Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode Seven, with Dr. Scott Samuelson

"How to Live the Deepest Human Life"

Transcribed by Drake Boling, May 12, 2017.

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[Intro music]

Announcer: This podcast is brought to you by WRFL: Radio Free Lexington. Find us online at wrfl.fm. Catch us on your FM radio while you're in central Kentucky at 88.1 FM, *all the way to the left*. Thank you for listening, and please be sure to subscribe.

Dr. Weber: Hey everyone, you're listening to WRFL Lexington, this is Dr. Eric Thomas Weber here to present to you episode seven of Philosophy Bakes Bread which is about how to live the deepest human life, an interview that my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio and I have done with Scott Samuelson, I'll play that for you in just a second.

I want to give a shout out to a few people who have reached out to us and say thank you to you all for that. Thomas Ames wrote to say, "Listened to Philosophy Bakes Bread with Daniel Brunson", and that was also the episode with Seth Vannatta, "...while working out. Nice episode. I too am a first-generation college grad, a terrible high school student who found philosophy in first semester by complete happenstance. Forever grateful, and led to passion to philosophy. So I found the discussion very nice." says Thomas Ames. Thanks so much for that feedback, we have got another person that sent us great feedback. I didn't get permission to say his name on the radio but here's that great feedback: "I'm a big fan of Philosophy Bakes Bread, our body politic is better for it." Man, that's awesome. Thanks so much for that wonderful feedback. Victoria Burmeister, who on Twitter is @MercuryWitch says to us that "This podcast on Philosophy Bakes Bread on teaching first-generation college students hits home! Philosophy Bakes Bread provides great advice for pedagogy in the humanities. I love the advice that Philosophy Bakes Bread gives for stimulating interest in class via popular culture. Philosophy Bakes Bread shows how we need to be cognizant of our privilege."

Finally, Victoria says "Thank you for the podcast!" Thank you, Victoria, that's awesome feedback. We're really grateful for it. We're grateful that it isn't just one-way communication, throwing things out there and who knows what people think about it. We're very glad to have you all reach out to us. As I said, without further delay we'll have

some information about how you all can get in touch with us in just a second on Philosophy Bakes Bread. Here is the start of episode 7.

[Theme music]

Dr. Weber: Hello and welcome to Philosophy Bakes Bread: *food for thought about life and leadership*, a production of the Society of Philosophers in America, a.k.a. SOPHIA. I'm Dr. Eric Thomas Weber.

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

Dr. Weber: Philosophy Bakes Bread airs on WRFL, Lexington, 88.1 FM and is recorded and distributed as a podcast next, so 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. 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 on this show. Plus, we have a segment called "You tell me!". Listen for it, and let us know what you think.

Dr. Cashio: You can reach us in a number of ways! We are on twitter as @Philosophybb, which stands for Philosophy Bakes Bread. We're also on Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread, and check out SOPHIA's Facebook page while you're there at Philosophers in America.

Dr. Weber: You can of course, also email us at philosophybakesbread@gmail.com, and you can call us and leave a short, recorded message with a question, or a comment that we may be able to play on the show at 859-257-1849. That number is 859-257-1849.

Dr. Cashio: Hey Eric, guess what?

Dr. Weber: What?

Dr. Cashio: We got a letter for our "You Tell Me!" segment!

Dr. Weber: No way.

Dr. Cashio: Yeah. Marc wrote to us about the episode on the shared values in the abortion debate with Dr. Bertha Manninen. He has to say that he is really enjoying the show. Thank you Marc. And he very much appreciated the thoughtful approach to the abortion topic and he plans on picking up Dr. Manninen's book. Sales all around.

Dr. Weber: You should!

Dr. Cashio: Marc is on the pro-life approach to this argument, and he really appreciated the shared values approach to begin dialogue. He agrees with us and Dr. Manninen about the importance of taking a shared approach to dialogue, to actually having dialogue, to coming to understand each other's positions.

Dr. Weber: Shared values, that common ground.

Dr. Cashio: That's correct. He does say this, though, thought you might want a chance to respond. This is Marc: "One nit to pick, because I can't help it, I found it interesting that your guest's students were focused on the idea of acceptable versus unacceptable reasons to get an abortion. I think that's greatly encouraging because I don't think you can follow that road without ending up affirming the value of unborn life. But I don't see it as analogous to buying Sudafed for a cold versus buying Sudafed to produce meth". I believe we used that example, Eric. "That's actually two different actions. The purchase itself and the chemical purchased are morally neutral. One then can use the chemical in two actions, one praiseworthy, one blameworthy with abortion, and we're talking about one action with different motivations." That's the end quote from Marc's very thoughtful letter.

Dr. Weber: Well listen Marc, I really appreciate your comment and your point that you're raising. I think that you're right that abortion is not the same as what I was trying to say about Sudafed. My purpose in bringing up Sudafed is the fact that law can be something that we talk about as sort of "on or off", like this is legal or it's illegal. But there are examples and cases where there's more subtlety about that. An obvious case would be asking yourself whether or not you respect the law. Do you always respect the speed limit? A lot of people don't respect the speed limit regularly, or all of the time, anyway. But it's sort of a matter of degree. It you're only going 10 over, it doesn't add quite so much risk for the world as going 50 over, or 30 over in a residential area.

The point is about the nature of law and the fact that sometimes we talk about it as sort of on and off, because Dr. Manninen was explaining that even if they don't think abortion is a good thing or morally acceptable, many still think it should be legal. And so she was saying "But if it's legal that's sort of the pro-choice stance. What do we say about the cases where something is legal but something can seem wrong or problematic anyway, or should be legal but it's problematic. I think the speeding example sort of helps show how something can be illegal, to actually violate the speed limit, but you're not going to go to jail, and the gradations of that. By the same token, something can be legal, like buying Sudafed, but you can't buy too much of it. You're right that it's not morally neutral.

I would say that when you say that all abortions are of a kind in contrast with the buying of Sudafed, which can be of different kinds, well there's the cases where a mother's life is at risk, and that's the reason people give, to terminate a pregnancy, which is ending one life to save another life. Arguably, it leads to, in the moral literature, "That's different in kind from a mother who just aborts a baby because she doesn't want a bi-racial child," which is one of the examples Dr. Manninen gave. So, I think that's all I'll say for now, Marc, or anyone else, I'd love to head your thoughts about that.

Dr. Cashio: Well thanks Eric, and thanks again Marc, for the very thoughtful letter. Eric and I have had quite a good conversation about it. If anyone else would like to reach out to us for our "You Tell Me!" segment, we're always taking questions, comments, praise, criticism. You can email us, call us, or even tweet at us. We can be reached at

philosophybakesbread@gmail.com, and other ways of contacting us we will give you at the end of the episode. Thanks again, everyone, for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread, and this "You Tell Me!" segment.

Dr. Weber: Indeed. Thanks a lot.

Dr. Cashio: On today's show, we're excited to be joined by Dr. Scott Samuelson. How are you doing today Scott?

Dr. Samuelson: Doing great. Happy to be here!

Dr. Cashio: Great, I'm glad you could join us. Scott is here to talk with us about the role of philosophy in living a deep and meaningful life.

Dr. Weber: Dr. Samuelson is the author of the book *The Deepest Human Life*, as well as another book in development titled *Seven Ways of Looking at Pointless Suffering*. I first encountered Scott's writing in *The Atlantic* magazine, in a piece titled *Why I Teach Plato to Plumbers.* Scott earned his P.H.D. in philosophy at Emory University and teaches philosophy in Kirkwood Community College in Iowa.

Dr. Cashio: Scott, in this first segment, we called it "Know Thyself", we'd like to see how well you know yourself. Maybe you could tell us about yourself, how you got into philosophy, what philosophy means to you, and how your background ended up shaping how you do philosophy and thinking about how it connects to living a meaningful life.

Dr. Samuelson: Well I grew up in a very small town in rural Iowa, a town of about 500 people. I do think that growing up in a small town helps the philosophical life because you get to see faces of a whole variety of human nature. The little town provides you with all of that. I didn't get into philosophy in a real way until I was about 16 years old, and I made a trip up to Iowa City, where I now live. I was at the public library there, and I stumbled on a book in the public library that happened to contain an excerpt from the famous theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas, thought that name was completely unfamiliar to me at that time. The excerpt was titled *Five Proofs of God*. That idea intrigued me, so I read the proofs and I had an almost mystical experience. On the one hand, I can't say I really understood what he was saying at all. It all went over my head, the proofs seemed really complicated. But on the other hand, somehow when I was reading, I had this overwhelming feeling that whatever Thomas Aquinas was doing was about the greatest thing a human being could do. The idea of Proving God, to be able to stand back from the universe and use our minds to fathom the thing. That seemed like the most amazing thing in the world. I didn't really know what philosophy was, but I knew I wanted to be a philosopher.

Dr. Cashio: That's a very ambitious undertaking. Can I prove God exists?

Dr. Weber: Would you say that people might call that an arrogant thing to say that you can do?

Dr. Samuelson: Yeah, in a way. I think Thomas was not being quite as arrogant as the title of the piece sounded. I think he was just trying to show that the mind lead to the belief in God in certain ways. I have to say it was part of the arrogance of the idea that attracted me originally. That idea of being so great that one could pronounce upon even a matter like God by using one's own mind. I immediately started reading philosophy thinking that this stuff is going to be great. I have to say, it wasn't so much the Scholastic philosophers like Thomas Aquinas that I was reading at first. It was mostly the existentialists, as they are known. And then I went on to college and studied the whole history of philosophy.

Dr. Weber: So I would imagine, though, that the rebelliousness of that age might make the ambition and perhaps arrogance of the idea that we're going to prove God, I can imagine that might seem attractive to a young person. At the same time, we can sound arrogant on the other hand, arrogant in a community that might respect that because when you are talking about God and believing in that, so maybe this is a balanced kind of rebelliousness.

Dr. Samuelson: That's right, and I do think that philosophy is kind of turbulent, that is to say that it unleashes all sorts of things in us and at times, sometimes arrogance. Philosophers can be known for that. But I really hope that in the end, philosophy cures us of some of that arrogance and allows us to approach these matters a little more humbly.

Dr. Weber: Interesting. You mentioned the existentialists, and at least some existentialists are atheists, of course some are religious believers. So at what age did you encounter existentialists and if you encountered, it was Aquinas first right?

Dr. Samuelson: Right. It was right after that. Like I said, even the idea of philosophy was pretty foreign to me at the time, and I just started poking around. I'm not sure exactly is was that I came across the existentialists, but I have to say that they're a natural place for to go people at first. Existentialism I think of as a style of philosophy that starts with who we are and our existence, hence the name existentialism, rather than starting just with big ideas. It works from the existence outwards. And of course existentialism puts a big emphasis on our freedom, as Jean-Paul Sartre puts it in his distinctive French way, "We are condemned to freedom." As a teenager, that idea of the celebration of one's freedom and the idea of trying to figure out how to use that freedom well and how to have a clear-eyed look at who we are and the situations we are in and how we can lead authentic lives. These are things that the existentialists seemed to be doing, and those were things that I felt like I wanted to do too. And I have to say, that I have not grown out of. I'm still interested in exploring those matters in that way.

Dr. Cashio: Excellent. So as you've gone on, you went on to study philosophy and now you're a renowned philosophy teacher, have you developed a better sense of what philosophy is? Has it gone from some sort of mystery? You kind of mentioned the making you humble. I guess my question is, how would you define philosophy for our listeners?

Dr. Samuelson: One thing I like to point out is that even the question "What is philosophy?" is itself a philosophical question. When scientists asks "What is science?", they're not doing science anymore. But when philosophy asks "What is philosophy?", we're doing philosophy. This segment is called "Know Thyself", and there's a way in which philosophy is all about that, that kind of attempt to think "What is this that I'm doing, who am I anyway?", a kind of turning back on oneself. What do I think of philosophy? I feel like what I've come to see about it is that I like to think of philosophy as a kind of journey. I worry sometimes that philosophers portray a too-narrow sense of philosophy. In other words, you can kind of get the feeling that philosophy is some form of making a big theory about everything. Or maybe you get the idea that philosophy is just about criticizing what everyone else's theories and views are. Certainly theorizing and criticizing are important parts of philosophy but I don't see them as the whole thing, I think of them as stages on that bigger journey.

The way I see the journey is that it begins in wonder. We wonder about what happens when we die, or we wonder if there is a God, or we wonder what's right. Really, almost anything can provoke this kind of wonder, and then that next stage is a kind of speculative stage, where we do start to theorize, we try to think our way to a good answer to our questions. That stage, I think can become kind of tyrannical at times. This is that arrogant side where we can start to think "I have seen the truth of everything and everyone else is wrong and I'm right. Why can't they understand things like I see things?" But if we're good philosophers, we start to apply continued criticism to our own views just as we've applied it to others. This sometimes leads us to skepticism. We can doubt things.

Sometimes the skepticism can go so far that we enter a stage of despair or worry: "There's no truth at all, or we'll always be cut off from it." But I feel like if we go through that whole journey, we come back to where we started but in a unique way. We come back to see the real basis for our speculations. I think that whole process is a kind of active examining our lives, of learning who we are, and of enriching our lives through that journey. It's a way, like the mental act of growing up, or the spiritual act of growing up.

Dr. Weber: That's interesting, you know you mentioned this issue of despair when philosophers question everything, we can worry that there's nothing firm to hold onto, that we don't have any answers. We can feel lost. There's this saying that I won't get, I'll have to paraphrase from Bertrand Russell where "The great tragedy of the world is the fact that people who are wise realize that they don't know, and they're hesitant and quiet, whereas everyone else who doesn't know a damn thing is incredible loud and confident." (laughter). Anyone with any wisdom is cautious and the people with fervor enough and insufficient thinking go out and win public office.

Dr. Samuelson: That seems about right.

Dr. Cashio: So this skepticism has seemed like a concern for philosophers for a long time. You mentioned Aquinas' *Five Proofs for God*, I know in an earlier passage in that

text he sort of laments the idea of what he calls...he's worried about skepticism. You hear these bad arguments and because of the bad arguments you think there's no such thing as a good argument. Then you give up on philosophy altogether. And giving up on philosophy at least for Aquinas, was giving up on a life with God, so that's always been a concern.

Dr. Samuelson: I do worry about that. Philosophy can sometimes throw us into that confusion spiral where we think that there is no truth. I feel like right now that idea of truth is vital as ever. To me, I always think of philosophy as trying to occupy a middle ground in between two positions, and it's a difficult middle ground to occupy. On the one side, there are the people who feel like they have the truth, that they are in possession of it and act decisively on it. On the other side there are the people who think that there is no truth, whatever. Think whatever you want, it doesn't make any difference.

Dr. Cashio: "It's all relative."

Dr. Samuelson: Right, the philosopher is sort of in between those two things. The word itself, philosophy, of course means the love of wisdom. It doesn't necessarily mean you have wisdom, but it means that you believe that there's truth, that you believe some wisdom out there, and you're looking for it, you're searching for it, you're courting it, you're in love with it, you're pursuing it. So on the one hand, you have to believe in that truth and the worthiness of it, but at the same time you don't necessarily deceive yourself in thinking that you're always in possession of it.

Dr. Weber: I love that, thinking about that love as a courtship. It certainly gets at the notion of the journey, certainly the chase for the one you love, or the knowledge you love. Well on that note, that's a great moment for us to take just a quick break, and we'll be right back talking with Dr. Scott Samuelson.

Dr. Cashio: Welcome back to Philosophy Bakes Bread, this is Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber and today we are here talking with Dr. Scott Samuelson, author of *The Deepest Human Life*. Today we look forward to learning from Scott about how and why to live the deepest human life, although I don't know, do we need to ask why to live a deep human life? Why don't we start with that? Why should I want to live a deep life?

Dr. Samuelson: I'm overwhelmed by a sense that life is a precious thing and that being a human is an incredible, unique thing. Someone once said, I'm not good at the scientific facts, but someone once said that the human brain is the most complex thing known to exist in the universe, so I figured, why not take it out for a test drive? Why not use it to its maximum? If we have these amazing depths in us shouldn't we try to live our lives in a way that's worthy of them? Worthy of this amazing gift of being human, being conscious on this planet.

Dr. Weber: I guess so. Or we can watch Maury Povich or whatever the latest...

Dr. Cashio: Maury Povich? Is that your reference?

Dr. Weber: Oh my goodness I feel old. (laughter) What will the youngins watch today on television? Dr. Phil?

Dr. Samuelson: I'll ask you guys this question. Don't you think that people do have a deep-down hunger for something like meaning, for leading a more fulfilling life? I admit, there's plenty of times where people seem to be dodging it or whatever, sitting back and watching whatever the contemporary Maury Povich is and not pursuing it. But I feel like deep down there is this kind of hunger there, and I've seen it again and again awoken in people and I've seen it enough to think that it's more widespread than we sometimes like to credit ourselves with.

Dr. Cashio: I agree completely. This is how I begin almost every one of my classes or conversations with you about philosophy. Begin asking them: What can they do in their life to find meaning? What do they do to think about those depths and what is keeping them from having a life of meaning? Just those first questions gets the whole thing started and it engages them immediately every single time.

Dr. Weber: Interesting. I see a couple of directions people tend to take. One, when people really thirst for meaning, I think a lot of people turn to religion, and many find a great deal of meaning there. I think there are people who revel in their sense that they are elevated and they understand that these stories that we tell each other Santa Claus and Jesus are just stories of these people, and they kind of revel in their awareness of despair, the Gothic teenager existentialist, and so their meaning in life is sort of just understanding that there's no meaning. And then I guess you find some other people just contented. There are some people out there who hunger and thirst for more, but it's also very easy for us to sort of watch a lot of TV and play a lot of video games and escape these questions.

Dr. Samuelson: No doubt. I agree with your point about, for some people religion provides a satisfactory pattern of life for them, or maybe their Gothic existentialism, as you said, gives it to them, or maybe their distractions with TV and their cell phones give it to them. But what I think of, I talked about philosophy as being a journey. I think all of those things, they have the danger of not fully satisfying us, or how we see them as not fully satisfying to us. So all of the sudden we have a question or a wonder, or just feel a vague sense of dissatisfaction? Is this really what's true? It's out of that, that I think grows the sense of "OK, how can I find a better way of being? How can I find the truth that I thought I had but maybe I didn't have in the same kind of full possession that I once believed?

Dr. Cashio: So do you have any recommendations on how to go about starting this journey for our listeners? Someone listening right now is like "Yeah, I identify with Scott just then".

Dr. Weber: Maybe they don't want to read the proofs of God, but would you point people to one of those Existentialist texts that hooked you?

Dr. Samuelson: Well sure. It can take lots of different forms. The reason why I wrote my book, the first book that I wrote, *The Deepest Human Life*, was in a way, this idea that look, I really think the whole philosophical tradition is a real treasure trove, and I wanted to open the doors as wide as I could to that philosophical tradition. It was a kind of commitment I had, I think a lot of people are hungry for this kind of thing, and if you just try to offer it to them in a serious, real, no-nonsense way, that the people will take to it. My book is a kind of tour through a lot of the history of philosophy that I have found to be a great way into some of these questions from a whole lot of different angles. There are lots of recommendations I would have. See my book!

Dr. Weber: His book of course, *The Deepest Human Life*. And I think that's a good point. I want to follow up, because when we think about this, each of us works in higher education. I would ask you, when you ask about the deepest human life, let's say a janitor is listening, or someone who drives a truck across the country might be listening, or just someone who drives a taxi in town here.Is the deepest human life available to everybody, or is it just for eggheads in the ivory tower, people who get to go to college and have the good fortunes in life to be able to talk to professors. How would you address in various audiences?

Dr. Samuelson: Teaching where I teach, at a community college, I've also had the opportunity to teach philosophy in prisons, I've really seen that philosophy is certainly not limited to the so-called eggheads, much less limited to some upper-class, or something like that. I have seen philosophy just as alive if not more alive in the taxi drivers and the prisoners and the janitors. I don't see any kind of...I have yet to see that a doctor philosophizes better than a nurse, or an investment banker better than a taxi driver.

In my experience, actually, I almost bet on the taxi driver in that instance, but investment bankers sometimes surprise you too. I get a little bit demoralized, actually, how we sometimes talk about education simply in terms of the economy and getting jobs and how we narrow down our humanity just to this economic function. I feel like that's a kind of betrayal of our humanity and a betrayal of to me, what the promise of America is at its best that says "We believe that the goods of freedom, the goods of a free mind and the goods of liberty are available to all people and there shouldn't be some artificial boundary put on that. I think philosophy is definitely one of those great treasures.

Dr. Weber: As I mentioned, one of the things that caught my attention in your work was the piece you wrote *Why I Teach Plato to Plumbers*, just for people who haven't had a chance to see that, why do you teach Plato to plumbers?

Dr. Samuelson: I wrote that piece, *Why I Teach Plato to Plumbers* in part because it's shameful how we've thought of education so much in terms of the economy and getting jobs and whatever. I hate to see our jobs and our education totally separated. Yes, it's obviously important to get a job, it's crucial to have plumbers. But we're never just our jobs. We're never just plumbers, we're citizens who get to participate in the government of our country. And we're also just human beings, with all of the mysteries of the

universe inside us. To me an educational system that doesn't appreciate those facts is really poor. The term, "the liberal arts", of which philosophy is considered a mainstay, refers to those subjects appropriate to free people. Liberal, in this sense, having the same sense as liberate, or to be free.

My friend, Scott Newstack calls the liberal arts "the crafts of freedom." And usually those crafts of freedom, subjects like philosophy and history and math and science, were taught to the upper classes of society. They were the ones who needed to think for themselves and make decisions about how things should go. If the lower classes got any education or training, it was a technical training. They were supposed to take orders and do their jobs. Now is that the kind of society we want to have, where the rich get to think for themselves and enjoy the higher things, and the rest of us are just taught how to be basically functionaries or slaves? That's not what I think is the American ideal! I think we should all have access to those higher goods.

Like I said, my experience has been plumbers, nurses, whatever, they have had just as much potential for engaging in philosophy as the doctors do, as the investment bankers do. In fact, often more potential at times. I'm not saying that everyone should major in philosophy, though of course some people should. I'm just saying that we should make a commitment to teaching those crafts of freedom, the liberal arts, as widely as possible.

Dr. Cashio: When you're teaching you students this how do they respond? Do you get a lot of pushback? "Why would I want to study philosophy?" I find this approach extremely engaging but how do they respond, your students, or even people outside of the classroom?

Dr. Samuelson: I have found that on the whole, people respond fairly well. Don't get me wrong, I always have students who are checked-out, or would rather be somewhere else, that certainly happens. But again, I don't see that as being anything to do with their economic class or whether they are more likely to be a plumber or something else. I always take the approach, pastry approach, to these matters.

I like to cook myself, and one of the things I have learned from the people that make pastries, is that they never defend dessert. They just make up really delicious desserts and put them in front of you and people tend to eat them. I kind of think of philosophy a little like that too. I think of philosophy as a really just delicious, interesting thing, so I just try to make it as delicious and interesting as I can and set it out there. I find people usually take to it at some level, they have had these questions on their minds, they are interested in them. If I can find a way of showing that these are interesting things that human beings wonder about, then most human beings start to wonder about them. To me, I have never found that making philosophy interesting and engaging hard. I feel like the subject sells itself in the same way that blackberry pie sells itself.

Dr. Cashio: You heard it folks, philosophy bakes pastry, even if it doesn't bake bread. (laughter).

Dr. Weber: I like that. I understand, Scott, that you participate in, or you run a television show in Iowa, can you tell us about that?

Dr. Samuelson: Yeah, I am one of the hosts on a show, it's on our local ABC affiliate, called *Ethical Perspectives on the News*. Our idea is to take big questions that have arisen on the news, and try to bring an ethical perspective to them. We get people from around the community who have perhaps some kind of stake or expertise on the issue. I try to interview them, I try to push them a little bit, I try to show that this kind of philosophical thinking can be a useful thing in action and try to get people involved in it. At times it can be a really great thing, a lot of times we have much better discussion on our local show than you'll see when people are just yelling at each other on the cable TV stations next to it.

Dr. Cashio: But you don't get the ratings! (laughter)

Dr. Samuelson: We do not.

Dr. Weber: Maybe you need to start yelling at each other and bringing in paternity tests and then you'll get the ratings.

Dr. Cashio: That reminds me Eric, I've been thinking about re-thinking the format of this show, more yelling. We need more yelling, and some conspiracy theories, I think.

Dr. Weber: I like that. In just a few moments we'll be right back talking further with Dr. Scott Samuelson, about his book *The Deepest Human Life,* as well as his book in progress.

[Radio station music]

Announcer: Who listens to the radio anymore? We do. WRFL Lexington.

Dr. Cashio: Welcome back, everyone. You're listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber and today we're speaking with Dr. Scott Samuelson, and we've been discussing how to live a deep and meaningful life.

Dr. Weber: That's right. Before we move on to talk about your next book, Scott, I want to invite you to tell us about, for our listeners, what does it mean to live a deep human life, or the deepest human life. What are some characteristics of such a life and why should people want that exactly?

Dr. Samuelson: The title of the book comes from a line from William James, where he says "The deepest human life is everywhere." When I read that, it inspired me to write the book, and in the sense that, look, in a way, the deepest human life is in all of us in

some ways. When I look out at my students I try to remember that the deepest human life is there lurking in some ways already. It's a matter of trying to actualize it. While we could certainly talk about some characteristics of it overall, one of the things that I always come back to is that there's something always surprising about a really deep human life. In other words, I don't see my book as saying "Look guys, if you want to lead a good life, you've got to check off these things here, and once you've done that is meaningful."

Dr. Cashio: "Life complete! You've won the game."

Dr. Samuelson: It's really more like going on that journey, and it's a kind of heroic journey, or it's an adventurous journey, and you're not sure where it's going to go. Like I said, it usually does involve going through some darkness and skepticism and doubt and struggle and despair, even. But then trying to come out on the other side richer for having undergone that journey. To me, that's the crucial thing itself, is having undertaken, to explore that deeper life. The way my book is structured is that I centered around four big questions by looking at the history of philosophy in light of those questions. I start with just the question "What is philosophy?", and in a sense, trying to get us to understand it as a journey and to see ourselves as on a kind of odyssey. Then next question is "What is happiness?", where we look at some great ancient philosophers and how they understood to seek out a really fulfilling, satisfying life.

In particular I look at Epicureanism and Stoicism, which I think are a kind of permanent possibilities for people to consider. Then I look at the question of God, can we have knowledge of God? I look at people exploring religion as ways of trying to help us to see that deeper human life, and the extent to which God is available to us or not. And then the last part is about "What is the nature of good and evil? How can we think of questions of right and wrong, and in thinking about those things, enhance and deepen our lives?" As I said, though I think that there are some characteristics that obtain across the board, I always like to say that wisdom isn't so much of a doctrine, it's more of a style.

Dr. Cashio: What do you mean by that?

Dr. Samuelson: To me, I think of style as central to philosophy. There's a great philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, who has a book on education that I like a lot. He says at one point that the ultimate goal of education is the development of style. I think that's right, in a way. Think of, like, a musician. If you're going to be educated as a musician, at first you learn the notes, you learn the instrument, you learn to play it as it's supposed to be played. But if you are a real musician, you eventually achieve a style. You're Glenn Gould, you're Louis Armstrong. You've somehow so internalized the music that it has come out to be who you are. Like I said, there's no way of telling people "This is how you're supposed to play a style", you have to achieve that style in some ways. If we think of philosophy as the education of humanity, then the point is to achieve a style of being human, a way of being as fully who-we-are as possible. And so that style is compatible with any number of doctrines and religions and whatnot, or atheisms. To me

I'm more interested in that style than necessarily saying "You gotta get the right doctrine, and once you get the right doctrine then it's all there."

I'm a kind of philosophical pluralist who thinks that there's probably different approaches that will always be there and we should always show respect to, and probably our overall sense of truth would be diminished if we lost those different perspectives. We as human beings have to figure out a way of "How do I live my life? What am I going to do about how I pursue happiness? What am I going to do about what I think about God? What am I going to do about what I think is right and wrong? How am I going to live my life in relationship to those things?" I see my job as an educator and a philosopher is more giving people to be serious about pursuing wisdom about those matters than so much believing that I have the wisdom that they should always follow.

Dr. Cashio: What a fantastic idea. You get this sort of universal concept of wisdom, everyone can be wise, but everyone is wise in their particular, unique way or style. I like that a lot.

Dr. Weber: This also brings us full-circle to why we begin with "Know Thyself", because there's this creativity, and you don't just come to know in terms of finding out yourself, but of determining who you are through these experiences in this journey.

Dr. Sanuelson: That's exactly right, and that is something that is sometimes hard to get people to see, that in the act of knowing oneself, one transforms oneself. The more one understands, one is changed by that. A lot of times students come in and feel that "This is just my belief, this is what I think." I'm always inclined to push them a little bit and say "Is that what you think? It's what you happen to think, it's the belief that you've happened to hold onto or acquired but have you made it yours yet? Maybe in thinking about it, you may come to some other belief, or a different belief. In a way you don't know what your real beliefs are until you've examined them. You don't just start with a bunch of beliefs and say "These are mine, this is my religion, these are my political views". In a way, only until you've examined them do they become yours, and oftentimes they are transformed when you examine them.

Dr. Cashio: We were speaking of the liberal arts earlier, I've always understood the act of knowing oneself as the act of liberation: having the power to act on your own and to be your own person.

Dr. Samuelson: Yeah, exactly. There's the famous allegory of the cave, from Plato, where he says "Imagine people all chained up inside of a cage, and they've been there their whole lives and all they ever see is what's projected in front of them by a fire and shadow puppets". It's a kind of macabre scene of a half-dungeon half-movie theater. When I originally started teaching that allegory, I thought this was a very far-fetched story, it's obviously it's obviously not realistic at all. The more I've taught it, the more I think "God, it's really realistic!" It's basically about people who spend all their time staring at images projected in front of them. And that's basically our lives. Our screens,

in any form. In the story of course what happens, is what happens for someone who gets out of that, who breaks out of the cave. Well, it's a journey. It's a very difficult journey, and when you finally get out and you see the light of the sun you're blinded, you've lost all sense of sight. But if you stick around, and you push on through that journey, you eventually see for yourself and that really is what you're saying, liberation. You're now understanding things for yourself, you're thinking for yourself and you're seeing that this is a much richer, better world. I think of there's the kind of education, the liberal arts education, the crafts of freedom education that says that this is about getting out of the cave, and seeing by the light of the sun versus the kind of education that teaches you to guess what shadow comes next in the cave.

Dr. Weber: This is fantastic that you bring this up because our very first episode is one where we started with having Anthony as a guest, to be a co-host off an on. He had just been teaching *The Republic* and the cave allegory. And so if anybody is interested in that and you're just hearing this now, go to philosophybakesbread.com and check out episode 1 of the show. The whole episode is about Anthony talking about that. It's a great story in philosophy.

Dr. Cashio: It's been a long journey from there to here, somehow. It's a good one.

Dr. Weber: This is fantastic. I do want to get a chance to ask you about the book that you're writing, which is about suffering. Can you tell us about the book in progress and how this differs from what you have been talking about, and where you're going with it?

Dr. Samuelson: Yeah, one of the things that I have found, I talked about how philosophy often begins in wonder, wondering if there's a God, or something like that. I feel like one of the main sources of wonder that we have as human beings pertains to suffering. Suffering presents itself to us and we think "Why is this happening? What's going on? What sense can I make of this?" I titled the book *Seven Ways of Looking at Pointless Suffering. I*n a way, pointless suffering is a way of what in philosophy is traditionally called evil.

In philosophy we sometimes talk about the problem of evil. Evil here doesn't just mean people doing nasty stuff, though that certainly is included. It means all kind of excessive suffering or pointless suffering. The kind of suffering that is very difficult to get one's mind around. Some suffering, I suppose, we can make sense of: "No pain, no gain." But to be human I think is to perceive some instances of pain and death and misery as just going beyond anything we can see as valuable. Migraine headaches or the death of children or horrible natural disasters. The Holocaust. Slavery. What are we to make of these things that just seem like this gross infliction of pointless suffering? Philosophers have wrestled with that and I think everyone wrestles with that, up to a point. In wrestling, it's crucial as human beings in our best human institutions and ways of being, come out of leading examined lives in relationship to suffering. So I try to look at how different philosophers have approached this struggle.

What I come to is that even though there's a lot of different ways, I talk about 7 different ways, but in a way, most philosophers end up when they reach something like wisdom about this, that they find some kind of interesting balance between trying on the one hand to fix suffering, to remedy or cure it, and on the other hand, figuring out a way of just facing it. Of letting it be, and even growing in relationship to it. That's a kind of paradox to at once combat something as well as to accept it. That paradox is at the heart of the best institutions when it comes to dealing with suffering.

Dr. Weber: That's fascinating. I don't want to just plug episodes, but we actually just aired an episode with Dr. John Lachs, and he's got a book called *Stoic Pragmatism*. The stoic side of stoic pragmatism teaches you how to accept things beyond your control and to cope with suffering. And the pragmatism inspires you to ameliorate circumstances to the extent that you can, but you've got to be stoic about it.

Dr. Samuelson: Yeah, I look at both stoicism and forms of pragmatism in my book too, and in fact I've looked at that book of Lachs', in part because I love the title, because I think the title contains that very paradox that I'm talking about.

Dr. Cashio: I know in your book you also talk about another attitude or approach, called, I think the "forget it attitude".

Dr. Samuelson: I say that basically you've got three approaches when you're faced with suffering as a human being. You can think "OK I'm going to fix it, I'm going to get rid of it, I'm going to change it", or you think "I'm going to face it in some ways, make it part of my story", or probably the most common method of all is the "forget about it", where you're just like "I'm going to try not to think about it as much as possible". I think a lot of human life is caught up in distracting ourselves, diverting ourselves from facing the difficult conditions of being alive.

Dr. Cashio: The shadows on the cave wall?

Dr. Samuelson: Exactly.

Dr. Weber: Indeed**.** When we come back we're going to ask you a little bit more about that, about what we should think about the "forget it" attitude, as well as some big-picture questions. We have one more segment with Dr. Scott Samuelson, thank you so much for being with us, and folks, we'll be right back after a short break.

Dr. Cashio: Welcome back everybody! This is Philosophy Bakes Bread. Today we have been talking with Dr. Scott Samuelson and now we have time for some big-picture questions, some light-hearted thoughts, and we'll end with a pressing philosophical question for our listeners, as well as some info of how to get a hold of us. Scott, when we ended the last section, we were talking about the "forget it" attitude with approaching suffering, when we sort of bury our face in our cell phones and our social media and we don't face it. Though I've noticed something lately with the greater prevalence of social media. I wonder if you can say this. On social media, you might find, let's take Facebook, just as a big example. We had a lot of discussions about different places where people

suffer, about maybe Syrian refugees, different kinds of poverty, different kinds of death. So you get social media as this big, moving, influential phenomenon, in some good way. And yet, we have this ironic or paradoxical structure where it seems like we're facing our suffering, but the more we talk about it, it feels like it renders suffering shallow. Is this a weird twist on the "forget it" attitude"?

Dr. Weber: Or are we getting desensitized in a sense?

Dr. Samuelson: I worry about these things. Obviously, any kind of technology can have a good side to it in that it can make us aware of things and provide vehicles for us to help out or reflect on our lives more. But of course many technologies more powerfully are used for us to forget about things, or even more interestingly, to sensationalize things. What's to me interesting is that as we tend to bury ourselves more in a kind of forgetfulness of suffering, a lot of time suffering reappears in more sensational, weird forms. We play violent video games or watch zombie movies, or see horror films where everything is going to be destroyed. It's as if we can't ever quite fully get away from it.

I think the same goes with social media, that at times it can be sensationalized, or it can become more of a spectacle. When it comes to actually facing suffering, it involves being a bigger part of it, not just seeing it as "Oh those people over in Syria suffer, not me, or not the people around me." But to see suffering as intersecting with ourselves is not separate from us, is not something that we stand above like gods and watch on a screen. It's something that is deeply connected to who we are, that connects us to the sufferers around the world as well.

Dr. Cashio: I'm always concerned that we take the social media suffering as a substitute for actually facing it, so we're like "Look at me, I'm engaging in suffering. I shared this sad story about refugees and I have done my part and faced the suffering." I think you're absolutely right, I like that "Like gods above a screen, moving little pieces around."

Dr. Weber: In this last segment, Scott, I want to invite you to consider either from your first book, *The Deepest Human Life*, or from the one you're writing on ways of addressing unnecessary suffering, what are some big takeaway points that you think could help people either to live a deep human life and be happy, or to cope with or deal best with suffering? What do you want listeners to think about and take away from this interview?

Dr. Samuelson: When it comes to suffering, I'm going to really recommend that we give serious thought to it, that we engage in an active philosophy in relationship to it. I think, like I said, there's a powerful pull in our society to forget about suffering, to bury ourselves in distractions. Don't get me wrong, I don't want to be too puritanical here, everyone has to distract themselves sometimes and take a little forgetfulness from their lives, I don't mind that. But it can easily get overboard, and I think we can all recognize that. But the other side of our society also poses a danger. The other part of us is the

highly, the "fix-it" mentality, that suffering is just going to be fixed, that technology can remedy everything. That too, I think poses dangers. There's a lot of good that comes out of that, I'm mostly grateful for the kinds of technological fix-it qualities that we've cultivated, but they can go too far. Medicine, for instance, can turn into trying to anness the ties, all trying conditions, to keep us young indefinitely, put off our deaths beyond when our lives are still meaningful.

At some point you need to stop trying to fix death or forget about death, and you need to face it, accept the fact that you are going to die. Like I said, it's a paradox, because obviously if you get cancer it's usually going to make sense to try to combat it, and try to live. It's also possible that there's going to come a time when fighting it no longer makes sense, and regardless of whether you're engaged in chemotherapy or not, coming to terms with the fact that you are going to die at some point, is probably part of what it means to lead that examined life, and to lead a better life overall. Like I said, it's not to say that death is all good, but it's also to say that simply to see it as something that has to be eliminated or forgotten is to impoverish us as human beings.

Dr. Weber: I think that's definitely right, for obvious reasons it's morbid to think about death. But for me, the line sounds so corny but man, is it true, that when I think about death I realize that every damn moment is precious! That's true. You only get so many times to play with your kids, you only get so many times to do this and that. It's long in one sense, but it ain't forever.

Dr. Cashio: It's always too short.

Dr. Samuelson: I've met some people that have had terminal cases and they have come to terms with the fact that they were going to die, and it's not a depressing thing to see their life at that point. A lot of times that acceptance has empowered them in certain ways, and given their life a kind of glow, perhaps because they are taking things more seriously, but also because they have just focused themselves on what they know really matters. They're less likely to waste their time on things that don't matter. To me, that's what part of what philosophy is about, to say "OK, let's examine our lives and try to see where are those things that really matter? How can we focus ourselves on those things?"

Dr. Weber: Everybody, I hope you're enjoying as much as I am, and I think Anthony is, our time talking with Scott Samuelson. If anybody is interested, I urge you to go have a look and check our Scott Samuelson's book *The Deepest Human Life,* where you can find more insights into what we've been talking about. This is our last segment today talking with Scott, but we have some more minutes left here, and this is where we're going to get into the other side of the deepest human life, which is the enjoyment of it too. Thinking a lot about suffering, but philosophy can be about funny things too. Here's a little help from my son Sam.

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(laughter)

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(Child laughter)

Dr. Weber: In our segment philosophunnies, we invite our guest to tell us a funny story, or maybe a joke either about philosophy, or what we've been talking about. So I wonder, Scott, whether you've got a funny joke for our listeners.

Dr. Samuelson: I do! When you first mentioned this segment to me I thought there is something similar between comics and philosophers, they're both trying to get us to see truths we often overlook. I think of Louis C.K. as one of our best contemporary philosophers.

Dr. Cashio: I say the same thing!

Dr. Samuelson: I think Ludwig Wittgenstein said something like "A good philosophical work can be written entirely in jokes," but I think he added, "unfortunately I don't have a sense of humor."

(laughter)

Dr. Weber: So not by him, anyway.

Dr. Samuelson: Anyway, I just started to think about jokes, and I was thinking "What are my favorite jokes?", I wasn't necessarily thinking about philosophy, but I started to realize that all of the jokes I like have a high quotient of philosophy in them. So let me take one of my favorite jokes as an example. A man walks into a bar and sits down next to a guy. Then, to his surprise, he sees in front if this guy at the bar, a tiny man, only about a foot tall playing a tiny piano. A miniature gentleman in a tuxedo playing Shubert on a miniature grand piano. "That's amazing!", he says, and asks the guy next to him "What's the deal with that?" The guy says "Well, I found this magic lamp, and when you rub it three times a genie appears and asks to grant you a wish. "Really?", our hero says, "Can I try it?"

"Sure if you want, here it is." So the guy presents him with this old dusty oil lamp, and our hero takes it out and rubs it three times, and a magical genie sure enough appears and asks to grant a wish. The man blurts out "I want a million bucks". Suddenly the bar is filled with ducks flying everywhere, honking and beating their wings. So the two men are running to take cover, and our hero yells "What is going on? I asked for a million bucks, not a million ducks!" and the guy replies "Did you really think I asked for a twelve-inch pianist?"

(laughter)

Dr. Cashio: Haha, I saw that punchline coming, it's great.

Dr. Samuelson: the whole joke turns on a bunch of misdirection and a play on the word pianist. At first, the joke doesn't necessarily seem philosophical, but the more I started thinking about it, doesn't the joke say something important about the human condition, that we rarely get what we ask for? But also that what we ask for is often silly anyway, a bit more money, a bit longer penis, and what we get in some ways is much more wonderful. a room full of ducks, a little virtuoso playing an impromptu. I even see a bit of the philosopher in the man who wished for something stupid but has now figured out how to enjoy the Shubert in front of him. I think Wittgenstein is probably right, a joke book contains a fair amount of philosophy.

Dr. Cashio: That's good, that's really good.

Dr. Weber: We do have a couple of little jokes. We're talking about suffering, so this is sadder than funny, as Anthony said. If suffering brings wisdom, I wish to be a little less wise. That's kind of sad, right?

Dr. Cashio: Tom became very ill. He lost his job, his family left him, his friends abandoned him. He went to church and stumbled up past the pews, looking up and asked, "Lord, why have you forsaken me?" From the heavens, a voice came and said "I don't know, Tom. There's just something about you that pisses me off."

(laughter)

Dr. Weber: This is one I'll tell because I have a very forgiving wife who is very supportive. What are the three rings of marriage? The answer, the first one is the engagement ring, the second one is the wedding ring, and the third one is the 'suffer-ring'.

(laughter, rimshot)

Dr. Cashio: Alright, Scott! One of our final questions comes from the inspiration for this show, philosophy baking bread. I think we've already established that you think that philosophy bakes bread in the metaphorical, and maybe not metaphorical sense. I kind of want some of that pie you were talking about. But what do you say to people that disagree, who think that philosophy bakes no bread, that it doesn't have any everyday practical import. When you encounter these people, is there anything you can say to them?

Dr. Samuelson: What I do is I just engage them in philosophy. As I said before, this is the pastry defense. I just think that if you put good pastries or good bread in front of people, they just go for it. I find if I start asking questions about something like suffering, which people sometimes act as if they don't want to think about. All of a sudden they want to talk about it, they get into that, and I feel like OK, now we're on the way, you're seeing the value of this, you're seeing that it can focus you in a good way. I always see philosophy as the most practical thing of all. What do we want in life? We want to be happy. What is philosophy in large part about? Figuring out how to do that. What could be a more practical thing to do?

Dr. Weber: Right on. Listen Scott, last but not least, we want to take advantage of the fact that today we have powerful social media that allow two-way communications even for programs like radio shows. So we want to invite you to give a question for us for our listeners. Do you have something that you would have us ask them, and then we'll invite them to let us know what they think for our segment that we call "You Tell Me!"

Dr. Samuelson: OK. It comes out of my work on suffering. On both the left and the right, and really on all sides, we hear a common rhetoric, I think. Though it is sometimes applied to different topics, and it's what I would call the rhetoric on The War On Suffering. Some emphasize the war on crime, or the war on terror, or the war on drugs. Others might emphasize the war on poverty or the war on cancer. Some have even imagined a war on death itself. It's not enough just to work to help people who have cancer, or to try to minimize crime or terror, we somehow envision mobilizing our entire efforts towards eradicating them altogether. We want poverty or terrorism or crime or drugs to wave the white flag and give up once and for all. We want to re-engineer life and society to eliminate suffering.

While I appreciate that we channel our energies towards the betterment of our condition, I have a hunch that these wars are actually harmful, that they can generate bad, unintended consequences. Maybe more to the point, they can make our lives meaningless or even barbaric at times. Here is my question: Is war a good and healthy metaphor when thinking about our relationship to suffering? Or is my hunch correct, that this war is harmful? If so, should we have a different metaphor altogether? If so, what might a better metaphor be? What would be a metaphor that might capture that paradoxical relationship of fixing and facing suffering. If we don't want to fight a war on cancer, or a war on drugs, what would be the right way of looking at those things? That's my question. Is war a way of thinking about how we should relate to suffering, or is there a better metaphor than that?

Dr. Cashio: Great question, great question. Well thanks everyone for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread, food for thought about life and leadership. Your hosts Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber have been really grateful to be joined by Dr. Scott Samuelson, and we hope you listeners would join us again. 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 that Scott posed for you, or any of the ideas that we've talked about today.

Dr. Weber: Indeed. Once again, you can reach us in a number of ways. We're on twitter @PhilosophyBB, which stands for Philosophy Bakes Bread. We're also on Facebook at PhilosophyBakesBread, and check out SOPHIA's Facebook page while you're there, @PhilosophersinAmerica.

Dr. Cashio: You can of course, email us at philosophybakesbread@gmail.com, and you can call us and leave a short, recorded message with a question or a comment that we may be able to play on the show at 850-257-1849. That's 859-257-1849. We do listen to all your questions and comments. We've gotten some amazing ones so far, and we

consider them all. Join us next time on Philosophy Bakes Bread, food for thought about life and leadership.

[Outro music]