

Reply to *Canadian J. Phil.* Commentators on My Memoir¹

I

In order to adequately express my appreciation to Helga Varden,² Jordan Pascoe,³ Myisha Cherry⁴ and Ashwini Vasanthakumar⁵ for their insights, commitment and hard work on this special and very unusual section of the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* focusing on my memoir, *Escape to Berlin*, I begin by laying bare some of the structural underpinnings of this discussion for the benefit of novices in the profession and readers unfamiliar with the workings of academic philosophy in the Anglo-American analytic tradition.

¹ The full title of the memoir is *Escape to Berlin: A Travel Memoir/ Flucht nach Berlin: Eine Reiseerinnerung*, henceforth ETB. All page references are parenthesized in the text and refer to Piper, 2018a. https://adrianpiper.com/edinburgh/books/Escape_To_Berlin/index.shtml.

This Reply was invited by the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* for its *Special Issue on Kant and the "Isms"* (2026), 1-6. It addresses the versions of the commentators' texts sent to me on 27 December 2025 and returned to them with factual corrections of errata on 15 January 2026. Those that remain in the commentators' published texts are listed in footnotes 2-5 below. I withdrew this Reply from the issue pre-publication because I do not knowingly collaborate in or implicitly condone deliberate factual misrepresentation of my work, no matter how flattering, under any circumstances.

² Varden, 2025. All page references are to this version and parenthesized in the text. Errata are at pages 6 ("... of never being deemed to be as good or as worthy as those students whose identities and pedigrees were of the 'right kind' etc." is false, and intentionally fabricated on the grounds that Varden "hear[s] others who report stories on these themes as linking it to their lack of the right identities or pedigree [marginal comment of 29.03.2026]"), 8 ("... filled only with unconditionally loving, caring and emotionally healthy parents etc." is similarly fictive), and 9 ("... who say, just like Piper does, that their human animality is experienced as a kind of cosmic mistake etc." is false: I say no such thing in ETB).

³ Pascoe, 2025. All page references are to this version and parenthesized in the text. Erratum is at page 4 ("... her 2016 assertion that she had 'retired' from being Black" is false: I announced my retirement from being "black" in my 2012 artwork *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, a Moment of Embarrassment* https://adrianpiper.com/edinburgh/news.shtml#September_2012).

⁴ Cherry, 2025. All page references are to this version and parenthesized in the text. Errata are at pages 7 ("... she was already experiencing liver issues" is false [cf. ETB 209]), 9 ("heeves" is not a word in English and does not appear in the text of *Escape to Berlin*), 10 ("She took all the classes etc." is false [cf. ETB 99]; "... wrote a paper questioning the theories etc." is false [cf. ETB 99]; "She also refused to work on topics her advisor persuaded her to pursue etc." ["persuaded" is an achievement verb not an attempt verb, so this sentence is self-contradictory]; "... a bad grade as punishment [a B+ (cf. ETB 99) is hardly a "bad grade" by any measure] ... bad recommendation letters" is false [cf. ETB 105]), 12 ("Piper records a 45-minute mantra etc." is false [cf. ETB 199]; "... Piper continues to assert the schedule and hold them accountable" is false [cf. ETB 215-217]; "But she recognized her responsibility etc." is false and fabricated; "... she refused to come back etc." is false [cf. ETB 281]), 13 ("... that she had seen with other black colleagues etc." is false and misleading [cf. ETB 187]), 16 ("Her friend Jeremy etc." is false). Cherry entitles herself to an excessive degree of fabrication, inaccuracy and selective overgeneralization.

⁵ Vasanthakumar, 2025. All page references are to this version and parenthesized in the text. Erratum is at page 5 ("Piper attributes her ability to avoid these pitfalls etc." is false and nowhere to be found in ETB).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, academic philosophy is a hierarchically structured institution like any other functioning organization. It is powered by ambition and fueled by a concomitantly efficient system of reward and punishment. The overriding aim is professional advancement that progresses up a well-charted series of steps that measure and confer increasing degrees of professional authority, power and peer recognition.

Behavioral conditioning by that system begins when you enter it. When you obey, defer and genuflect to those higher in the hierarchy, you are rewarded with gradual advancement to the next level within it. When you disobey, dispute or resist, you are punished with disapproval, neglect and eventual ejection from the hierarchy altogether – and hence from the institution of academic philosophy. I describe these processes in detail, as I personally experienced them, in Chapters 4 (“Hemlock”) and 5 (“Lip Service with a Smile”) of ETB (97-165).

If previously, you already had been inducted into such a hierarchy – perhaps in your family, or in school, or in your sports or social life, then this process of induction into the institution of academic philosophy will, indeed, seem unsurprising and familiar and you will more easily adapt to it. In fact you may not even notice it, if your activities all naturally fall well within the bounds of acceptability circumscribed by that hierarchy.

If you have not previously been inducted into it, as was the case for me, then the process of induction into the institution of academic philosophy will be very surprising. Neither of my parents was well suited to provide guidance on how to navigate this process. My father’s training as a lawyer disposed him to argue his cases assertively and persistently but impersonally and without rancor in the courtroom, while my mother’s family, upbringing and Igbo heritage disposed her to view and treat others as her equals regardless of their stature or social status.⁶ I inherited those traits of character from them and my upbringing did nothing to rein them in. I describe the effects on me of these factors in Chapters 2 (“Me”) and 3 (“Words”) of ETB (35-95).

They meshed well with the Socratic tradition of rational and disinterested dialogue that the field of philosophy teaches its students as they begin their induction into it. In practice, however, this ideal is the very antithesis of the institutional hierarchy that in fact dominates it. If you are already familiar with and comfortable in such a hierarchy, it is easier to make your peace with this one. If you

⁶ I describe some of the blessings of an Igbo heritage in Piper, 1996.
<https://adrianpiper.com/docs/WebsiteNGBK3Hats.pdf>.

want to survive in the field, you had better find a way to do that in any case. For denizens of the field, these observations are truisms. It is possible to read ETB as a first-person account of my dogged but ultimately unsuccessful attempt, over a period of 30 years, to survive within the constraints of the professional hierarchy that defines academic philosophy – against my colleagues’ dogged and ultimately successful efforts, beginning in graduate school, to root me out. Perhaps that journey may be of some interest to those who remain.

II

The four philosophers who have offered their comments on ETB for this special edition of the *Canadian J. Phil.* share certain salient features in common. None of them are self-identified men, although in the footnotes some of the commentators thank male colleagues for their help. This is noteworthy in a field that has gradually become more respectful of and attentive to the practical applications of impartiality, an ideal to which it has always given lip service. Yet here as elsewhere, women have tended to be in the vanguard in fighting for progressive change in the conservative conventions of the profession. Although I would have welcomed the reactions to ETB of male colleagues in academic philosophy, to my knowledge not a single one of them has dared to utter a peep in print.⁷ All four women who have chosen to comment publicly on ETB are of subsequent generations, and I do not have professional or personal relationships with any of them. All four have impressive publication records in academic philosophy, and all are perforce warriors who have ably survived in the field.

So all four have come to terms with the field’s intrinsic disconnect between its radically democratic ideal of disinterested rational dialogue among equals and its crudely primitive, brazenly self-interested system of professional reward and punishment. None of the commentators have as yet attained the hierarchy’s fickle and precarious pinnacle of professional recognition that might free them from its demands altogether, at least for a time. That means that all are professionally empowered to varying degrees on the one hand; but on the other, still subject to the vicissitudes and vagaries of more powerful senior colleagues whom they might inadvertently antagonize while innocently pursuing their chosen professional projects. They must be careful not to encroach on the territories or provoke the

⁷ My exchange with the *New York Review of Books* was illuminating in this regard. First they requested a review copy of the original English-German version of ETB. Upon being reminded of this six months later, they replied that after reading it, the potential reviewer (identified to me only as “he”) had decided not to review it.

anxieties of others in a position to retaliate against them, lest they destroy their own professional futures in the process.

Jordan Pascoe gives voice to the resulting pervasive climate of fear:

[I]t's not just that institutional betrayal can be silencing, but that it can lead to sidelining and erasure, that one's contributions will simply be sidestepped, and thus not passed down to the next generation of scholars, even if they work directly in the areas where one has painstakingly carved out space. In this era of autocracy and institutional complicity, this is a chilling warning to those speaking out, a reminder that the illusions of meritocracy will not protect you or your legacy (6).

Pascoe's remarks refer specifically to what I sacrificed in order to escape the menacing environments I personally encountered in the field, but they have broader application to the brutalities we all must navigate in academic philosophy. In commenting on my professional trajectory, Helga Varden also notes "the crucial importance of learning when to let go, even if it means leaving the philosophy department, (the) university (life), or even the country" (6), a choice between self-respect and capitulation which all members of the field must confront eventually. And Ashwini Vasanthakumar alludes indirectly to the practical consequences of this climate of fear in her meditation on the value of making compromises:

Such compromises are inevitable and should not always attract moral disapprobation. Integrity, like much else, is a 'burdened virtue' in conditions of oppression. Protesting every wrong and insult might exhaust one's resources, distracting one from one's long-term goals and interests, and only oppressing one further. Subordinated individuals must learn what battles to pick, how to calibrate their responses, and when to bite their tongues (4).

Yes, precisely. Like Pascoe's and Varden's, Vasanthakumar's observations are aimed at my particular experiences in academia.⁸ But all three observations apply across the board to all academic philosophers. I map this ever-present professional minefield in ETB (particularly Chapter 4, "Hemlock," at 97-131).

In this minefield, only the players occupying the pinnacle of the hierarchy at a particular moment are not subordinated individuals in Vasanthakumar's sense; for all the rest are dependent on their superiors for their continued survival or flourishing in the profession, whether or not they realize it. If they do not comply, whether spontaneously or with forethought, they will not be promoted; or their

⁸ They are particularly relevant to the professional choices I describe in Piper, 2019. https://adrianpiper.com/docs/Piper2019PhilosophyEnRouteToReality_IWP4.2.pdf.

partner will not get tenure; or they will not be invited to present at a prestigious conference in their area of specialization; or their research will be plagiarized by desperate senior colleagues on the prowl for original arguments; or the referee reports on their book manuscript from a prestigious publisher will recommend rejection; or their paper will not be accepted for publication by a prestigious journal in the field; etc.; etc.

III

The *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* is one of those prestigious journals in the field. It has arranged to publish these four sets of comments on my memoir and invited me to reply to them. Yet ETB is not a work of academic philosophy, and neither Varden, nor Pascoe, nor Cherry nor Vasanthakumar write about it as though it were. To be sure, Varden says of it that

the book does philosophy in a new way. On the one hand, the book integrates Piper's personal, philosophical, and artistic journey, including by letting us see photographs of her life and reading or seeing reprints of her artwork along the way. [...] On the other hand, it is often, appropriately, and in many different ways, deeply funny (2).

I agree that ETB is philosophical in its approach to my life story, in that it reflects from a critical distance on the philosophical implications of my circumstances and self-critically interrogates my behavior and life choices. It is also true that in all of my writings, I am always glad to crack a good joke about such matters wherever I can find one.

Yet these attributes themselves are departures from the values and standards that traditionally define academic philosophy. In my explicitly philosophical writings I aim always to adhere to those traditions and to impart them to my students. I summarized these traditional values and standards in the three-page handout "Ten Commandments of Philosophical Writing,"⁹ which I distributed in all of my courses to all of my students at every level. Those traditions are the pride of Anglo-American academic philosophy and the envy of other fields. To reject them is to shoot oneself in the foot. So I am ambivalent about Varden's generous characterization of ETB as "do[ing] philosophy in a new way" – gratified to be viewed as breaking new ground on the one hand; but deeply resistant to the suggestion that I am thereby violating the traditional mores of the field on the other.

⁹ Piper, 1992b. <https://adrianpiper.com/docs/10CommsPhilWriting.pdf>.

Those mores are meant to apply to academic philosophy texts, and ETB is not an academic philosophy text.

ETB does deliberately revert to an ancient philosophical practice of critical self-interrogation that was largely abandoned in the West after the execution of Socrates. And I do believe this practice should be resuscitated. But that does not require sacrificing the analytical clarity, consistency, precision and depth that have traditionally defined the field. The practice of Socratic self-interrogation is fully compatible with those traditional values. It is rather the photographs, artworks and compressed poetic texts also to be found in ETB that complicate and disrupt them. I see these philosophically extraneous elements in ETB as contributing significantly to its narrative, but not to any analytic argument about it. There is none in ETB.

Thus it is not inappropriate that, for the most part, the commentators on ETB avoid attention to my strictly philosophical writings, even though the events narrated took place largely in philosophy departments and were directed primarily at thwarting my philosophical work. Pascoe and Vasanthakumar each mention an early article of mine in the course of their remarks: Vasanthakumar discusses “Two Conceptions of the Self”¹⁰ (2-3), whereas Pascoe calls attention to “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism”¹¹ (4-5). However, both of these are invoked in order to illuminate the personal narrative of my path through the profession that is the core of ETB. Neither discussion dwells on their intrinsic philosophical significance. It would have been out of place to draw attention to the purely philosophical implications of those articles in the context of discussing a memoir, and particularly one that contains copious poems and images of artworks.

For all of these reasons, I cannot bring myself to think of ETB as “do[ing] philosophy in a new way.” Relative to the professional academic conventions of philosophy journal publication that I remember from over a decade ago, before editors summarily discontinued all of my journal subscriptions, dedicating a special section of a prestigious academic philosophy journal to discussion of a patently non-academic text is unprecedented. I am both gratified and mystified.

IV

Perhaps readers from outside the profession may now begin to understand the full extent of the challenge that Helga Varden, Jordan Pascoe, Myisha Cherry and Ashwini Vasanthakumar faced in undertaking this project and seeing it through to

¹⁰ Piper, 1985. [https://adrianpiper.com/docs/Website2ConceptionsOfTheSelf\(1984\).pdf](https://adrianpiper.com/docs/Website2ConceptionsOfTheSelf(1984).pdf) .

¹¹ Piper, 1992a. [https://adrianpiper.com/docs/WebsiteXen&KantRat\(1991\).pdf](https://adrianpiper.com/docs/WebsiteXen&KantRat(1991).pdf) .

completion (Lucy Allais withdrew late in the process). They have elected not merely to publicly name in print a former colleague who was forced out of the field and out of the country for general insubordination; but also to utilize the professional resources at their disposal in order to call attention to the scapegoat's detailed published narrative of her ejection. I cannot know, and do not need to know, whether their decision followed upon a suggestion or request from some more powerful, benevolently inclined senior colleague; or whether it followed upon a spontaneous reaction of outrage in defiance of threats and intimidation from some other, malevolently inclined senior colleague. Regardless, I am profoundly grateful to them all for their courage, their eloquence, and the professional risks they faced down in order to bring this project to completion.

For my own peace of mind, however, I need to reassure both myself and the reader that publication of these comments does not further endanger the professional wellbeing of their authors; and that they have taken every possible precaution to avoid harm to themselves by following through on it. So I am relieved to note their decision to confer among themselves, excluding my participation, in advance of writing up their comments, on matters of strategy. I have served as commentator on many philosophical texts at conferences and have not previously encountered the practice of coordinating comments exclusively among the commentators on an author's text, in advance of an Author-Meets-Critics session. Ordinarily, preparing one's comments under a "veil of ignorance" of what the other commentators will say is regarded as a convenient, Rousseau-inspired method of ensuring the fairness and unbiased nature of one's judgments about the work under discussion. But there were good tactical reasons for the commentators to break with that tradition in this case.

For example, in ETB, in several places, I accurately depict my two-volume project in Kantian metaethics, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume I: The Humean Conception* and *Volume II: A Kantian Conception*,¹² as the central preoccupation of my mature philosophical life and the touchstone of my incessant battles with my colleagues (215 [twice], 249, 271-273). Yet none of the commentators mention this major work, of which "Two Conceptions of the Self" and "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism" were early building blocks. Under the circumstances, the commentators were right to continue the long tradition of passing over RSS in

¹² Piper, 2013. <https://adrianpiper.com/edinburgh/rss/index.shtml> : <https://adrianpiper.com/edinburgh/rss/docs/PiperRSSVol1HC.pdf> , <https://adrianpiper.com/edinburgh/rss/docs/PiperRSSVol2KC.pdf> . Henceforth RSS.

silence. If they had not, they most definitely would have incurred the wrath and retribution of those prominent figures in the field who have been feeding off of RSS for decades.¹³ Among them are classmates I described in ETB who succumbed to our advisor's pressure to confine their graduate research to the history of philosophy, while I was resisting that pressure in order to write the master's thesis and Ph.D. dissertation in metaethics that were to become the first draft of RSS (ETB 103-105). It is not difficult to picture the reaction that juxtaposition would have elicited.

Similar considerations led me to suggest the two most prominent and established scholars in their respective areas of specialization (Kant scholarship and decision theory) as commentators for the online *Critique* symposium on *Rationality and the Structure of the Self* that the editors held in 2018.¹⁴ I knew that no one else in the field had sufficient professional stature and job security even to discuss RSS, much less to publicly express their unvarnished opinions of it without fear of retribution. Other colleagues with more modest rankings in the philosophical firmament have remained understandably silent. But without reference to that achievement, the commentators' ample praise for my philosophical contributions to the field may well seem excessive to the uninformed. They do not seem so to me; I busted a gut for 34 years to develop RSS to a level that satisfied my own standards of philosophical quality.¹⁵ So I can accept that praise with gratitude and humility even though its true object is concealed beneath a blanket of silence.

V

To take another example, acting as a bloc without my participation facilitated unanimity among the commentators as to how to publicly represent my identity to their readership, namely as a "Black" woman. Cherry and Vasanthakumar each use this term four times (Cherry: 13 [three times], 17 [once]; Vasanthakumar: 3 [once], 4

¹³ If you want to know to whom specifically I am alluding, read RSS and trace that déjà vu sensation back to its sources.

¹⁴ <https://adrianpiper.com/edinburgh/rss/symposium.shtml> : Guyer, 2018. <https://adrianpiper.com/docs/PaulGuyerCommentsPiperDRAFT2-Final.pdf> ; Bradley, 2018. <https://adrianpiper.com/docs/RichardBradleyCommentsPiperReview-Final.pdf> ; Piper, 2018. https://adrianpiper.com/docs/AMSPiper20181023RSS_ReplyToGuyer&BradleyFINAL_RevAP5Website.pdf

¹⁵ Readers who are inclined to react to the expression, "busted a gut" as inappropriate in a respected journal of academic philosophy are invited to debate whether or not, in that case, this special section on ETB itself is so as well. For my part, over the last thirty years, I have felt far greater dismay upon encountering essays in highly regarded philosophy journals that included grammatical contractions or incorrect use of the apostrophe, or that lacked bibliographical citations or indeed lacked any mention of named or quoted texts to cite. Those strike me as far worse transgressions than a punchy vernacular expression that vividly drives the point home. For another one, newly coined, see the second paragraph following.

[twice], 5 [once]); Varden uses it three times (5 [once], 6 [once], 7 [once]); and Pascoe uses it 17 times (2 [once], 3 [twice], 4 [ten times], 5 [twice], 6 [twice]), for a grand total of 28 repetitions within approximately 15,180 words of commentary. That averages out to roughly one repetition of the attributive predicate “Black” every 500 words; or, otherwise put, one repetition per printed page of a text comprising 30 printed pages. Now imagine a 30-page printed text that identifies me as “Black” on each and every page. That will give you an idea of the importance of this consensual agreement on my identity to these four intelligent and well-intentioned women who hammer it home to their readership at every possible opportunity.

But even one repetition per sentence would not increase its credibility. When Myisha Cherry observes about ETB that

[t]here are no intermediaries attempting to reinterpret her story, nor are there researchers compiling private reports or public interviews to construct a psychological profile of her as a subject. Absent are the assumptions about her identity filtered through the history of race or through the perceptions of others (2),

she calls our attention to the absence of such mediating damage control mechanisms in ETB itself. That was deliberate on my part, because those assumptions are extrinsic, self-serving fabrications that are irrelevant to my self-conception and interior mental life. Contrary to the commentators’ shared presumption, my identity is not up for public debate and is not theirs to arrogate. I, not you, decide who I am.

However, the imperatives of professional survival nevertheless demand from the commentators some such degree of vigilant gate-keeping of the established proprieties. Their multiply repeated, peremptory collective announcements to their audience of my identity perform the dual function of mollifying their readership on the one hand, while countermanding my own hard-won insights into that identity, which I have developed at some length in several well-known publications on this topic, including ETB, on the other.¹⁶ These concur in rejecting the terms “black” (sorry, “Black”) and “white” as opportunistic racist stereotypes that dumb down both speaker and audience rather than smarting them up. But had the commentators not held the line with their collective suppression of my analysis, they could have realistically anticipated the same brand of punitive backlash that has been meted out

¹⁶ The most recent (and, I hope, the last) of these publications, Piper, 2022, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/caste-in-stone-why-classifying-artists-by-race-is-not-just-a-social-construct-2229595>, surveys and builds on the previous efforts. My self-designation, as an American woman of acknowledged African ancestry, would have introduced too many controversies into the discussion to contain within the bounds of this project. So their choice not to consult me about this issue at all was the prudent one.

to me, and to other recalcitrants who defy the very foundations of the American caste system, such as Rebecca Tuvel and Rachel Dolezal. Under the circumstances, it would have been counterproductive for the commentators to take that risk.

Their consensus has the unfortunate consequence of erasing from view the actual pathology infecting my three decades-long relationship with my philosophy colleagues, symptomatized by their suspicion of me as duplicitous and opportunistic: duplicitous for enabling them to believe falsely that I am “white” when I am not, and opportunistic for having identified myself falsely as “black” when I am not. In ETB I often allude to this no-win dynamic (67, 87-89, 105, 115, 129-131, 143, 159-161, 177-179, 234-245, 251-253, 267, 299-301). Pascoe codes the consequent “double resentment” that poisoned my relationships with virtually all of my colleagues (3-4), particularly the women (see ETB 241-243), in terms of my failure to fit into (inter alia) conventional racial categories. But the suspicion goes deeper than that: it is rather a fear, shared by self-styled “Blacks” and “whites” alike, that I am manipulating those treasured racial categories themselves in order to make fools of those who cling to them.¹⁷ That fear cannot surface in all its paranoid buffoonery so long as the categories themselves are protected as sacrosanct. But perhaps that is the commentators’ futile intention: to insist on the sanctity of those archaic categories for my own good, in order to protect *me* from the backlash?

Thus none of the commentators call into question the socially entrenched mass hallucination of race on which these conventional categories are based, or discuss Chapter 8 of ETB (“Race to the Bottom,” 233-277), which patiently and systematically dismantles it. On the contrary: Pascoe’s discussion takes for granted that the term “race” has a stable denotation and an intelligible meaning, as when she indulges the misty-eyed, Topsy-like sentimental fantasy that

Piper [...] reminds herself – and us – that who she is has never been in question: she is, at her core, that well-loved Black girl, holding her head high and entitled to the love and respect of those around her (4).

I do nothing of the kind, as readers of the actual text of ETB (in particular Chapter 2, “Me,” 35-63) will discover. My use of those racist stereotypes is confined to lampooning them. But my longstanding practice of questioning the mass hallucination of “race” itself would have been too inflammatory for the

¹⁷ I thematize this fear in my poster edition, *Race Traitor*, 2018. 36” x 24” (91,44 x 60,96 cm). Digital print, signed and numbered edition of 7. Photo credit: Fotofix. Rennie Collection. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation. That the eponymous career retrospective bearing this title (PAC Milan, 2024) was not reviewed by a single American publication venue is one expression of it.

commentators to broach explicitly in a project of rehabilitation like this one in any case. Better to simply foreclose that discussion by fiat.

VI

But it is not too inflammatory for me to broach. By articulating explicitly the two foregoing background power dynamics concealed by the formal conventions of philosophical discourse within which each of the four commentators must operate, I commit in this Reply to Commentators the same breach of traditional philosophical etiquette as I did in ETB itself by naming bluntly and concretely the deeply alienating reality of my experience in the field. Unlike the commentators, I am uniquely positioned to do this in virtue of my standing in the field as *persona non grata*, which gives me license to say whatever I like. So picture me as a sympathetic distant observer of the commentators' deliberations as to what they could rationally afford to discuss and what they were compelled by expediency to suppress; but also as the incorrigibly delinquent sprout that suddenly pops up from beneath the sidewalk to create cracks and fissures in its smooth, newly paved surface.

The process of naming and dissecting the experience described in ETB was similarly alienating. But precisely for that reason, it served the liberating therapeutic function of distancing me from the events and personages in question so that I could see and reflect on them more clearly. It has a similarly salutary effect on me as I voice my ambivalence in response to the professional honor conferred on me by the attention paid to ETB in this special section of the *Canadian J. Phil.* Naming and dissecting erased realities always has this bracing effect on me, as one of those realities. But I would not expect it to affect others similarly, any more than I would expect that of ETB. All four of the commentators instead sift through those realities in search of a consoling dénouement to the sordid tale that ETB in fact recounts.

Myisha Cherry culls a triumphalist narrative from her reading of ETB to support her generous thesis that I am what she terms a "moral exemplar" of resilience, someone "who demonstrates how principles can be applied in concrete situations;" (3), who serves as a "living illustratio[n], making morality both comprehensible and actionable [...; and] cultivate[s] humility, respect and encouragement for our own moral striving" (3). I am deeply moved by her tribute. But based on my first-hand knowledge of my own behavior and inner states, I can assure the reader with unconditional certainty that Cherry's thesis is entirely too charitable. This Reply should prove, if nothing else has, that I most definitely am not the paragon of virtue it portrays. Careful readers of ETB may draw their own conclusions about this.

ETB does not dispute anything in Cherry's closing arguments against what she terms "the myth of resilience" (15), which defend the thesis that we survive in community rather than in isolation (14-17). But the text makes clear that I survived expulsion by my professional and social communities in the US through isolation. I made sure that none of them even knew I had escaped until it was too late for them to do anything about it (ETB Chapter 9, "Escape to Berlin", 279-303).

My resilience at that juncture was anchored not in those communities, but rather in the two longstanding sources of creative self-expression – art and philosophy – that define my adult life, each of which offers solace, support and hope in moments of pain or misfortune in the other. Both were nurtured within the same communities that provided my family and education. But those communities had been taken away by the time I needed to call on them for help. I would not have survived the ordeal of ostracism and abandonment in the US without drawing on both. That experience, of surviving through reliance on my own multiple modes of self-expression, is what led me to establish a foundation dedicated to advancing multidisciplinary as a survival resource for others.¹⁸

Ashwini Vasanthakumar also argues for the importance of community and "the ways that our relations with others are essential to the project of becoming who we are, including by countering the systematic ways that oppression deforms our relations with others and ourselves" (1). She makes good use of the pseudorational mechanisms I introduced in "Two Conceptions of the Self" and developed in depth in *Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume II: A Kantian Conception*. In my opinion, her insightful remarks would be better suited to elaboration in a traditional philosophy article, were it possible to publish one on this topic without making powerful enemies in the field, which it is not. But like Cherry, she errs similarly in asserting that "Piper attributes her ability to avoid these pitfalls to the strength of her 'real childhood'" (5). Readers of ETB will find ample evidence that I do not take myself to have avoided these pitfalls at all; see in particular Chapter 6 ("Mother's Little Helpers"), 167-197. Hence I make no such self-attribution.¹⁹

Helga Varden also errs on the role played by my "'real' childhood," by inflating my description of it and ascribing to me an "unwavering commitment to truthfulness" (8) of a sort that seconds Cherry's hagiographic approach. As I argue

¹⁸ For information about the APRA Foundation Multidisciplinary Fellowship, see <https://adrianpiper.com/edinburgh/M-DFellowshipMenu.shtml>.

¹⁹ As Vasanthakumar does not substantiate her misgivings about my use of the term, "caste," I disregard them here.

in “Kant’s Two Solutions to the Free Rider Problem,”²⁰ Kant’s core concern is not truthfulness but rather promise-keeping. And my core concern is not truthfulness but rather fidelity to reality no matter how ugly or painful, because that is a necessary prerequisite of knowledge on a correspondence theory of truth.²¹ Varden “read[s] *Escape to Berlin* as having been written for the world with the hope that it will contribute to making it better for humanity” (1). But here she, too, deifies my motives. My main incentives for writing ETB were what I say they were in the text: to cleanse my mind (61); to thereby enable me to cope with the PTSD symptoms I continued to experience after relocating to Berlin (301); and to demonstrate the failure of myriad attempts to silence my voice and erase my achievements (91). My hopes for ETB were directed toward self-preservation, not the improvement of humanity. As I make clear in the prose poem “YOU HUMANS (1996)” (ETB 211-215), I do not think humanity can be improved. The pressing question is whether humans ever will attain it. Nevertheless I am very glad to know that ETB might be of use to others.

I appreciate Varden’s careful exposition of and engagement with the text, as well as her perceptive observation of the primacy in my value hierarchy of self-knowledge (the term “wisdom,” which she borrows from Kant’s late *Metaphysics of Morals*, seems to me similarly inflated) over power.²² And I note her attempt to bring the narrative of my escape from the US into relation with Kant’s treatment of “the complexities surrounding lying and truthfulness” (7), on which Varden herself has contributed much of value to the literature. However, it is not true that I “disagre[e] with Kant’s claim that the duty not to lie is a perfect, unconditional duty” (7). I do not address that claim in ETB at all. What I said in ETB was that “I do not agree with Kant that you should not lie even if it is necessary to save your life” (281). I did not mention his distinction between perfect and imperfect duties at all because I had already argued, in “Kant’s Self-Legislation Procedure Reconsidered,” that this distinction collapses under close scrutiny of the text.²³

²⁰ Piper, 2012a.

<https://adrianpiper.com/docs/WebsiteAMSPiperKants2SolutionsFreeRiderProblemKantYearbook42012.pdf>.

²¹ I.e. of a Kantian rather than a Tarskian sort; see Kant’s argument against the possibility of a criterion of truth that is both general and sufficient in the *Critique of Pure Reason* at A 58-62/B 82-86.

²² I examine the extent to which this unusual order of psychological priorities is the consequence of my 40-year practice of yogic celibacy in Piper, 2009.

<https://adrianpiper.com/docs/Piper2004BrahmacharyaKaivalya.pdf>.

²³ Piper, 2012b.

https://adrianpiper.com/docs/AMSPiperKant'sSelfLegislationProcedureReconsideredKantStudiesOnlineVol2No14_20Oct2012_203-277.pdf. See in particular Sections VII. “Kant’s Self-Legislation Procedure Reconsidered,” and VIII. “O’Neill’s Contradiction Tests.”

Thus each of the commentators extracts and reconfigures various aspects of my person, derived from ETB, that relate me tangentially to the content and subject matter of philosophical preoccupation. They effectively fabulate from these a subset of reference points constitutive of an identifiable persona that might be institutionally palatable to the field. I am deeply moved and grateful to all of them for their determined efforts to resituate me within the professional academic context that ejected me. They have done their very best to put a good face on a bad business and I greatly appreciate the time and energy they have invested in redressing it.

But that persona is not the author of ETB, and the content of ETB does not express it. After all, you cannot put lipstick on a pig. Unfortunate circumstances beyond the commentators' control, namely the profession itself (i.e. the pig), force them to edit their versions of me in such a manner that neither my actual identity nor my most important philosophical achievements make the cut, leaving only a rosy but insubstantial shadow of my person for academic institutions to recognize. The mythologized result of their efforts joins other recent, well-intentioned and very respectable attempts at institutional whitewashing for purposes of rehabilitation that in effect reinforce the same unpalatable institutional conditions that drove me out.

VII

Jordan Pascoe knows those unpalatable conditions at first hand. She, too, has been stripped of a tenured professorship, betrayed and ostracized by colleagues who feared institutional retaliation for befriending her, placed on an official government watch list, and faced death threats from anonymous others. However, she experienced those ugly events roughly two decades later than I did, after the conditions of fear and hate that have divided the US since the end of the Civil War had intensified and deepened even further, splintering and damaging all human relations even more profoundly, and producing even more bruising and desperate interpersonal transactions.

So it is no good going on about how her experience and mine "are different in nearly every particular" (2) with regard to such shallow peripherals as "race" or class or academic pedigree. By now it should be clear to anyone who follows the news that those outmoded sources of personal pride, self-definition and self-esteem have withered in the face of the virulent assaults on our autonomy that we all are now experiencing at the hands of those who call the shots and assign social status by flipping a coin. I of course understand Pascoe's statement as a distancing device, in

this instance a way of courteously declining to invade or appropriate my experience into her own, or prematurely to presume commonality where there may be none.

But she need not worry on that score. There is plenty of commonality between our respective experiences of institutional aggression, including the realization that under these circumstances, it is in fact *oneself* as a uniquely anomalous and conspicuous individual that is the de facto target of aggression, the red flag that incites the bull to charge – not one’s “race” or class or academic pedigree. Those peripherals are merely empty abstract names that designate no specific and discrete class of concrete particulars and therefore can be applied arbitrarily to any of them, as circumstances permit and various agendas require; opportunistic weapons of endless political debate and division through which aggressors aim to conquer intellectual territory. Sometimes they hit the mark, more often they do not.

That is the alienating language of territorial demarcation. No one motivated to establish connection with another uses that kind of language when introducing themselves or receiving the other into authentic conversation. But Pascoe demarcates her perceived territory very clearly, by further propagating among her readers the circulation of anonymous uncorroborated suspicions such as this one:

And yet, Adrian Piper is a Black woman, and so there is, haunting this tale of inspiring success, another story, one which is no longer whispered as it once was: the suspicion that her success was *because of* her race and her gender, that her prestigious pedigree was just a product on what now gets denigrated as “D.E.I.” (3)

Pascoe acts prudently in formulating this “whispered” “other story” in the passive voice and declining to provide bibliographic citation for it; for her silence on her sources both facilitates her role as impartial conduit of purportedly consensual opinion, and also frees her from the costs and benefits of owning it as her own.²⁴ This is much more promising territory for carving out unbridgeable difference than the mere recitation of such abstract markers as “race” or class or academic pedigree. Pascoe’s remark underscores my argument that those abstract markers mean nothing. What counts is what you do with them. The discussion of gossip, demonization and ostracism in ETB (87-89) offers a brief survey of this territory.

Thus the primary culprit of our respective misfortunes is not that revered set of abstract markers, but rather our respective unique locations at the intersection of the

²⁴ Thus note her silence on that even more widely “whispered” “other story” haunting all women in academic philosophy, that they achieve status in the field by trading sexual favors for professional ones. For the record, I did not. A teacher in art school was the first and last professionally powerful man in whom I had any sexual interest. After he gave me an A for the course, I broke up with him.

complex social and political currents that track each of our particular paths through the world: different in some arbitrary particulars, similar in others. Each of us was – or is – merely a sitting duck that transiently condenses ancient, roiling histories of vague interpersonal animosities and grievances so deep and explosive as to defy comprehension. Hers was more unconscionable because more highly mechanized and rationalized by skilled administrative cost-benefit calculation.²⁵

VIII

Like me, Pascoe has been transformed by that trauma into a vigilant and watchful guardian of any remaining ability to trust others than might remain to her. Hence her approach to ETB, like mine, is grounded in a direct and immediate, experiential examination of the realities depicted in the narrative. They are as real for her as they were for me. She faces them, names them, and probes them for deeper revelations about the shared social and political conditions they disclose. And when she describes ETB as a

multi-dimensional experience [that] requires the reader to linger in moments of betrayal, illustrates the ways they permeate a life, provides a taste of the rage that can threaten to swallow you whole when it happens to you (2),

she deploys a generalized characterization, ending with second-person indexicals, that in turn demands of the reader reflection on whether or not or to what extent that characterization names them in particular. Those readers who feel that it does form the concrete particular referent class for whom that characterization holds true; and to whom she speaks directly and vividly. I am obviously one member of that class, but hardly the only one. It is unlikely that its members fall exclusively within the scope of any particular “race” or class or academic pedigree. Those makeshift concepts are too crude and flimsy to capture the nuanced reality of institutional betrayal. Animal fear, greed and opportunism easily outcompete them as explanans.

When she then situates the selective personal experience of institutional betrayal within the larger, paralyzing context encompassing the ever-present background conditions of state and corporate surveillance (3) that groom all of us as consumers of digital and social media for even more pervasive and invasive betrayals of one

²⁵ Pascoe is also more resilient than I: having endured her ordeal, she nevertheless has chosen to remain in the field; whereas having endured mine, I could not get out of it fast enough. Our respective allocation of melanin pigmentation is irrelevant.

another,²⁶ she thereby expands the scope of the referent class picked out by the second-person indexical even further, simultaneously speaking directly to more of us who have experienced institutional betrayals like hers, and weakening the case for regarding our respective institutional encounters as essentially incommensurable due to “racial” difference (3-4).

Of course there are situations in which such variables plausibly enter into an explanation of the attitude toward and treatment of unfamiliar others; but not uniquely, not sufficiently, not necessarily and not stably. And in no case is the complex conjunction of professional circumstances and personalities in which each of us was ensnared among them. Pascoe does not convince me that these are in essence any more incommensurable than we choose, in light of our own agendas, to make them.

Indeed those of us who are self-selected members of this special club could gain considerable insight into the workings of the veiled institutional hierarchies that dominate our lives, by comparing notes among ourselves – provided that we overcome the shame of the outcast sufficiently to speak of them as clearly and forthrightly as her comments sometimes do. She says of reading ETB that it gave her a sense of feeling seen, of feeling less alone: yes, this *is* what it’s like when the place where you have chosen to stand and to serve rips the rug out from underneath you; yes, these are the costs, these are the burdens. This is how it remakes you (2).

Similarly, reading Pascoe’s comments gave *me* a sense of feeling seen and of feeling less alone in the face of the institutional betrayal that she rightly describes as

structured to prevent access to support or solidarity; [...] designed to turn us against one another: to encourage others to give up their jobs so we won’t have to; to report on one another to avoid being targeted ourselves (2).

The power of her words here to penetrate the scrim of false and self-serving assumptions about our relation to others lies in their direct and unmediated quality, their brazen and unapologetic demonstration of a direct and unmediated relation to the realities they name. This is the first-personal authority that can build confidence in oneself, anchor courage in action, and inspire others’ trust – if others are ready for it. I have contended elsewhere that younger professional women now find it particularly difficult to conduct such conversations among themselves and therefore

²⁶ I.e. it is not merely *state* apparatuses of surveillance that poison our collegial relationships and destroy our careers. Shoshana Zuboff dissects the extent to which these forces of surveillance reach into the most vulnerable regions of the psyche in Zuboff, 2019.

almost impossible to achieve the mutual solidarity to which such conversations can lead.²⁷

Pascoe rightly finds cause for optimism in my conclusion to “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism,” which is developed more fully in RSS Vol. II. *A Kantian Conception*, Chapter XI. “Xenophobia and Moral Anomaly.” I agree with her view of this argument and very much appreciate her precise and careful summary of it (4-5). But the transcendental account of conceptual and moral expansiveness I offer there does not presuppose any particular community or communitarian support system. Rather, it presupposes only the exercise of autonomous rational faculties in the service of satisfying our dormant native curiosity about ourselves, our surroundings, and others. Each one of us can put that curiosity to work whenever we decide, whether in community or in isolation, to abandon the suffocating safety of tired and obsolete preconceptions about who, what and where we are. I find consolation in that thought.

Adrian Margaret Smith Piper was the first woman of acknowledged African ancestry to earn a doctorate in Anglo-American analytic philosophy at Harvard (1981) and the first to receive tenure in the field. She publishes in metaethics and Kant. Piper taught at Harvard, Michigan, Stanford, Georgetown, UCSD and Wellesley, which forcibly terminated her tenured full professorship in 2008.

Piper is also a first-generation Conceptual artist, exhibiting internationally since 1968. In 2015 she won the Golden Lion Award for Best Artist at the 56th Venice Biennale. Her 2018 career retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art was its largest ever for a living artist. She was the first American to win Germany’s Kaethe Kollwitz Prize.

²⁷ I explore the historical reasons for this in the videotaped lecture-discussion “Second Wave Feminism: Unfinished Business” (Piper, 2014).
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