

Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 16 with Drs. Bell, Brunson, Jackson, and Woolwine

## “On Disability and American Philosophy”

*Transcription by Daniel Brunson and Shelena S. of  
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### **Part 1: Know Thyself**

[acoustic guitar music]

**Eric Weber:** Hello and welcome to Philosophy Bakes Bread, Food for Thought About Life and Leadership, a production of the Society of Philosophers in America, AKA SOPHIA. I'm Dr. Eric Thomas Weber.

**Anthony Cashio:** I'm Dr. Anthony Cashio. A famous phrase says that philosophy bakes no bread, that it's not practical, but we and SOPHIA and on this show, aim to correct this misperception.

**Eric Weber:** Philosophy Breaks Bread airs on WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM and is recorded and distributed as a podcast next. If you can't catch us live on the air, subscribe and be sure to reach out to us. You can find us online at [philosophybakesbread.com](http://philosophybakesbread.com) and we hope you'll reach out to us on any of the topics we raise or on topics that you want us to bring up.

In addition, note that we have a segment that we call, "You Tell Me." Listen for it and let us know what you know think.

**Anthony Cashio:** You can reach us in a number of ways. We're on Twitter @philosophybb which I bet you guessed right, stands for Philosophy Bakes Bread and you can go to our Facebook page @philosophybakesbread and check out SOPHIA's Facebook page while you're there, @philosophersinAmerica.

**Eric Weber:** That's right, and you can email us at [philosophybakesbread@gmail.com](mailto:philosophybakesbread@gmail.com) and call, leave a short recorded message with a question or a comment or bountiful praise that we may be able to play on the show at 859- 257-1849. That number is 859 257-1849.

**Anthony Cashio:** All right guys, we are having a very special episode of Philosophy Breaks

Bread today. I am in Birmingham, Alabama, at the Society for The Advancement of American Philosophy meeting, also known as SAAP for those in the know.

**Eric Weber:** I thought it was pronounced, "sawp."

**Anthony Cashio:** "Sawp", "Sawp." And I am here today with several guests. I've got one, two, three, four, four people with me today in an empty conference room at SAAP. I'm going to introduce them all in a minute, it's just too many names right now. This panel, they've presented a panel on "American Philosophy and Disability: Implications for Lived Experience." What I want to do, we're just going to go around the table and have everyone introduce themselves, say your name and where you are and a little bit about yourself. Just very briefly.

**Eric Weber:** Where you're from perhaps more than where you are right this minute.

**Daniel Brunson:** Hello, I'm Daniel Brunson and I teach at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Hello everyone, I am Sarah Woolwine and I teach at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, Oklahoma.

**Nate Jackson:** I'm Nate Jackson and I teach at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio.

**Justin Bell:** And then I am Justin Bell, I teach at the University of Houston at Victoria.

**Eric Weber:** It's awesome to have you guys on the show, thank you so much everybody. This is Eric Weber in what Anthony Cashio has described perhaps correctly as a closet in Ohio. Because through the power of the "inter-webs," we've been able to have this conversation together even though five of us who are on this chat are in Alabama right now.

**Anthony Cashio:** Eric, I should point out that the room we're in could fit several hundred people.

**Eric Weber:** You know you could probably fit a good 10, 15 people if everyone was standing up in here. This is sort of a hallway closet. This is I'm sure not everybody's listening to this episode to hear about, but nonetheless what we want to do in our first and opening segment, we call this, "Know thyself." Ordinarily we have a good bit of time with an individual or maybe two and so we sort of elaborate and let people sort of talk about themselves a little bit more to get a sense of where they're coming from and how they understand philosophy as a result. We're going to be a little bit briefer this time because we're so very lucky to have several guests. Perhaps each of you could tell us very briefly what attracted you to philosophy, what you're interested in and in a sentence or two, what philosophy means to you. Please speak to people who haven't taken a philosophy class or aren't in college. Or you know, just in simple terms, what is philosophy to you, each of you.

**Anthony Cashio:** Let's start with Justin.

**Justin Bell:** Hi Justin Bell again. What does philosophy mean to me? I think philosophy means that we are making a fundamental bet against the idea that ignorance is bliss. I call this the philosophical bet.

**Anthony Cashio:** Philosophical bet, a gambler, all right.

**Justin Bell:** And frankly, I don't know if I'm right or not but I got this hunch that knowing something about the world is going to make my life better. That's how I approach philosophy and to me what philosophy really means is discourse with others toward the end of this goal. I am a weirdo in the philosophy world. I'd like to talk about who I teach and who I reach more than I like to talk about what I've necessarily written.

I teach maybe 300 students in a year and I could fundamentally change one of their lives and I doubt many people, even people listening to your radio show crack open very many philosophy journals. This is the way the way I approach philosophy approach philosophy as an ongoing discourse against the idea that ignorance is bliss.

**Anthony Cashio:** Just a hunch guys.

**Justin Bell:** It's just a hunch.

**Anthony Cashio:** Just a hunch.

**Eric Weber:** Or is it a faith?

**Justin Bell:** You know it frankly might be a faith, at least it has to be treated as a faith because when you truly reach out and makes those sorts of jumps, when you make those sorts of leaps, frankly you have to do so without a doubt. And so at least if that's what you mean by faith that you're not introducing doubt into it, it's a faith.

**Eric Weber:** I know.

**Justin Bell:** Let's see how did I get into philosophy? My mother sent me two books when I was having a tough time when I was young. Victor Frankel's *Man's Search for Meaning* and *Slaughter-house Five*. I think after that it was all down hill.

**Anthony Cashio:** Eric, we need to start a reading list, books mentioned by philosophers and put that on the website.

**Eric Weber:** That's an excellent idea. That'd be awesome.

**Anthony Cashio:** We should start doing that.

**Eric Weber:** That's right.

**Nate Jackson:** All right, I'll go next. I'm not sure if I can improve too much upon that conception of philosophy.

**Eric Weber:** This is Nate right?

**Nate Jackson:** This is Nate Jackson, that's right.

I came to philosophy through the church actually. When I was in high school, my Pastor was

also trained as a philosopher and we read several works by Kierkegaard together so I read *Fear and Trembling* and *Sickness Unto Death*. And those were my sort of introduction to philosophy and so I maintained that interest through college, went to college reading a lot of Kierkegaard and kind of changed my interests I guess in graduate school when I fell in love with American philosophy in a graduate course actually. I turned a little bit from issues in religion and faith and more towards issues in the community and moral education.

For me what philosophy does is it enables self-criticism. It allows us to hear other's perspectives and arguments sympathetically and hear that as actually having some kind of bearing on our own lives. I'm going to make that bet along with Justin that reading and being sympathetic to arguments we read and hear from others can impact how we construe and act in the world.

**Anthony Cashio:** Okay can you give like an example -- you said it kind of enables you? Is there something like a place in your life where it really enabled you to do something that you didn't think you would be able to do without philosophy?

**Nate Jackson:** I think a really good example, again, a lot of my interests stemmed from issues concerning religion and faith early on. Reading philosophers from diverse faith perspectives and again as a high schooler in the church from non-theists and people who critique religion really called into question my conception of religion as accepting or assent to a particular dogma, right, rather than a particular kind of attunement to other people. I think reading Kierkegaard, having conversation with pastors, other people from diverse perspectives was really formative in that respect.

**Eric Weber:** So your experience of someone who loves philosophy was not first this atheistic professor telling you, "God's dead," and you have to watch the movie and you cheer for the champion. "God is not dead!" as the movie goes right?

**Nate Jackson:** No, absolutely not. My first bit of philosophy was in the church.

**Eric Weber:** Excellent, that's such a wonderful demonstration. People need to know that St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm, these are philosophers, they're sainted.

**Nate Jackson:** Absolutely.

**Eric Weber:** Right on.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Right.

**Anthony Cashio:** What about you Sarah?

**Sarah Woolwine:** Okay so this is again Sarah Woolwine speaking. For me, philosophy more than being even a search for truth is probably a search for meaning and an effort to invent language and vocabularies by which to express that. What drew me to philosophy initially? Let's see, I have always been curious about questions concerning identity. Maybe because I have always felt like a little bit of an outsider myself. My initial route into that as a young person was through psychology.

I was originally a psychology major but as I took more and more philosophy classes, I

realized that philosophy afforded better theoretical tools for exploring those questions about identity that I was interested in. And those questions continued to guide my work and my research now in feminist philosophy and in critical disability studies. That is sort of the, for me I guess, the line of continuity that is always sort of unites my initial experiences with philosophy to what I'm doing today.

**Eric Weber:** Right on.

**Anthony Cashio:** For those of you interested and listening in, we're going to talk more about critical disability studies in the next segment.

**Eric Weber:** That's right.

**Anthony Cashio:** More coming on that, that's kind of what's going on today.

**Eric Weber:** That's right, in general on this show we really try and make an effort to avoid jargon, to avoid invented language but I think what Sarah's explaining is important because when you think about a chef who doesn't know the difference between savory and sweet or certain cooking terms, if you don't have the language, you don't have words you need to make certain points you can't talk about them. You can't think about them. Sometimes we do have to find the right words and that's a nice point.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Okay.

**Anthony Cashio:** We got just enough time to hear from Daniel.

**Daniel Brunson:** Hello everybody, this is Daniel Brunson again. I'm very happy to be back on the show a second time.

**Eric Weber:** Indeed.

**Daniel Brunson:** As I said previously and for those who haven't heard before, my introduction to philosophy came because I worked in a bookstore in high school. Sometimes we'd get random books and then when I had discovered, I had the power to order books, I spent a lot of time ordering books such as Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Nietzsche...

**Anthony Cashio:** You've always been like this is what you're saying.

**Daniel Brunson:** I have always been like this. Yes.

**Anthony Cashio:** Philosophy is his personality trait.

**Daniel Brunson:** I think pretty fundamentally, bizarrely even.

**Justin Bell:** Or at least difficult to read books.

**Daniel Brunson:** Yes. One thing I want to say about the nature of philosophy for me and from what I'm hearing from my colleagues here is -- I think they would agree with this--, is that something that philosophy allows us to do, in its best forms at least, is to be able to go across

disciplines. Right, so whether religion or political science as we'll talk about some more later, science itself or psychology and really do some cross pollination where it can take ideas from different disciplines and put them against and with each other and see what results.

I think that ability to travel, as it were, allows philosophy to ask questions and be critical of different fields, not necessarily and hopefully not in any sort of arrogant way, but rather again really trying to open up new spaces, right? And to talk about things that have not been talked about enough perhaps, as we will in a moment.

**Eric Weber:** Wonderful, thank you so much all four of you for talking with Anthony and me. Thank you everybody who's listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread. We're going to come back in the next segment and talk about what these scholars discussed on their panel on disability and pragmatism as a theory in philosophy. We'll be right back, thanks everyone for listening.

## **Part 2: What Does Philosophy Contribute?**

**Anthony Cashio:** Welcome back everyone to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio with my co-host, Dr. Eric Weber, and I am today at this meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy and this meeting this year in Birmingham, Alabama, and I am here with four very special guests, Dr. Daniel Brunson.

**Daniel Brunson:** Hello.

**Anthony Cashio:** Dr. Sarah Woolwine.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Hello.

**Anthony Cashio:** Dr. Nate Jackson.

**Nate Jackson:** Hello.

**Anthony Cashio:** Dr. Justin Bell.

**Justin Bell:** How you doing?

**Anthony Cashio:** So many doctors and none of us could help you if you got sick. We're all here, and these four presented on a panel yesterday and the panel was on American Philosophy and Disability. So, I want to just ask you guys, maybe you could say a little bit about the general idea. Why disabilities? How did you get thinking about it, and what's the friendship with philosophy and disability? How does that work out? What can philosophy tell us about disabilities?

**Nate Jackson:** So this panel came together, or the idea for it came together after Dan Brunson and I met in a session of the American Philosophical Association last year where other philosophers were presenting on disability. And I think we were a little surprised to see each other in the same room, having the same interests, and we work broadly in the same tradition. And so out of that meeting, we decided that it would be good to start thinking through issues concerning disability from the perspective of the American philosophical tradition.

And as for the question, "Why disability?". I think there's a lot of reasons to think about disability. We have debates concerning the nature of disability, what a disability is, how we ought to construe living as a disabled person, whether it's inimical or antithetical to a good life, whether it's a lack. There are issues of care, issues of dependency, and really I think there's a lot in the topic of disability that we haven't really talked about. It's been overlooked for a long time.

**Anthony Cashio:** Sounds like it's a philosophically rich vein.

**Nate Jackson:** Absolutely.

**Anthony Cashio:** All right.

**Daniel Brunson:** And one thing for me, and this is part of what I talked about yesterday on our panel was, thinking about how now what we now call disability was, in many ways, much more prevalence throughout history. So, a variety of illnesses, lack of our medical technology and so forth.

**Nate Jackson:** Right

**Daniel Brunson:** And so the prevalence of disability among people and philosophers in this American philosophical tradition that we all study really made me think about, "Why didn't they talk about this?". Right? So, for example, Jane Addams, a very important philosopher and social activist, working mostly in Chicago, had ...

**Nate Jackson:** Potts Disease.

**Daniel Brunson:** Potts Disease. Which is a fairly severe deformity of the spine caused by tuberculosis. So she spent her entire life with a limp, and mostly in pain because of this, because of a disease she contracted when she was four. And her work had ... she developed, really, the field of social work and dealing with immigrants and people injured in factory accidents and all these sorts of things. So it's like, these people were living with impairments, what have you, every day. And yet, how does that relate to their philosophy? How does that come through in their accounts of what it is to be a human being? Or how should human beings live together? And that's part of our interest here, is trying to really take what we can talk about with disability now and read it back into the experiences of these earlier thinkers.

**Nate Jackson:** So reflecting on Sarah's introduction, we can think about these thinkers that are struggling to articulate the ways in which disability affected their lives, their thoughts, their concepts but not necessarily had ... they didn't necessarily have the language. Right? Or the conceptual framework to do that well. So you can see this develop and hopefully we get to continue that development.

**Eric Weber:** Interesting, well you know one of the trends that you see in terms of people caring about some matter is simply whether or not you have representatives willing to talk about it. As you say, sometimes you have to have the language. And in other things, you know, there are matters that are in your control and matters that aren't, you know, and there's no use complaining about something not in your control says Stoicism, as we read from one ... as we heard about from one, actually two episodes we've recorded already. And then there's the folks that think, you know, "Well, this is sort of nature and it's not something for us to worry about versus the things that man can do and be in control of" and so forth. But then when we have that

attitude, it seems to me, we forget things like the fact that we design our world in a way it can be inaccessible to some people. Right? So the notion that it's just the fact of the world that someone can't walk around well, but we are the ones who failed to put in a curb cut. You know what I mean? For the wheelchair. Right? So we make our world to some degree. How does that factor in, in terms of control, over our world to the various projects you guys have been thinking about?

**Daniel Brunson:** Well I would say very much so. And I don't want to exaggerate, as it were, or minimize the prevalence of disability in chronic illnesses today as in contrast to the 19th century and earlier times. But I think mainly, the example of the curb cut is so important because curb cuts were invented to help disabled veterans, from World War II- they were invented in Detroit in the fifties- and we don't recognize that they are for disabled people. So, if you are relatively able to, you know, have trouble walking, well then, you know, a curb cut is useful. You might be mildly annoyed if it's not available, like if you're pushing a shopping cart. Right?

**Eric Weber:** Right.

**Daniel Brunson:** But these things-

**Anthony Cashio:** Baby stroller.

**Daniel Brunson:** Right. Baby stroller. But it really highlights the way in which, you know, the way we construct our environments, both physical and social, as we'll talk about a bit later, with the people that are making these choices and they don't always consider the consequences of their choices.

**Anthony Cashio:** Right.

**Daniel Brunson:** And then things become normalized, right? We just develop this expectation of, "of course a curb cut", right? Which is just a thing we do and we don't recognize that these choices were made for certain purposes, to help certain people as well.

**Justin Bell:** And what interests me, this is Justin Bell, by the way. What really interests me about this kind of social conversation that we need to be having concerning disability is, the curb cut is literally concrete.

**Eric Weber:** Right.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Justin Bell:** It is a physical thing that persists and a curb without it a physical thing that persists. And a curb without it is a physical thing that persists that isn't going to be fixed for, however municipal governments work, let's say, ever? So, there are realities here. And the way we start to build our world, feeds back on us and makes us who we are as well. When I was a kid, we moved into a neighborhood with curb cuts, from one without it, and I am an able person. I liked it because I could rollerskate and bike wherever I wanted to go. It freed me to interact with my environment differently. And so, an unintended consequence, right? Well, let's start multiplying this. We're talking, right now, about one form that you put on a curb in one place.

**Eric Weber:** Right.

**Justin Bell:** And now we start multiplying out from there. And I think this is one of the richest places to go for a philosopher, in general. What is our world like, because I think that's what matters. That's what makes us do the things we do. I joked in our panel that every building has a ramp and I know of no public spaces that deal with the logical problems of counterfactuals. And yet, what do we do in philosophy conferences? We sit around and talk about ... let's do some logic, somebody get a whiteboard!

**Anthony Cashio:** For our listeners, counterfactual's are thing that you don't need to know about.

**Justin Bell:** They really aren't and that's one of the reasons I'm I'm joking about them. Because I'm not quite sure how to wrap my head around them. And here's the thing, I feel like that's a lost conversation. And that's the joke. Because look at our world; our world exists in so many ways that are concrete and that will have not only affects on us, but our children and our children's children. And frankly, if we are bad at inquiry, if we are bad at figuring out how to do things now, that's going to affect what other people have to live and the possibilities that are opened up for them. So it's not just about curb cuts, it's not just about where the school is. It just starts compounding over and over again. And these kinds of questions, what I would call democratic inquiry. What kind of things are we going to do together and how are we going to live together starts mattering in almost inconceivable infinite fashion.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Okay, yeah, I have a couple of things I want to say about philosophy, generally, that I think have thrown up barriers to being able to have much of a conversation about disability. By the way, people working in the areas of History and English have sort of come to this conversation quite a bit before philosophers have. But philosophy has sort of resisted talking about disability, partly because of it's tendency to want to make universal claims about people, that don't necessarily- that aren't necessarily descriptive of the experience of being disabled. So, that sort of shuts out disables voices. And another thing that philosophers tend to do is to simply assume that disability makes a person worse off. And therefore, that's all there is to say about it. When, in fact, talking about disability opens up possibilities for talking about all kinds of interesting ethical questions, questions about personal identity, questions about psychological sorts of questions. But philosophers have been sort of slow to come around to all of this. So part of the reason that I wanted to participate in this panel and why I think it's important is, we're still at the beginning stages of opening philosophy as a discipline up to greater conversation with work that is being done in Disability Studies. And that, actually, has been going on for several decades now. Philosophy has sort of been ignoring it. So ...

**Eric Weber:** Well it's interesting that when you think about, so many of the metaphors for how philosophers understand the things we talk about. You know, we talk about seeing and sight as this metaphor for understanding. Like when you discover something, literally, you take the cover off it so you can see it, right? So now you see the truth, and so knowledge is truth and light and seeing. But what does that say to someone who's blind? You know what I mean?

**Sarah Woolwine:** Right, right.

**Justin Bell:** Well, even Daniel made this point yesterday. Or even everyone at this table here in Birmingham is wearing glasses or contacts.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Justin Bell:** And we're using sight as this metaphor, yet we all have to mediate our sight.

**Anthony Cashio:** I'm not.

**Justin Bell:** Okay, Anthony here, is perfect. But the rest of us...

**Anthony Cashio:** I do have glasses, I'm just not wearing them.

**Justin Bell:** The rest of us poor fools have to wear...

**Anthony Cashio:** I am superior.

**Justin Bell:** Something on our faces that mediates the world.

**Eric Weber:** That's right.

**Justin Bell:** And how that mediation happens, matters for how we're going to go about living. And I find that fantastically interesting.

**Anthony Cashio:** So, if we have someone who is listening to this episode right now, maybe that has disabilities and some interest in philosophy, you know, it may sound slightly esoteric and "What are philosophers talking about 'What are counterfactuals,?', but it seems that the payoff here is concrete in often concrete ways. Like literal concrete ways.

**Eric Weber:** Literal and metaphorically.

**Anthony Cashio:** Thinking about these things philosophically, right, can reshape, quite literally reshape the world and open up new possibilities in ways of moving and being in it.

**Nate Jackson:** I think that's right. To expand on the curb cut example brought up by Dan and Justin's assertion that our theories and concepts feed back into our experience. One fact, of curb cuts is greater visibility of disabled person in your communities.

**Eric Weber:** True

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Nate Jackson:** And so it becomes less strange or, odd, to see a disabled person out and about and much easier to see them as a part of your community in virtue of this policy that was enacted for veterans coming home.

**Eric Weber:** And actually I wanted to piggy-back on that earlier, because that's a really important point to recognize who mattered in bringing about the change. Because it wasn't some kid somewhere who's got serious disabilities that brought about change, but rather people who sacrificed and suffered for the country and for our freedoms and so forth, and served. And then they come home to an utterly inhospitable country. That's not how you're supposed to treat veterans. So it's interesting, like, who you are thinking about makes a big difference about on

whether or not people are going to take that cause seriously, unfortunately. Right? Whereas, sort of these are just those disabled children, folks would actually institutionalize them. We used to send them to some building, somewhere, so we don't have to see that stuff. Kinda thing. That's actually how we used to do things. And those buildings now, when you see those buildings used for some of the purpose, or that are vacated, they're pretty creepy. You know those institutions?

**Anthony Cashio:** Yeah, they are.

**Justin Bell:** “Pretty” is not the right word, they are very creepy, Eric.

**Eric Weber:** Well, we've been talking with some wonderful guests here: Justin Bell, Nate Jackson, Sarah Woolwine and Daniel Brunson. This is Eric Weber and my co-host is Anthony Cashio. Thank you everybody for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread. We're gonna come back in just a second, after a short break, with yet another segment with these wonderful people. Thanks everybody for listening.

### **Part 3: What is Disability?**

**Anthony Cashio:** Welcome back everyone to a special episode of Philosophy Bakes Bread. I'm Dr. Anthony Cashio and I am in a giant, freezing room at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy's meeting in Birmingham, Alabama. And I'm here with my co-host Dr. Eric Weber, who is in a tiny closet in Ohio.

**Eric Weber:** Thanks, Anthony.

**Anthony Cashio:** We're joined today by four esteemed philosophers, Dr. Daniel Brunson, Dr. Sarah Woolwine, Dr. Nate Jackson and Dr. Justin Philip Bell and we've been discussing about disabilities. So philosophy, and race relationship to disabilities, and how American philosophy specifically can do this. These four esteemed people spoke yesterday on it and kind of getting some insights from them and learning things. Now for those of you who have been listening to this show for a while, or know anything about philosophy, one thing that philosophers like is to be clear about what we're talking about.

**Eric Weber:** That's right.

**Anthony Cashio:** Because sometimes we're not. So I guess a simple question for you guys, and maybe jump in. When we're talking about disabilities, what is a disability? How do we understand it? I mean we're talking about physical disabilities, mental disabilities, emotional disabilities?

**Daniel Brunson:** Yes.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Anthony Cashio:** Yes. Everybody, well what is a disability? How do we define that? Oh we've got two people jumping in. Go for it.

**Eric Weber:** Sarah, why don't you go first?

**Sarah Woolwine:** Okay. I think one pretty useful way of defining disability is to see it as a way of being a minority. Being a minority relative to one's body. So having a different kind of body than the majority of people have, but that being said, like earlier we were talking about wearing eyeglasses or corrective lenses. We don't normally think of near-sightedness as a disability, partly because it's something that's easily correctable, but also partly because a whole lot of people are near-sighted, right? So that's at least one, I think fairly useful way of answering this question.

**Eric Weber:** I've never thought about that.

**Anthony Cashio:** Yeah, I guess it'd be more rare to have like 20/20 vision-

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Anthony Cashio:** Than, so if disability is out of the norm-

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Anthony Cashio:** That would be the-

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yeah, and-

**Anthony Cashio:** Disability?

**Justin Bell:** Well, and that's certainly addressed as this political problem we've been dancing around this entire time. A group of people who don't have any or have limited political power, but have needs that are somewhat different than the political majority. How do we demand attention to these folks? How do these folks come into our conversations?

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Eric Weber:** And talk with us.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Right, yes. So one thing that this does, defining disabilities is a way of being a minority, it allows people who have disabilities to participate in identity politics in a more useful way, in similar ways that those people who are in racial minorities, ethnic minorities. So that's one thing that it allows.

**Justin Bell:** But I think this conversation we're having also points to something that's really important in my work and also in my life and that's the fight against rigid "either/or" distinctions. Man we love our either/or distinctions. It's black or it's white, it's chocolate or it's vanilla. You're able-bodied or you're disabled. I think that we have to start interrogating these either/or distinctions because there's a problem with them. Well, there's many problems with them but in this case one of the problems we're dancing around is we have this imaginary idea of the "prototype" human being. And this prototype human being does a lot of damage I think. Because let's talk about this prototype human being. First off-

**Sarah Woolwine:** Okay.

**Justin Bell:** It's a 'he'.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yeah.

**Justin Bell:** I think we all know that. He's better looking than I am too, does more pushups.

**Sarah Woolwine:** And he's white. (laughter)

**Justin Bell:** Oh yeah, he's definitely white, probably speaks some pretty clear English in an accent about like mine, he's an adult.

**Anthony Cashio:** He's not short.

**Justin Bell:** That's right.

**Anthony Cashio:** But also not old.

**Justin Bell:** Not old. Yeah, straight as an arrow. And so we've got ... We can't help but walk around with this sort of prototype or we might want to say "normal" human being idea. And this does tremendous damage if we start expecting people who aren't close to that prototype to then ... You're either normal or not normal. Be like that normal guy.

**Anthony Cashio:** Damage in what way?

**Justin Bell:** Damage, well there's psychological damage that occurs. There's social damage that occurs.

**Nate Jackson:** Also political.

**Justin Bell:** If you're not close enough to be normal, you're not invited to have the same kind of political or social or even neighborhood conversations, that's everyone else is. So I'm an able bodied white guy. I'm not blonde, and I could stand to do a couple more sit-ups, but I could enter into all sorts of different conversations that maybe ... First off, maybe I don't have a place in, but I am free to move around in a way that these political minorities that Sarah identifies are not. And so you've got this problem of the way we divide up reality. Frankly, a bad philosophy of how we divide up reality and understand how to navigate our world, dictating then who gets to have a say or not simply because they don't hit that "normal or not" bar that we demand they hit.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Or they don't approximate it closely enough.

**Justin Bell:** That's right.

**Eric Weber:** This is very interesting, what you both said has pulled some things together for me, as many of you know, I've got a daughter with some pretty significant disabilities and I've thought a lot about some of these issues you're talking about and one of the challenges seems to be just how widely different disabilities are. And therefore, in one of the challenges of being a group that's minority is that you need at least ... If you're going to be a minority, you need all the more solidarity among people in that group and yet you're all very, very differently enabled or disabled and so on. And so it's really hard to get that kind of solidarity, and yet I also learned that for people who reach old age, 80% of people end up with disabilities. So as a matter of fact, in old age, the vast majority of people are disabled. And yet there is a struggle to have solidarity, so fundamentally what I've seen which troubles me is that one of the answers people have

sought or pursued to address the question "How do you get change for such a kind of group?", and the only answer for so many people is the courts, which means that instead of the community thinking about you as valuable and part of the community, someone has to fight for their rights to be defended and then your municipality is forced to fund this thing.

I remember, for instance, a school where there was a child who needed a communication device, but the basketball team wanted new outfits.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Eric Weber:** Right. And this was the discussion.

**Daniel Brunson:** And that's the idea, that "you're taking things away from other people."

**Eric Weber:** That's right.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yeah, so disability rights tend to be construed as "special rights" somehow, rather than just a human right.

**Justin Bell:** That's right and this is one of the reasons why I think we must start in our conversations about not only this idea, but rights for gay people, rights for women, rights for ethnic minorities. We have to start, I think changing not only how we're talking, but even some of the words we use and some of the language we use. And this is the danger of jargon that we're always dancing around, right. So we don't want to get too jargony but we also have to invent new terms and new ways to talk about folks. So just the distinction of few years ago, we would say handicapped. Now we say disabled. What does that distinction mean?

**Anthony Cashio:** That's a good question. Why the change?

**Sarah Woolwine:** Well because, handicap was used as a kind of pejorative term for a long time. And so I think, that's the main reason there's been a kind of effort to get away from that word. But coming back to this idea of saying being disabled makes you a minority also, I think that just by itself, as a way underscoring this idea, that being disabled just makes you different and not necessarily worse off or doomed, as it were, to some sort of terrible existence, and therefore there's no reason to even focus on a question of rights.

**Justin Bell:** Yeah and well this is why I agree a 100% with my co-author Sarah. This also means we need to have a conversation about all of us.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Justin Bell:** About what ways we think about our own access to the world, and how we act. Because what I love about the philosophies I read and the position I'm pushing is that really we don't need to "normalize" disability. We need to *de-normalize* ability. We need to start understanding that because we're all unique and different, we are embodied and we have to access the world through our own embodiment, through our own predicaments, through our own problems, through our own perspectives. And really what that does when you start thinking about it in the way that I think Sarah talks about, you start realizing just how, first off, rich individual human experiences are, and I think that's a beautiful thing.

**Sarah Woolwine:** How individual they are.

**Justin Bell:** Yeah, how individual they are. So you get into the beautiful richness of human condition. But you also get into being able to have conversations about needs in erratically different way. So for example, I think we need to redefine what we mean by equality. Equality can be a word that leaves people out of conversations. "You're going to take from me, so that you can give it to somebody else." When I really think we should start talking about equality as equal shares in social goods and an equal share in the ability to interact with each other. And so I think starting to think this way opens up really radical, but really, frankly, beautiful new avenues of how we're going to live together. Because note this, if I'm talking about equality just as something that I have to give up or I get in order to be equal, instead of equality enables me to do something, that changes my perspective, and the more we can start changing this perspective, the more I think we can start. Not only integrating people with, what we would traditionally call obvious disabilities, into our society, but also integrating voices that aren't traditionally heard in our interaction. And that includes not only the disabled, it includes gay people, it includes ethnic minorities, it includes the impoverished-

**Sarah Woolwine:** Transgender people.

**Justin Bell:** -transgender people. And it starts opening up our world to understanding what our own potentials are and our society's potentials are. I think in not only a beautiful way -- I am intrigued by this idea -- but also a way that starts improving all of our condition and all of our activities.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Eric Weber:** So wouldn't you guys, wouldn't all of you say to some degree that philosophy at least in tradition is part of the problem, in so far as, in instance when you think about Aristotle, one of my favorite philosophers, who'll say things like "Man is the rational animal."

**Justin Bell:** Exactly.

**Eric Weber:** And only until very recently, has Martha Nussbaum, this great philosopher who by the way is going to be on this show ... That's going to be awesome.

**Anthony Cashio:** Plug. Plug.

**Eric Weber:** Plug, plug. That's coming in May. Martha Nussbaum has written about the frontiers of justice she calls them, including cognitive disabilities and so when you say, the man's the ... And first of all man, human kind is the rational animal, what does that say about a person with intellectual disabilities.

**Anthony Cashio:** I'm going to stop you there, Eric, because I think you're right when you said "man." I think that's actually still part of the problem, is that Aristotle-

**Eric Weber:** That is what he said.

**Anthony Cashio:** -said man. So yeah, you go "man".

**Eric Weber:** That's right.

**Anthony Cashio:** Don't change his language.

**Sarah Woolwine:** But I think-

**Anthony Cashio:** That's part of the point.

**Eric Weber:** That's right.

**Sarah Woolwine:** I think most importantly what it says is that someone with cognitive impairments falls below the threshold of the truly human.

**Eric Weber:** As far as how we treat them.

**Sarah Woolwine:** In terms of how we treat them, in terms of how we treat the, in terms of-

**Daniel Brunson:** Well, also it's in terms of how we *get* to treat them.

**Nate Jackson:** Right.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes, exactly.

**Eric Weber:** Can you say that again, Daniel?

**Daniel Brunson:** So I mean this idea that those with cognitive impairments are "less than human," is a way of justifying how we get to treat them poorly. Right? So it's not that we treat them poorly, it's that we have a reason to. And that's because they're not fully human.

**Eric Weber:** We make that our reason.

**Nate Jackson:** Right.

**Eric Weber:** Yeah.

**Nate Jackson:** One way-

**Eric Weber:** This gives us a ... I'm sorry.

**Nate Jackson:** One way in which doing or thinking through disability is pushing back on a longstanding philosophical tradition, as that there's this impetus that actually pay interest to experiences of disabled persons, whether that's through reading disability narratives, through everyday communication, making some kind of effort, right, to interact with people who are different from you.

**Sarah Woolwine:** And to listen to them, particularly I think in the case of people with cognitive impairments, one of the ways that these individuals have been treated unjustly is that we think that we can just speak for them. Right?

**Eric Weber:** Right.

**Sarah Woolwine:** And say whatever we want, rather than listening to them. So ...

**Eric Weber:** Well you know we have one last segment remaining to talk with these wonderful scholars on Philosophy Bakes Bread. Thank you so much to all of you for being on the show. And that is Dr. Justin Bell, Dr. Nate Jackson, Dr. Sarah Woolwine, Dr. Daniel Brunson and of course my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio and me, Dr. Eric Weber. We're going to come right back after a short break for one more segment of Philosophy Bakes Bread. Thanks everybody for listening, we'll be right back.

#### **Part 4: Concluding Thoughts**

**Anthony Cashio:** Welcome back to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio and my co-host Dr. Eric Weber, and we have been discussing disabilities, philosophical understandings of disabilities with Dr. Daniel Brunson, Dr. Sarah Woolwine, Dr. Nate Jackson and Dr. Justin Bell. We are at a special meeting at the Society For The Advancement of American Philosophy, meeting in Birmingham, Alabama. And it's been a really wonderful discussion so far.

**Eric Weber:** Indeed.

**Anthony Cashio:** In this last segment we're just going to kind of ask you guys some big picture questions. We're going to maybe tell a joke or two. We'll be lucky if it's funny and then we're going to invite, asking maybe for a question, for our "You Tell Me!" segment, see if our listeners have, you have a question for our listeners so they can share with us.

Why don't we get right to it. Final thoughts, I know we barely even touched the topics and it's clearly a fruitful thing. I think we maybe will have another episode about this in the future because there's so much to talk about here. We're going to start with you Nate. Do you have any final thoughts or something?

**Nate Jackson:** Absolutely I think-

**Anthony Cashio:** One final point for us.

**Nate Jackson:** Really broadly I think an outcome of our panel and our conversation today has been this question who counts right? And developing a little bit of self-suspicion and how we might unconsciously or just habitually answer that question when we interact with other people, with our neighbors in our communities. And to think about the ways in which maybe we diminish or minimize experiences of disability or our responsibilities towards respecting other persons, particularly disabled person's authority.

I think that's a big theme that we've encountered in each of our papers over the weekend. And also just in talking to one another over the last seven months.

**Anthony Cashio:** Beautiful, what about you, you want to add to that?

**Justin Bell:** Well first off I'm going to be stealing this idea of "self-suspicion." It sounds so much better than criticality or something like that. I'm going to completely steal that, I'll footnote you of course. I'll buy you a beer or something. Maybe my final thought is theft.

No, my final thought it actually thinking about disability in the way we're thinking about disability is important. I think the way we think about things is what's potentially transformative about conversations like this and philosophy in general. This way of thinking about disability and what it means to be a person and what it means to listen to others I think opens up avenues of interaction with all sorts of new people, all sorts of new situations, all sorts of new possibilities in our world. If we're going to transform real problems that people are dealing with day to day, thinking in new ways is necessary.

**Anthony Cashio:** Awesome.

**Eric Weber:** Right on.

**Anthony Cashio:** You know, not encountering people with disability and in kind of ways almost, it limits everyone.

**Justin Bell:** It absolutely limits what I can think about what I can do and what I consider my world to be like. Maybe the kind of higher or meta thing I should point out is "Don't be a butt head."

**Anthony Cashio:** Underlying theme of the show.

**Justin Bell:** This is-

**Anthony Cashio:** No jerks.

**Justin Bell:** This is actually one of my critiques of how academic philosophy works. There's a lot of jerks that live in universities and troll around the libraries. Don't be a jerk, listen to people and think about what they're saying. Maybe you don't like what they're saying, maybe you feel uncomfortable about what they're saying, but for the love of God, *think* about what they're saying.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Very much in line with what Justin was saying, I guess my final thought is that it is very important to change the commonplace conversation that many of us tend to engage in about regarding disability. This is something that I am trying to do in my research. It is very usual to think of disabled people as sort of existing for the edification of abled bodied society right? Get disabled people and we say things like, "Oh you know, they're so strong and-

**Daniel Brunson:** "I'm so proud of you!"

**Sarah Woolwine:** "I'm so proud of you and you do such a good job of minimizing your disability such that I don't even think about it. I don't even think of you as being disabled."

**Anthony Cashio:** What were we calling it yesterday? Inspiration porn?

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes, yeah inspiration porn that this tendency to only show disability in the media as a kind of super ability so we can't show disabled people unless they're doing something that far exceeds what so-called able-bodied people are normally able to do. I'm trying to change to that conversation and that outlook on disability, mainly be shifting the focus to the experiences of disabled people themselves. And not just what abled-bodied society has to say about them or its own supposed edification.

**Eric Weber:** Right on.

**Daniel Brunson:** So, we wouldn't be philosophers if there weren't a minor disagreement at least and so I want to say that this is not my final thought. Right?

**Justin Bell:** I feel like you just showed me up.

**Daniel Brunson:** Yeah it wasn't hard. [laughter]

**Eric Weber:** Ouch. Be nice.

**Justin Bell:** I just said we don't need to be butt heads. I disagree!

**Daniel Brunson:** Reasonable disagreements. And so, language aside, I'm sure this is true for my friends here and colleagues and this is a continuing conversation. Both in terms of political movements or in terms of disability rights and visibility which has a term with its own problems maybe. Then also the sort of work we're doing with bringing these cross disciplinary dialogues, bring disability studies in the philosophy, seeing what philosophy and the history of philosophy can offer us today with conceptual tools. There's ideas so we can better think about our experiences and those of other people.

Then my not final thought would be again, this binary thinking, the either or disability, we need to recognize that ability is rare in the sense right. Looking at the course of a human life, this is a common theme in disability studies where for the first two years of your life, somebody else is wiping your butt. Then for maybe a few decades you get to wipe your own and then at the end, somebody else is wiping your butt again right. [laughter]

**Anthony Cashio:** It's true.

**Daniel Brunson:** This ideal of a human being as being an able-bodied adult, that's not what we are most of the time right? Even now being a middle aged adult myself, I wear glasses and my eyesight is poor enough without my glasses that I cannot legally drive. And so I can take my glasses off and become disabled and then put them back on and no longer be disabled, at least in the eyes of the state.

And so there like disability is not a permanent thing, right, it's something that happens to people that they move in and out of in various ways and across various dimensions. I think it's part of why you find this topic so rich and important.

**Anthony Cashio:** Excellent.

**Eric Weber:** Yeah right on, indeed. Thank you so much all of you for those great final thoughts. You know as an inspiration for the show, we always want to ask and we don't necessarily have to go one by one, but just anybody who feels sort of strongly that you have the kind of thing you say to people when they think that philosophy doesn't bake bread. The question is for you and we've already heard a little bit from Daniel on this question so maybe we'll ask from others or if you got some more new thoughts Daniel go ahead. The question is do you think that philosophy bakes bread? Or would you say that it doesn't and what do you say if you do think it bakes bread metaphorically? Then what do you say to people who doubt that?

**Justin Bell:** I'll jump in, this is Justin. I think everyone is already, if they're navigating the world, if they're acting, if they are getting out of bed in the morning and putting on their pants, they have a philosophical position. It could be naïve...

**Daniel Brunson:** But also if they're not wearing pants.

**Justin Bell:** Sure, why not. Pants optional. That's a philosophical position. [crosstalk 00:08:45]

**Anthony Cashio:** Pant's optional is definitely a philosophical position.

**Justin Bell:** You should dedicate a spring break show to that.

**Eric Weber:** You can be in shorts or skirts.

**Justin Bell:** Everybody has a philosophy, they just might not be thinking about it. It might be a bad philosophy, it might be a dumb philosophy but everybody has one. What I do, at least especially in my teaching is yeah we've already got these positions, let's at least think about them because we've got them already. It's not like I'm without some claim about what is real or what I should do, or how I should act. It's not like I don't have those, it's not like anybody doesn't have them but instead, we probably have bad ones. Or we could at likely have bad ones and we should at least talk about them and that's where philosophy for me starts.

And if that doesn't bake bread, if that doesn't matter for my day-to-day life and for the day-to-day life of everybody in the world, then I really don't know what this shooting match is all about.

**Eric Weber:** Right on.

**Anthony Cashio:** Good, anyone else want to jump in on that?

**Eric Weber:** Well we're getting close on time so maybe we should just see whether anybody's got a funny story or a joke to tell for our segment called Philosofunnies.

Say Philosofunnies.

**Young Child:** Philosofunnies. [Laughter]

**Eric Weber:** Do any of you have a joke or a funny story to tell us either about philosophy or in relation to disability? Anything?

**Justin Bell:** Two philosophers walks into a room, they had three opinion.

**Anthony Cashio:** Perfect.

**Justin Bell:** I've got another one. This one's about academics in general. All right ready?

**Anthony Cashio:** Yeah.

**Justin Bell:** Why do academics tell bad jokes? Timing. You gotta let that one soak in a little.

**Anthony Cashio:** I told my students a version of that, they just started at me. Because you have to be an academic to get it.

All right, Eric.

**Eric Weber:** Yo.

**Anthony Cashio:** I told my doctor I broke my leg in two places.

**Eric Weber:** Yeah.

**Anthony Cashio:** He told me to quit going to those places.

**Eric Weber:** There's a doctor talking to his patient and he looks at him frankly and says, "This is a second opinion. At first I thought you had something else."

[Canned rimshot, laughter]

**Anthony Cashio:** Last but not least, we want to take advantage of the fact that we have powerful social media, ways of communicating with each other through the interwebs. They allow two-way communications for even programs like radio shows. We want to hear from you our listeners, we want to communicate with you. We're going to give you ways to talk into us so talk to us. We want to hear from you.

**Eric Weber:** That's right, so given that we'd love to hear your thoughts folks, our panelists, do you have a question that you propose we ask our listeners for our segment that we call "You Tell Me!" Got a question?

**Anthony Cashio:** A question, one question.

**Justin Bell:** Yeah the question, how are you disabled?

**Sarah Woolwine:** Yes.

**Justin Bell:** Or what potential do you have to be disabled and what does that then mean for what you mean by public and private? What you mean by the good life and starting to think about this and talk about this I think is exceptionally rich. For example, what I mean by private changes if I don't have use of my limbs. Just because of the needs of living. We typically think about these kinds of ideas as once again, those rigid "either/ors" and I think starting to think about this really starts breaking down these ideas.

**Eric Weber:** Can I ask you to repeat your question one more time just the straight question?

**Justin Bell:** How are you disabled and what does that mean for your vision of the good life?

**Eric Weber:** Thank you.

**Anthony Cashio:** All right guys, you heard it. That's a great question. How are you disabled? I have my answer. I don't want to tell you.

**Eric Weber:** If you remember, if any listeners remember the episode with Shane Courtland on selfish ethics, you may recall him saying that any of us is one slip and fall away from disability.

**Anthony Cashio:** Yep, that's true.

**Eric Weber:** That's true.

**Anthony Cashio:** Thank you everyone for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread.

**Eric Weber:** That's right.

**Anthony Cashio:** We're your Hosts, Dr. Anthony Cashio here in Birmingham, Alabama at Society for Advancement of American Philosophy. I'm going to take just a quick second and we want to thank the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy and especially Bill Myers, he hosted it this year.

**Eric Weber:** That's right.

**Anthony Cashio:** If you've listened to a few of our episodes, Bill Myers was on the second episode about dental ethics. We want to give a big shout out to him and a big thanks to him and to Birmingham Southern College for helping host this particular meeting. Any one want to add to that?

**Justin Bell:** Golf clap.

**Anthony Cashio:** Golf clap. Thanks Guys and I want to thank my colleagues and my friends here for joining us, we've been joined today by Dr. Daniel Brunson.

**Daniel Brunson:** Thank you.

**Anthony Cashio:** Sarah Woolwine.

**Sarah Woolwine:** Thank you.

**Anthony Cashio:** Nate Jackson.

**Nate Jackson:** Thanks so much.

**Anthony Cashio:** And Justin Bell.

**Justin Bell:** My students call me Papa JB. [laughter]

**Eric Weber:** Oh boy.

**Anthony Cashio:** We've had a great time today, we've learned a lot. I hope you consider sending us your thoughts about anything you've heard today that you'd like to hear about in the

future or about the specific question or questions we've raised for you. What disabilities do you have or potentially have that maybe aren't obvious to you and how does it change how you relate to the world in both the public and private senses?

**Eric Weber:** That's right and of course everybody you can reach us in a number of ways. We're on Twitter at PhilosophyBB which stands for Philosophy Bakes Bread, surprise, surprise. We're also on Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread and check out SOPHIA's Facebook page while you're there at Philosophers in America.

**Anthony Cashio:** You can of course email us at philosophybakesbread, all one word, at Gmail.com and you can call us and leave a short, recorded message. We will maybe play it on the show. You can reach us at 859-257-1849, that's 859-257-1849. Join us again next time on Philosophy Bakes Bread, food for thought about life and leadership.

[acoustic guitar music]