

# Pulled Up Short: Exposing White Privilege

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## INTRODUCTION

The email came from four students of color and one white ally who wanted to discuss their experiences in my doctoral research course. “Can we talk?” they asked. Their request wasn’t entirely surprising. I had sensed tension in class and was glad the students reached out to me. I didn’t think anything serious was going on. Still, the prospect of our conversation was unnerving.

When we met, one student began: “When I speak, especially about privilege and power, people look at me blankly or nod their heads and continue talking as if I hadn’t spoken.” Another recounted how his heart sank when a white classmate explained, “Marginalized voices are my subjects. I want to study them.” When asked whether it would be possible to regard marginalized students as fellow inquirers rather than as objects to study, the classmate replied: “If I do that, I worry my research won’t be published.” Another white classmate wondered: “Who counts as marginalized anyway? Doesn’t the educational system marginalize parents, for example?” Story after story poured out about how white peers dismissed, ignored, and occasionally rebuked the perspectives of the students who were sitting around my office table.

“Do I behave this way?” I asked, trying to quell the butterflies in my stomach.

“No,” they assured me. “The problem is with our peers.”

Maybe. But as their teacher, I wasn’t off the hook. I suddenly apprehended with gut-wrenching clarity that the problem in my class concerned white privilege. How could I have been so blind to a dynamic that was happening right before my eyes?

I had to do something. I wasn’t sure what.

Sensing my hesitation, one of the students reached into her bag and produced a stack of articles. “Are you familiar with these authors?,” she asked. “I recommend them.” Leafing through the pile, I saw familiar names: Barbara Applebaum; Kathy Hytten and John Warren; Cris Mayo; Audrey Thompson. I was too embarrassed to tell my students that I had attended many PES conferences with these respected scholars. But I had not read their work. “It’s interesting,” I thought, “but it doesn’t apply to *me*.”

Of course, the work *did* apply to me. I stumbled through the rest of the week, shell-shocked but nonetheless clear that I had to address the racial tension in my class. I read the articles my students gave me. I consulted with colleagues at my institution who focus on anti-racist pedagogy. I started monitoring small group discussions and had follow-up meetings with some of the students. The class improved. My life as a teacher and human being also improved, although in ways I could not have imagined at the time.

These events occurred twelve years ago. Since then, I have changed how I approach teaching. For instance, I developed a new class: “Social Justice, Social Science, and Qualitative Research.” I joined a group of faculty colleagues who facilitate colloquia that address equity and social justice in education. I now call my “Introduction to Educational Philosophy” course, “Introduction to *Western* Philosophies of Education.” Recently, I supervised a doctoral dissertation that convincingly argued that improving education for indigenous and white students requires de-colonizing conversations, not inclusive curricula.<sup>1</sup> Twelve years ago, I did not know, and did not care to know, anything about “de-colonizing” education.

I have also started experiencing what I call, “micro-awakenings;” flashes of discomfiting insight into how I am implicated in a network of everyday practices that are systematically normed to privilege white people. How could I have been so callous to the fact that my favorite musical, “Oklahoma,” erases indigenous experience? How could I have failed to appreciate that, for many black mothers, working outside the home is a necessity, not a choice? What does the term “non-Hispanic white” mean? Are Hispanics white?

My understanding of white privilege continues to grow clearer. Nonetheless, my blind spots with respect to race and privilege have not been eradicated. On the contrary: I continue to confront how much my investment in white privilege obfuscates my vision. As recently as last quarter, for example, I learned that some students of color in my research course continue to feel dismissed by their white classmates. I had no idea this was occurring. Reflecting on another course I recently taught, I came to realize that my behavior likely marginalized a student of color. I kind of knew it at the time ... but did nothing.

I do not relay this story simply to share a confessional tale. Rather, I want to use it as a way to do philosophy.<sup>2</sup> In particular, I want to examine two questions. First, why did that conversation with my students twelve years ago interrupt my refusal to acknowledge white privilege and reorient me to try and promote social justice through teaching? Second, does my experience offer any lessons for how educators could help other whites recognize their investment in privilege and work for racial justice?

To examine these questions, I draw on Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer is helpful because he explains what happened in that gut-wrenching moment when my blindness concerning white privilege was disrupted. Gadamer calls such experiences of disruption "being pulled up short."<sup>3</sup> Being pulled up short does not merely interrupt our assumptions about the world, Gadamer contends. This experience also interrupts and alters our self-understanding.

Many scholars maintain that white students must learn to recognize and change structural inequities that sustain white privilege. Gadamer maps a different route. From his perspective, redressing white privilege requires insight into one's own existence as a privileged racial being. Self-insight, in turn, is predicated on engaging in conversations with partners who interrupt one's blindness regarding white privilege. Such conversations require and also promote a particular kind of ethical relationship.

To make my argument, I begin by briefly analyzing the experience of being pulled up short. I then use Gadamer's framework to examine why

conversing with my students provoked me to recognize my own investment in white privilege and why understanding my privileged situation altered my self-understanding and catalyzed me to adopt a social justice approach to teaching. I conclude by considering what my experience suggests about how to educate individuals to be pulled up short around white privilege.

### PULLED UP SHORT

According to Gadamer's ontological view, understanding is a way of existing in the world that characterizes the human condition. In his words, understanding "is the original characteristic of the being of human life itself."<sup>4</sup> We do not step outside of existence in order to understand it. Rather, we understand existence through experiencing life over time. Our past experiences shape how we anticipate the future; our present experiences reshape how we understand the past.<sup>5</sup>

Making sense of life is possible because human beings are born or "thrown" into meaningful contexts, which others already have interpreted. Drawing on the interpretive legacies we inherit, we construe meaning for ourselves. This process occurs primarily through pre-reflective practical engagements with people and things. In other words, we instinctively know or intuit how to get around in various situations. Gerald Bruns explains that pre-reflective know-how signifies initiation into a way of life, being at home in a familiar world.<sup>6</sup>

As a way of being at home in the world, pre-reflective know-how is bound up with our purposes, interests, and concerns. In our dealings with people and things, we implicitly ask ourselves a number of questions, i.e., under these circumstances, what should I do? What do I care about? Am I willing and able to respond? Understanding our situation, in short, entails understanding ourselves. *How* we see the world and *what* we do within it is bound up with *who* we are and *where* we think we are headed. In Gadamer's words, "all such understanding is ultimately self-understanding ... Thus it is true in every case that a person who understands, understands himself [*sich verstehen*], projecting himself upon his possibilities."<sup>7</sup>

The inescapability of pre-reflective understanding poses a dilemma. Inasmuch as understanding is always occurring, then at some level, we must already have understood that which we wish to clarify or explain. How is critical reflection therefore possible? It seems that reflective understanding can only perpetuate and repeat pre-reflective assumptions.<sup>8</sup>

Gadamer disputes the conclusion that understanding is viciously self-referential. While understanding is temporally conditioned, it is not static or self-enclosed. Rather, understanding is like a horizon: situated yet constantly projecting beyond itself.<sup>9</sup> Future understanding—what Gadamer calls “projected” understanding—is never entirely new. Rather, projected understanding remains partially circumscribed by the pre-suppositions it illuminates. Nonetheless, our pre-suppositions can become critically reflective.

Critical reflection becomes possible, Gadamer says, whenever we converse with a partner about a question or problem of mutual concern. Concern can take many forms, including curiosity, anger, or love. The point is that both parties care about the subject at hand. Without mutual concern, there would be no reason to exchange ideas.

While interlocutors share a common concern, their perspective regarding the issue necessarily differs. “One always reads the other from within one’s own time and place,” Bruns explains.<sup>10</sup> We cannot extricate ourselves from our situation or leap into another’s subjectivity through some sort of Vulcan mind-meld. Understanding “is not a mysterious communion of souls,” Gadamer argues.<sup>11</sup> It is not empathy. To presume that we know how our partner feels or that we can understand our partner better than he understands himself is a form of “self-relatedness”<sup>12</sup> masquerading as care.

Even though parties cannot escape their own experience in the world, they can come to understand their partner’s perspective. Both parties consequently will realize insights that previously were unavailable to either of them. Horizons, in short, can broaden and become more critically reflective. Gadamer calls such understanding a fusion of horizons.<sup>13</sup> When horizons fuse, one party does not simply absorb the other’s viewpoint. Neither do parties interrogate

each other to assess the validity of the other's claim. For horizons to fuse, each party instead must be open to the possibility that her partner has something true to say about the subject, which she could not fathom on her own.<sup>14</sup>

Openness to the possible truth of my partner's claim is not merely open-mindedness. Open-mindedness is the propensity to reserve judgment and dispassionately listen to the other's point of view.<sup>15</sup> The kind of openness Gadamer has in mind, however, requires me to *be affected* by what my partner says — to hear his claim as an insight that directly touches my own understanding. The important thing, Gadamer writes, is “not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us ... I must allow [the other's] claim to validity ... in such a way that it has something to say to me.”<sup>16</sup> If I don't permit my partner's claim to affect me — if I treat his perspective as interesting but potentially irrelevant for my own understanding of the issue — I distance myself from the possible truth of my partner's position. More significantly, I fail to recognize that my partner is what Gadamer calls a “Thou,” i.e., a fellow human being whose own existence is inviolable and unique.<sup>17</sup>

When I acknowledge my partner as a Thou, I can appreciate how her perspective differs from mine. More profoundly, I risk the possibility that my partner's position will expose, challenge, and perhaps refute my own understanding in ways I cannot anticipate in advance of actually engaging with her. In Gadamer's words: “Openness to the other involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so.”<sup>18</sup>

Accepting some things that are against me does not require me to abandon my own position or lose consciousness of my “own inalienable Being,” as Gadamer puts it.<sup>19</sup> But acknowledging the truth of my partner's claim *does* require me to affirm my partner as a person whose own views stand over and against my position and who therefore is not subject to my desires or will. Bruns describes Gadamer's Thou as an “other” who “will not be objectified before me.”<sup>20</sup> In Gadamer's words, “The other is not my dominion and I am not sovereign.”<sup>21</sup>

If I recognize my failure to regard another person as Thou, I do not merely achieve an intellectual insight. Rather, this insight disrupts my lived experience; it interrupts and arrests my tendency to appropriate another's perspective, deny his position, and/or dismiss his claim as irrelevant for my own concerns. Living through this disruptive experience destabilizes both my understanding of others and also my self-understanding. Gadamer calls this phenomenon "being pulled up short."<sup>22</sup> Being pulled up short is unsettling. Admitting that another's view may be justified "makes us doubt our own," Gadamer observes.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, being pulled up short can be an opening for critical new insight to emerge. Insight is not simply a matter of seeing something new we previously had missed. We see what we always have seen. But reflective insight negates and reverses pre-understanding; we consequently realize that "something is not what we supposed it to be."<sup>24</sup> Insight is never final or complete. Conversing with another Thou will expose new limitations in understanding and self-understanding. These reversals in understanding can release us, however provisionally, from the grip of unexamined beliefs. The release we experience is "more than knowledge of this or that situation," Gadamer writes. "It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive. Thus insight always involves an element of self-knowledge ..."<sup>25</sup>

In sum, reflective insight, according to Gadamer, requires face-to-face conversations between partners who are open to having the limits of their pre-understanding exposed. Openness is not merely a matter of entertaining my partner's claim. Openness instead requires me to be affected by what my partner says — to allow my partner's challenge to "claim" me, i.e., to pull me up short by exposing limitations in how I understand my situation and myself. I cannot predict or control how I will be pulled up short. Rather than distance myself from my partner or defensively close myself off from the possibility that her claim could be true, Gadamer counsels me to be vulnerable to my partner's challenge, to risk the possibility that her view will provoke me to doubt my own position. While doubt is disorienting, it also makes insight possible. Insight requires me to regard my partner as a Thou, as a separate being who is not irrelevant to my concerns but who instead can affect and alter my existence

and understanding. Without this kind of ethical relationship, reflective insight cannot emerge.<sup>26</sup>

## PULLED UP SHORT: CONVERSING WITH MY STUDENTS

Drawing on Gadamer's notion of being pulled up short, I want to return to my conversation with my students to analyze how and why it disrupted my blindness regarding white privilege, altered my self-understanding, and catalyzed me to change my teaching. Viewed as an experience of being pulled up short, three features of my conversation become salient.

### (1) *Common concern, but from different perspectives*

First, my conversation with my students concerned our mutual situation, i.e., tensions in our class. We brought different perspectives to this issue, however. I intuited tension but assumed it was not serious. I certainly did not see how white privilege was marginalizing students of color. By contrast, the students of color who spoke with me experienced marginalization viscerally; they wanted me to understand how white privilege was operating to marginalize them. In Gadamer's terms, the students wanted my understanding of our situation to become clearer, broader, and more critically reflective. They wanted me to experience a fusion of horizons.<sup>27</sup>

A fusion of horizons requires altering one's own initial understanding of a problem in response to being challenged. Empathy short-circuits this process, Gadamer argues.<sup>28</sup> My students had not read Gadamer. But they intuited his premise that one can only approach another from one's own experience and perspective. Differences therefore are inevitable. Rather than ignore or dismiss our differences in a quixotic quest for empathy, my students challenged my view of our situation.

### (2) *Being affected: disrupting understanding of situations and self*

Second, my students' challenge *affected* me. Listening to their perspective, I experienced how I was "living" the phenomenon of white privilege both inside and outside my classroom. The articles my students gave me, together with my



subsequent consultations with my colleagues, certainly furthered my intellectual understanding of racial inequity and how those who benefit from privilege typically refuse to see it. But this information did not disrupt my blindness and transform my understanding. My awakening instead occurred when my students challenged my self-understanding as a white person.

Many anti-racist scholars argue that white privilege is a social structure that white students must learn to see objectively.<sup>29</sup> On Gadamer's ontological view of understanding, however, white privilege is not simply a social structure. More profoundly, white privilege is also a lived experience, a legacy of networked meanings that white people inherit, which shapes how they understand the world and themselves. Speaking for myself, I was — and continue to be — deeply familiar with the experience of benefitting from white privilege. I knew perfectly well — and still know — how to navigate this situation, how to participate in systems that perpetually privilege whites, myself included.

This pre-reflective way of belonging in the world is particularly hard to breach. Simply learning *about* social structures will not help people “get” it. Understanding white privilege instead requires one to acknowledge that one is refusing to see one's own lived experience. This is unnerving. My students' request to talk with me would not have been unsettling had I not sensed, however inchoately, that my refusal to acknowledge my pre-reflective intimacy with white privilege was about to explode.

### (3) *The students call; I respond*

This brings me to my third and final point. If being affected by my students' challenge exposed my blindness regarding white privilege, then on some level I must have been open to this disruptive experience. I like to think I am open to having my beliefs challenged. But prior to this conversation, being open to disruptive experiences had not helped me recognize white privilege. What prepared me to acknowledge white privilege this time around?

From Gadamer's perspective, this way of putting the question is problematic, because it puts too much emphasis on my own behavior and dispositions. The disposition to be open, Gadamer says, is not a proclivity that individuals

exercise or develop on their own. This disposition instead is awakened when we engage with another human being — a Thou — whose challenge to our own position affects us, i.e., calls us to respond to what our partner is saying by questioning, doubting, and perhaps refuting our own perspective. Being open, we can say, is an experience of call and response, a genuinely ethical form of engagement in which each partner is vulnerable to the other's challenging summons.

To understand why this particular conversation pulled me up short, therefore, it is necessary to consider not only me but also my students and what they did. Challenging my perspective regarding white privilege, my students summoned me to respond to their perspective and let their point of view affect my own. The order of events is important. I did not first understand white privilege and then choose to respond to my students. On the contrary: the experience of responding to my students' call made my understanding of white privilege possible.

Thus, my insight into white privilege arose as a consequence of engaging in an ethical relationship of response-ability with my students. While seeing the racial dynamic in our classroom was disorienting, this insight also appealed to the responsibility I feel as a teacher to create opportunities for my students to learn. Response-ability led to responsibility, in other words.<sup>30</sup> I was my students' teacher. And as their teacher, I had the authority and the resources to take steps to improve our situation. Calling me to respond to their perspective, my students also called me to be the teacher they needed me to be. As long as I ignored, denied, or refused to acknowledge the racial dynamic in our classroom, however, I was not in a position to heed my students' call. As a consequence of responding to my students, the horizon of my understanding now encompasses my self-understanding that I am a privileged white person who exists in a world that is structured to benefit my race.

Responding to my students was not a deliberate decision I made to improve my understanding of race and privilege. Nor did I consciously choose to be affected by my students' challenge so that I would be relieved of my blindness. Rather, I think my propensity to respond to my students was seeded long

ago when I first realized that being a teacher is central to my self-perception. Responding to my students thus clarified my self-understanding and allowed me to become more of the teacher, and more of the person, I have always aspired to be.

In sum, two aspects of this call-and-response relationship were important. First, my students were looking for a response from me. They were calling me to act. Second, my students' summons was addressed to a key aspect of my self-understanding: I was their teacher. In order to respond to them, I had to face my own understanding of what being a responsible teacher requires. And being a responsible teacher required me to acknowledge that my refusal to see white privilege was making me complicit in my students' marginalization. Acknowledging my complicity, I saw that my behavior contradicted who I want to be as a teacher and a human being. I would not have "risen to myself," however, were it not for my students' call to respond to them.

#### EXPOSING WHITE PRIVILEGE: EDUCATING INDIVIDUALS TO BE PULLED UP SHORT

My analysis of being pulled up short concerning white privilege centers on one conversation between four remarkable graduate students of color who took a risk and challenged the blindness of their philosophically inclined white teacher. Does my story provide guidance or insight for other teaching situations, particularly when white teachers initiate conversations about privilege with white students and or with students of various races and ethnic backgrounds?

Initially, the answer seems to be "no." Many anti-racist scholars argue that disrupting white students' self-understanding is unhelpful and may be counter-productive. Some maintain that white students will resist this destabilizing experience; resistance is understandable and perhaps even inevitable. Students whose self-understanding is unsettled when they recognize their investment in white privilege may find that their confidence is so shaken, they withdraw from working to achieve social justice.<sup>31</sup>

Other scholars contend that focusing on self-awareness is misplaced.

Changing hearts and minds will not change policies or laws. Collective political action, not self-insight, is needed to transform institutions and culture-wide assumptions that are systematically structured to privilege whites and oppress people of color.<sup>32</sup>

In short, some scholars argue that disrupting self-understanding may be impossible. Others argue that disrupting self-understanding may be unnecessary. I want to sketch how viewing education through the lens of being pulled up short can help teachers reframe both these concerns.

Let's turn first to the concern that students tend to resist disruptions in their self-understanding. I think this concern is legitimate. In my view, Gadamer does not take it seriously enough. He writes: "The mere presence of the other before whom we stand helps us to break up our own bias and narrowness, even before he opens his mouth to make a reply."<sup>33</sup> I wonder if Gadamer would have made this claim had he tried to teach white students to recognize white privilege.

Nevertheless, being pulled up short offers a way to acknowledge and possibly transform resistance. Encouraging students to share their different perspectives about a concern that they genuinely share could help them see that their own views are welcome and necessary. The concern does not have to focus on racial inequity writ large; students are more likely to engage with a particular case of white privilege that has personal valence for them. The Bok Center at Harvard University provides an example of this strategy. "Look for a relevant meta-issue that the hot moment raises," the Center's guidelines stipulate. Help "all students seek to understand each other's perspective, as a pre-requisite to understanding the subject at all."<sup>34</sup>

Beyond simply airing differences, however, students need to be affected by what their classmates say; they need to allow themselves to be pulled up short by a classmate's challenge and recognize that the other's challenge reveals troubling blind spots in their own position. Yes: being pulled up short is precisely the experience that students are likely to resist. It is possible that in some cases, resistance may be so entrenched, it can't be unsettled — at least not at that particular time or with those particular conversation partners. But in other

cases, resistance could signal that a student is not just evaluating an argument on an intellectual level. Rather, she has been personally affected by her classmate's challenge. In these cases, teachers could consider how to help students learn to appreciate that they need their classmate's challenge to help them clarify their own understanding of an issue. Being affected by one another thus becomes an opportunity to engage in an ethically transformative interaction in which students learn to treat one another as Thou.

Of course, teachers need to think hard about what it means to help students realize that they need each other. White students may need students of color differently than students of color may need whites; students of color are not responsible for teaching their white classmates to acknowledge white privilege. Addressing this important challenge, however, is not a reason to avoid conversations that disrupt students' self-understanding. Rather, it invites teachers to realize a longstanding insight of humanities education: experiencing vulnerability and self-doubt is necessary for becoming more insightful, mature, compassionate, and respectful of others.<sup>35</sup>

The second concern is that cultivating self-awareness is insufficient for transforming social institutions that are structured to promote racial inequity. A 2015 New York Times article illustrates this concern.<sup>36</sup> The story describes an encounter between Hillary Clinton and a Black Lives Matter activist named Julius Jones. Jones challenges Clinton "to bare her soul: 'Now that you understand the consequences, what in your heart has changed?' he asks. 'How do you actually feel that's different than you did before?'" The article then describes Clinton's response: "Mrs. Clinton seems unlikely to be persuaded that extensive self-examination will accomplish much ... 'I don't believe you change hearts,' Mrs. Clinton says, summarizing her basic view of social policy movements. 'I believe you change laws, you change allocation of resources, you change the way systems operate.'"

I appreciate Clinton's perspective regarding the importance of policy. Simply waiting for white people to wake up will not bring about racial justice. In addition to being impractical, focusing on the self-awareness of white people re-centers the quest for racial justice on white experience.

I want to suggest, however, that in addition to being relevant for how people live their lives, transforming self-understanding also is relevant for public policy. Collective political action is enhanced when people learn to engage with each other in ethically sensitive ways. It also is possible that deepened self-insight can change an individual's viewpoint regarding policy. Finally, political action that is uninformed by experiences that challenge and deepen self-insight can be a form of distancing oneself from understanding how racial inequity impacts real people. Engaging in social action does not absolve one from looking at one's own pre-reflective attitudes and behavior. I think this is the point of Jones' challenge to Clinton.

## CONCLUSION

Interrupting students' self-understanding raises difficult pedagogical issues. Examining this experience through a Gadamerian lens, I do not mean to promote strategies that will make it easier for teachers to pull students up short around white privilege. Disrupting self-understanding is fraught. Nevertheless, Gadamer counsels teachers and students not to fear raw first-hand engagements with perspectives that challenge one's own position and make it possible to become a better person.

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1 John P. Hopkins, "Conversations That Matter: Decolonizing the Inclusive Discourse of American Indian Education Reform," (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2015).

2 I am grateful to Audrey Thompson for this insight and for our many deep conversations as I was conceptualizing this address. My thanks also to Dave Tarshes for his helpful comments and editing skills.

3 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 270.

4 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 250.

5 For a helpful discussion of this idea, see Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 37-41.

6 Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 3. Also see Brice R. Wachterhauser, *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 22. Charles Taylor's discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's "habitus" provides additional insight into pre-reflective understanding. See Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 171.

7 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 251. Also see Gadamer's discussion of Aristotelian ethics on pages 310- 312.

8 For an excellent analysis of why hermeneutic understanding is not viciously circular, see Andrew Bowie, "The Meaning of the Hermeneutic Tradition in Contemporary Philosophy," in *Verstehen and Humane Understanding*, ed. Anthony O'Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

9 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301.

10 Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 182.

11 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 292. For Gadamer's argument regarding the limits of empathy, see his criticism of Edmund Husserl and Wilhelm Dilthey on pages 241-242.

12 *Ibid.*, 353.

13 *Ibid.*, 305 and 371. For a nice discussion of Gadamer's fusion of horizons, see Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 30-33.

14 For an excellent discussion of this idea see Darren R. Walhoff, "Friendship, Otherness, and Gadamer's Politics of Solidarity," *Political Theory* 34, no. 5 (2006): 569-593, 580. Also see James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). Gadamer's idea that conversation partners must be open to the possible truth of the other's claim is based on Heidegger's argument that a fore-conception of completeness guides all understanding. See *TM*, 294.

15 Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 184.

16 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 355.

17 See Gadamer's discussion of the Thou in *Ibid.*, 352-355.

18 *Ibid.*, 355.

19 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Future of the European Humanities," in

Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: *Applied Hermeneutics*, eds. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 206.

20 Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 180.

21 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Diversity of Europe: Inheritance and Future," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, eds. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 233.

22 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 270.

23 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Interview: The 1920s, 1930s, and the Present: National Socialism, German History, and German Culture," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, eds. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 152. Also see Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 183.

24 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 349. For Gadamer's full discussion of the negativity of experience see *Truth and Method*, 347-351.

25 *Ibid.*, 350.

26 Hans-Herbert Kögler writes: "*Dialogical interpretation entails a normative idealization, vis-à-vis the other that is built into the process of understanding itself...* By conceptually connecting ethical recognition to understanding, ethics is built into the very condition of possibility of relating to the other as a human agent." See p. 344 in Hans-Herbert Kögler, "Being as Dialogue, or the Ethical Consequences of Interpretation," in *Consequences of Hermeneutics: Fifty Years After Gadamer's Truth and Method*, eds. Jeff Malpas and Santiago Zabala (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 343-367. Compare the ethical dimension of understanding in Gadamer's hermeneutics with Levinas's argument in "Ethics as First Philosophy." See Emanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

27 I have been concentrating on how my own understanding changed to allow a fusion of horizons with my students' perspective. Two of the students who followed up with me after our initial conversation indicated that a fusion of horizons had occurred for them as well. They did not use this terminology, however.

28 For a critique of empathy that resonates with Gadamer's concerns, see Ann Chinnery, "Levinas and Ethical Agency: Toward a Reconsideration of Moral Education," in *Philosophy of Education 2000*, ed. Lynda Stone (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, 2001), 71. For a contrast-



ing perspective, see Derald Wing Sue, *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley, 2015). On page 142, Sue writes that empathy is necessary for understanding and that white guilt compromises empathic ability.

29 The challenge is that white students are encompassed by the social structures they seek to critically interrogate. How therefore is it possible for students to objectively see the situation in which they are immersed? Barbara Applebaum frames this challenge as follows: “Dominant group members need to be prodded into taking a macroscopic view of oppression.” See Barbara Applebaum, “White Privilege, Complicity, and the Social Construction of Race,” *Educational Foundations* (Fall 2003): 5-20, 11.

30 Barbara Applebaum draws on post-structural theory to offer a different view of responsibility. See her analysis of responsibility under complicity in Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

31 See, for example, Kathy Hytten, “The Problem of Misplaced Focus, or More About Me,” in *Philosophy of Education 2005*, ed. Kenneth R. Howe (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 2006), 158-160; and Andrew J. Pierce, “Interest Convergence: An Alternative to White Privilege Models of Anti-Racist Pedagogy and Practice,” *Teaching Philosophy* 39, no. 4 (2016): 507-530. A number of scholars focus on teacher education and argue that disrupting the self-understanding of white pre-service teachers is problematic. See for example, Jenny Gordon, “Inadvertent Complicity: Colorblindness in Teacher Education,” *Educational Studies* 38, no. 2 (2005): 135-153; and James C. Jupp, Theodora Regina Berry, and Timothy J. Lensmire, “Second-Wave White Teacher Identity Studies: A Review of White Teacher Identity Literatures From 2004 Through 2014,” *Review of Educational Research* 86, no. 4 (2016): 1151-1191, especially page 1176. For a contrasting view, see Audrey Thompson, “Tiffany, Friend of People of Color,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no. 1 (2003): 7-29. Drawing on feminist theory, Thompson argues on pages 21-22 that, “growth in understanding [of white privilege] is no guarantee of an enhanced, improved, or better integrated sense of self.”

32 See, for example, Ronald David Glass and Anne Newman, “Ethical and Epistemic Dilemmas in Knowledge Production: Addressing Their Intersection in Collaborative, Community-based Research,” *Theory and Research in Education* 13, no. 1 (2015): 23-37; and Cris Mayo, “Certain Privilege: Rethinking White Agency,” in *Philosophy of Education 2004*, ed. Chris Higgins (Urba-

na-Champaign: University of Illinois, 2005), 308-316.

33 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, eds. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 26. Also see Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Interview: The 1920s, 1930s, and the Present: National Socialism, German History, and German Culture," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, eds. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 153.

34 <http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/managing-hot-moments-classroom>. While the Bok Center guidelines provide suggestions for engaging different perspectives around a common topic, they diverge from Gadamer's ideas in other respects. For example, the guidelines counsel teachers to "Know your biases . . . Every one of us has areas in which we are vulnerable to strong feelings. Knowing what those areas are in advance can diminish the element of surprise. This self-knowledge can enable you to devise in advance strategies for managing yourself and the class when such a [hot] moment arises." Gadamer would counter that self-knowledge is not an individual achievement that can be accomplished in advance of engaging with others who surprise and challenge us. Teachers, no less than students, must learn to be vulnerable to these types of "hot" moments.

35 See, for example, the set of articles on humanities education in *Educational Theory* 65, no. 6 (2015). Also see David Denby, *Great Books: My Adventures With Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

36 Maggie Haberman, "Hillary Clinton, Pressed on Race, Issues Her Own Challenge," *New York Times*, August 9, 2015, <https://nyti.ms/iNkGXL4>