White on White/Black on Black. George Yancy, ed. Lanham, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. Pp.12 + 318. $75.00 h.c. 0-7425-148-03, $29.95 pbk. 0-7425-148-1.

George Yancy writes that he edited *White on White/Black on Black* in order "to get white and Black philosophers to name and theorize their own raciated identities within the same philosophical text. … My aim was to create a teachable text, that is, to create a text whereby readers will be able to compare and engage critically the similarities and differences found within and between the critical cadre of both white philosophers and Black philosophers" (7-8). *White on White/Black on Black* collects together essays by fourteen philosophers—seven identified as white, seven Black—who explore, by turns, their identities, the natures of whiteness and Blackness, and conceptualizations of race more generally.

Contributors to the volume interpret the call to "theorize their own identities" in significantly different ways. A number of the essays use particular moments, events, or ongoing themes in the authors' own lives as focal points around which to philosophize. For example, "Act Your Age and Not Your Color: Blackness as Material Conditions, Presumptive Context, and Social Category," by John H. McClendon III, explores "how Blackness (as a predication of racial identity) plays an instrumental role in my life and how it is linked to the more philosophically (rigorous) considered definition I have of Blackness" (283). Other essays use a feature of the author's identity more as a springboard that moves them quickly to more general analysis of some concept. Crispin Wright's essay "Wigger" starts with Wright's "laying down a few cards" about his own wigger history, but devotes its bulk to an exploration of the emergence of that concept, and a reflection on two specific wiggers. On the other hand, Monique Roelofs, in her essay "Racialization as an Aesthetic Production," quite explicitly rejects the autobiographical approach altogether—and perhaps the very premise of Yancy's call for

papers—because of her skepticism about "the power of white self-declarations…to help decenter whiteness from the grounds of cultural normativity" (112).

The largest plurality of essays in the volume draws theoretical resources from existentialism, phenomenology, and/or psychoanalytic theory—particularly the works of Aimé Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Jean Paul Sartre. The writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, and contemporary philosophers Charles Mills, Naomi Zack, Leonard Harris, Lucius Outlaw, and Lewis Gordon also inform a number of essays.

I noted that Yancy intends this book to be a "teachable text." As luck would have it, I'm reading it while teaching an introductory philosophy course on racism and sexism; notably, I've found myself recommending essays from the book regularly to students in that class. Recently, I suggested Robert Bernasconi's "Waking Up White and in Memphis" to a student writing a paper about the ways her identity—and her privilege—as a white woman changed when she moved from the United States to Germany for a semester. Bernasconi's essay presents an existential reading of *his* move from England to the United States—a move that forced him both to learn about the history of race relations in the United States and to acknowledge the fact that, in the U.S., he was perceived as *white,* not *English.* Bernasconi provided her both with theoretical grist for developing her own idea, and a philosophical model for doing the kind of work she was attempting. Bernasconi's essay is just one of many in the volume that has the capacity to resonate with students who are scrambling to assemble for themselves some resources with which to reflect upon their own racial locations—and to act *from* those locations (with all the complexity that term "from" entails).

One significant merit of this volume as a teachable text is the fact that several of its essays ground unfamiliar readers in central arguments in contemporary race theory, even while

they carry out their own original agendas. Several essays provide framing and orienting discussions about the "nature" (using the term loosely) of Blackness: they include Clarence Sholé Johnson's "(Re)Conceptualizing Blackness and Making Race Obsolescent," Molefi KeteAsante's "Blackness as an Ethical Trope," and "'Seeing Blackness' from Within the Manichean Divide," by Yancy. "Unmasking Through Naming: Toward an Ethic and Africology of Whiteness," by Greg Moses, offers such grounding, in the service of his exploration of whiteness.

As one moves from essay to essay, frequent and dramatic shifts in style can prove challenging to student readers—but challenging in a way I find useful as a teaching tool. Students reading this work will develop their facilities with various kinds of philosophical writing, as they move from essays using deductive, historical argumentation (e.g. the essay by Moses or Robert Birt's "Blackness and the Quest for Authenticity), to an essay such as Janine Jones's "Tongue Smell Color black," that intricately intertwines somewhat experimental autobiographical narrative prose with stark historical detail (descriptions of the life of the "Hottentot Venus"), with more traditional philosophical argumentation.

In considering the volume as a work to be taught in an undergraduate classroom, it's worth noting some other prosaic (but hopefully not petty and caviling) matters. First, not all essays will be conceptually accessible to undergraduates (though most will). There is some considerable variation in the degree to which essays assume readers' knowledge of particular philosophical schools or figures. Second, pieces vary enormously in length, ranging from eight to fifty pages. Such length variation presents a slight, though obviously surmountable challenge for someone using the work as a primary text in a class.

White on White/Black on Black presents readers with an array of illustrations of the way in which philosophizing about or from one's life can, in fact contribute to the living of that life. The book can serve as an invitation to take up the project of theorizing with, through, about, and beyond one's own life; and to consider theorizing as a tool one might take up in one's quest for social transformation.

I wish it had been possible for the philosophers in the volume to respond *to* each other; repeatedly throughout the text, I found myself wondering how Philosopher X would respond to Philosopher Y on some particular matter of race theory. Logistically, I recognize that this would have been difficult—and would likely have required the book to be significantly longer than it is. As it is, the book certainly presents many opportunities for readers (student or otherwise) to imagine such responses for themselves. Indeed, I found myself concocting writing assignments that would ask students to create such responses "on behalf" of the theorists in the book.

Yancy has edited several other books, a number of which focus—exclusively or at least peripherally—upon the project of philosophizing from and with one's own identity. *The Philosophical I* (2002), for instance, is a collection of explicitly autobiographical essays in which various philosophers discuss their coming to existence as philosophers. *African American Philosophers: Seventeen Conversations* (1998) is, as the title suggests, a series of discussions with Black philosophers about contemporary issues in African American philosophy, and their own locations within that field. *White on White/Black on Black* is an important addition to this "identity" work, as well as a useful, intriguingly-designed contribution to the philosophy of race.