, “Sometimes, sea changes in attitude start small, gradually establishing assumptions until no one remembers thinking differently. This is how that happened to liberal education” (para. 13).

The Necessitation of an Ontological Turn

Higher education is “now an epistemological regime characterized by fear” (Barnett, 2011, p. 25). Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007), arguing ontological considerations are subordinate to epistemological concerns, explore the necessitation of an ontological turn within higher education. The assertion of the privileging of epistemology at the expense of ontology is very much in keeping with the arguments present by Berrett (2015) regarding the state of higher education post-Reagan. More specifically, Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007) reinforce the critiques of higher education proffered by Heidegger, “who questioned the way in which we ‘increasingly *instrumentalize, professionalize, vocationalize, corporatize, and ultimately technologize* education’ [emphasis in the original]” (Thomson, 2001, p. 244 as cited in Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007). This critique was expressed by Harvey (2011) in his assertion that institutions of higher education are merely socio-economic sorting mechanism. The conception of university as solely a vehicle of knowledge and skill acquisition that can be decoupled from its practical context exemplifies the flawed epistemological notions, which undergirds the mission of many colleges and universities (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007; Barnett, 2011). Universities, with their primary focus on knowledge acquisition, have come to treat learning as unproblematic; more explicitly, Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007) argue, “A focus on knowledge acquisition leaves students to the difficult task of integrating such knowledge into practice” (p. 680). Given these practices within higher education, Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007) arrive at the conclusion that the issues encountered within higher education are ontological. Utilizing Heidegger’s position, they posit,

there is an essential link between education and ontology, in that our approach to the later will be reflected in how we treat the

former: ‘When our understanding of what beings are changes historically, our understanding of what “education” *is* transforms as well’ [emphasis in original].

(Thomson, 2001, p. 248 as cited by Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 681)

Heidegger utilizes phenomenology or our everyday being in the world, to reveal “that our mode of being in the world is that of dwelling with and amongst things and others” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 681). These are also key insights of *Ubuntu* and Buddhism. In other words, knowing and being are interdependent. This understanding of the interdependency of knowing and being “requires that we are open to the possibilities of things” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 681); our situatedness (Heidegger, 1978/1993) indicates that we are “always already” open to the possibilities of being (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 681). Therefore, our knowing arises out of or as a result of being in the world, or situated within a certain historical, socio-cultural context. “In other words, what is—including how things become what they are—and what we know are mutually dependent: ontology and epistemology are inseparable” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 682). To put it another way, Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007) offer:

Our very ‘being-in-the-world’ is shaped by knowledge we pursue, uncover, and embody. [There is] a troubling sense in which it seems that we cannot help practicing what we know, since we are ‘always already’ implicitly shaped by our guiding metaphysical presuppositions.

(Thomson, 2001, p. 250 as cited in Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 682)

Knowing is so intertwined with our being that we cannot escape from it; however, we can be transformed by it (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007; Barnett, 2011, 1993). Knowing has the potential to alter our being and vice versa.

The (Re)Turn

In agreement with St. Pierre (2014), what has been referred to as the ontological turn in the “post” analysis is really just a *return to*, but a return to what? Possibly a return to what Barnett (2011) classifies as the “the metaphysical university” (p. 11). The metaphysical university, the ancient Greek (and concurrently, Persian, Indian, and Chinese) foundation upon which the idea of the university is built upon, deemed “a full encounter with knowledge was felt to open up new forms of human being” (Barnett, 2011, p. 11). More cogent to the arguments offered

in the inquiry, the metaphysical university “came to be understood as an institution through which individuals could come to stand in a new and surer relationship with the world” (Barnett, 2011, p. 11) and one another. This is not the reality of most contemporary universities; again, the focus is primarily on knowledge acquisition for economic benefit (Berrett, 2015; Barnett, 2011, 1993; Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007). So, then how can a university *be* differently?

St. Pierre (2014) argues the conception of being inherited from Descartes, which we have now come to believe as natural, is not so. Foucault (1984/1997) argues for a re-evaluation of the knowing subject. Striking a similar tone, Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007) insist not on a rethinking of the “knowing subject,” but of knowledge as it relates to learning (Foucault, 1984/1997). In their rethinking, knowledge continues to hold a place of importance, but has shifted its focus from transfer to creation, enactment, and embodiment (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007).

In other words, the question for students would be not only what they know, but also who they are becoming . . . learning becomes understood as the development of embodied ways of knowing or . . . ways of being.

(Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 683)

Heidegger’s ontological perspective of being-in-the-world coupled with Dall’Alba and Barnacle’s (2007) aim of learning in the post-secondary environment, mandates an understanding that education is not

merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul [or mind] as if it were some container held out empty and waiting. On the contrary real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it.

(Heidegger, 1967/1998, p. 167 as cited in
Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 684)

It must be noted, our essential being is not the static subject of Cartesian thought, but fluid and ever-changing. Education, in the Heideggerian sense, should lead us to the place of our fundamental being, which “refers to *how we are* rather than *what we are* [emphasis added]” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 685). In the same spirit, Palmer, Zajonc, and Scribner (2010) advocate for a “re-ensoul[ing]” of education (p. 3), that is, the provision of an education that allows both students and teachers to bring all of themselves into the learning environment. It is no doubt that we are a multiplicity; simultaneously teacher and learner, intellectual and emotional, object, and subject. As a start, higher education institutions can “encourage, foster, and assist students, faculty and administration

in finding their own authentic way to an undivided life where meaning and purpose are tightly interwoven with intellect and action, where compassion and care are infused with insight and knowledge” (Palmer, Zajonc, & Scribner, 2010, p. 56).

In agreement with Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007), I call for institutions of higher education to provide an environment for “students to encounter the familiar in unfamiliar ways” (p. 685)—this creation of strangeness allows students to “engage with difference: the possibility that things could be otherwise” (p. 685). To clarify, problematizing taken-for-granted notions leads to new imaginings, new of understandings of how to be and live in the world. Barnett (2005) submits, “the only way, amid strangeness, to become fully human, to achieve agency and authenticity, is to have the capacity to go on producing strangeness by and for oneself” (p. 794). Amid the myriad of theorizations regarding the necessitation of an ontological turn within higher education, Foucault (1984) insists on the consideration of a “critical ontology of ourselves” (p. 50), not

as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.

(Foucault, 1984, p. 50)

I theorize an institutional being-becoming, for an ontological turn within higher education is necessary; however, it must occur in tandem with a reconceptualization of the self. Even while I advocate for and theorize the necessity of an ontological turn within higher education, I understand that at an institutional level there must remain an operational gap between evangelization of ideals and their realization for the university “in-itself” (Barnett, 2011, p. 19) is too a Being-in-the-world. Recognizing this current reality, it could be that the new being-becoming—the ontological turn—must first occur within each human being, then as a community of beings, who are being-doing-thinking differently in the world, institutions of higher education left without a choice are obliged to make the turn—to become institutions *for and with* the world.

The impetus of this study in part is an attempt through discourse to as the Buddhists would say, “turn [our current] reality on its head” (Waldron, 2003, p. 146). In agreement with Hanh (1999) and Waldron (2003),

Our task then, our moral imperative, is as urgent today as it was when Albert Camus (1971, p. 11) expressed it nearly fifty years ago, just as many millions of murders ago: ‘One might think that a period which, within fifty years, uproots, enslaves, or kills seventy million

human beings, should only, and forthwith, be condemned. But its guilt must be understood.’ . . . Human beings make war and kill each other in a way that no other species does, that no other species could, that no other species would. Somehow, we must make sense of it all.
(Waldron, 2003, p. 145)

Yes, if possible, we must make sense of it all, but more importantly, we must disrupt Western meta-narratives, turnover and aerate the soil of the educational landscape, so that the seeds of a new being-becoming and new onto-epistemological understandings are provided the best possible conditions to take root.

Given the magnitude of such a metamorphosis, where do we begin? Beginning at site of traditional knowledge production, this inquiry represents an attempt to turn our current reality on its head, that is, to re-imagine institutions of higher education mired in the muck of today’s inhumane reality into the fertile ground of interbeing (Hanh, 1999), interconnectedness (Eze, 2010; Waghid, 2014), and a place where *cura personalis* in community (care of the whole person) (Ganss, 1991) flourishes and reproduces in the world. Christopher Lasch argues that Americans have become presentistic, so self-involved in surviving the present that, for us: “To live for the moment is the prevailing passion—to live for yourself, not for our predecessors or posterity” (Lasch, 1978, p. 5 as cited in Pinar, 2012, p. 4). How can higher education institutions, microcosms of society, begin to shift the presentistic, individualistic paradigm that plagues our understanding of humanity? In the “contested terrain” (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 55) of higher education, how do we begin to employ “a pedagogy of possibility” (Simon, 1987, p. 382 as cited in Pinar et al., 2008, p. 263)—breaking open the physical, intellectual, and heart space to fully experience and sift through the messiness of our humanness (Pinar, 1975)?

This inquiry refocuses our gaze toward understanding the depth of our humanity, looks critically at the systems and power structures of this world, seeks to always disrupt hegemonic relationships through the practices of self-reflection and introspection, and actively works toward an education that does justice, which I argue is critical to our time (Kincheloe, 1993; Pinar et al., 2008). For too long we have been transfixed by the Western imperialist gaze and controlled by knowledge production that perpetuates our oppression (Foucault, 1977; Kaplan, 1997; Said, 1978; Apple, 2013). It is time for a new philosophical and pedagogical onto-epistemological perspective that advocates for justice, equity, and the liberation of the bodies and minds of the planet’s peoples through a focus first on human becoming. This inquiry employs pedagogies of hope, of the oppressed, of difference, of possibility, of interruption, and social transformation encompassed within the philosophical frameworks of Buddhism and *Ubuntu* to create a new understanding of humanness,