

## Creating Community through Dialogue



*Transcribed by Drake Boling, July 30, 2017.*

For those interested, here's how to cite this transcript or episode for academic or professional purposes:

Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Christopher P. Long, "Creating Community through Dialogue," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, May 1, 2017.



### [Intro music]

**Announcer:** This podcast is brought to you by WRFL: Radio Free Lexington. Find us online at [wrfl.fm](http://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.

### [Theme music]

**Dr. Weber:** Hey everyone, thanks for listening to WRFL Lexington, 88.1 FM all the way to the left of your radio dial. This is Dr. Eric Thomas Weber here in Lexington and I am excited as a lot of other people around here are, about the end of the semester because there is so much to do around here. I hope that you all will relax a little bit and enjoy with me a pre-recorded interview that my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio and I did for the show *Philosophy Bakes Bread* with Dr. Chris Long with Michigan State University. I do want to make one announcement now though, which is that I'm glad to say that the show *Philosophy Bakes Bread* will continue in the summertime. We're going to have one adjustment, however, which is that instead of Mondays at 2PM, the show is going to continue next week on Tuesdays at 12 noon. If you're used to listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread* on Mondays at 2, get ready for the new habit for the summer that we'll be 12:00 noon on Tuesdays. Without further ado, here is the first segment of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, our episode with Dr. Chris Long on the idea or processes of enriching life through dialogue. I hope you enjoy it.

### [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, AKA 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. We here 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](http://philosophybakesbread.com) We hope you'll reach out to us on any of the topics we raise, or on any topics you want us to bring up. 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 as always. We're also on Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread, and while there, check out SOPHIA's Facebook page while you're there at Philosophers in America.

**Dr. Weber:** Last but not least, of course you can also email us at [philosophybakesbread@gmail.com](mailto:philosophybakesbread@gmail.com), or you can also call and leave a short, recorded message with a question, or a comment, or maybe bountiful praise, that we may be able to play on the show at 859-257-1849. That number is 859-257-1849. Anthony and I have received a number of great responses from our listeners in the last couple of weeks. We're working on putting together our responses to those comments and questions. Our present idea is to do something a little bigger than our regular "You tell me!" segments from time to time. That way we can incorporate a lot of the feedback that we've gotten, as well as give some responses about what we've thought about. We're presently planning more of our special short episodes that we call philosophical breadcrumbs.

**Dr. Cashio:** Breadcrumbs. Right after you bake bread, there's always a little bit of crumbs left over, so this is that. These breadcrumbs will be short, 15-minute mini-episodes that will air on the radio after a regular episode and then will be released as individual recordings on their own in the series of podcast episodes. Be sure to subscribe to our podcast. That way, we'll have more time to respond to listener comments, and we'll have fun with this new additional format and we'll have more time to talk about what you write to us or call in about. We welcome and encourage your feedback all the more.

**Dr. Weber:** To all of you who have reached out to us, people like Phil and Chris here in Lexington, or Andre in Texas, or Dionte, wherever the heck you're from, who have been sending us your tweets, please keep them coming. It's been terrific to hear from all of you, and we really hope to hear from more of you further in the future.

**Dr. Cashio:** Really terrific. Keep sending us your emails, your letters, and your phone calls. We love them. On today's show, we are very excited to be joined by Dr. Chris Long. How are you doing today, Chris?

**Dr. Long:** I'm great. Thanks for having me.

**Dr. Cashio:** Thank you for joining us on this nice April afternoon. Chris is a professor of philosophy and dean of the College of Arts and Letters at Michigan State University. He is also the co-founder of *The Public Philosophy Journal*, a project that has received \$780,000 in funding from the Mellon Foundation. Congratulations on that...To create an innovative digital space of digital scholarship and communication. We're going to talk a lot about that today.

**Dr. Weber:** Chris is the author of numerous articles and books including *Aristotle On the Nature of Truth*, and *Socratic and Platonic Political Philosophy: Practicing a Politics of Reading*. This last book is also available as an enhanced digital book that you can learn about and engage with on his website [cplong.org](http://cplong.org). Chris takes his insights that he discovers in his work

very seriously and puts them into practice in many of the ways that we're going to hear about and focus on in today's episode. Chris, the start of our show is guided by an important maxim: "Know thyself." We ask you: Do you know thyself? Not just do you, but tell us about yourself, as well as how you came into philosophy, why philosophy is important to you, and in light of who you are and how you came to philosophy, what philosophy means to you.

**Dr. Long:** Thank you for having me on. I think it's a great way to start conversation with this notion of "Know thyself". It's an epithet that comes to us from ancient Greek, thinking ancient Greek philosophy. In a way, for me it is a perfect way to begin thinking about what a philosophical life means and what philosophy means to me. It's a contested formulation, coming from the Oracle of Delphi. What does that mean to know thyself? Obviously it was something that Socrates in his life made a lot about. One of the things that comes down to us is the notion that "Know thyself" means in part knowing that you are human and knowing that you are not a God. Knowing yourself means. In a way, coming to terms with your own finitude, coming to terms with your own mortality. In a way, that's a perfect introduction to how I found my way to philosophy. It really begins in those early years of my life, those anxiety moments at nighttime. I don't know if you have had this experience or haven't, where you are lying in the dark trying to sleep and your mind wondering, "What is this? What is this life? What is this thing here?" That pit in your stomach feeling about death and, if there's nothing after death, what happens? If there is something after death what happens? Those are the kinds of questions that have always been at the heart of my own life and my own thinking. Not as an anxiety-producing moment, but as a moment that returns us to the lived experience that we have with one another in this world. The question became for me over time: how do you live a life committed to the idea that we are finite? That we have a limited amount of time to make meaning and make connection and make a more just relationship with one another, make a more just world that we share? How do you put that into practice? Of course, this didn't come to me at night as a 6-year-old. It grew. (laughter)

**Dr. Cashio:** I was impressed!

**Dr. Long:** Very deep thoughts as a 6-year-old. It was more pure anxiety as a 6-year-old, I think. Over time, I went to a Quaker high school in Philadelphia, and got a sense of what the liberal arts meant in a deep way, and then I went to Wittenburg University in Ohio, and I took my first philosophy class. In fact, it was a professor named Robert Long who taught that class. I remember thinking, "Wow. You can get credit for this?" I didn't realize it then, that it was the dream job, I just realized that this was tremendous, to be in a class like this. Then I grew into myself and got undergraduate experience, and can talk more about the transformative power of the undergraduate experience, study abroad and all of that. At the end of my career it became clear to me that I wanted to go to graduate school. I went to the new school of social research and did my PHD in philosophy there where I really was introduced to some tremendous thinkers and to a life of thinking that was not abstracted from the world. Since then, I have taught at Penn State and now I'm at Michigan State and trying to think about how I'm putting those values of living a meaningful life into practice in institutions that are committed to public education on a grand scale. I just feel very privileged to live this kind of a life.

**Dr. Weber:** That is tremendous, Chris. I am interested though, that you took some of these philosophy courses. Did you find that they helped with the anxiety at night?

**Dr. Cashio:** You're dealing with your finitude, realizing that you're not a God, it's really crushing.

**Dr. Long:** I'm still dealing with it in some ways. We all are dealing with that, if you use Freudian terms, it's a sublimation of that anxiety that makes you put pen to paper, that makes you think about what kinds of contributions you want to make that will outlive your own finite life.

**Dr. Weber:** What is sublimation for our listeners who are unaware of it?

**Dr. Long:** You repress something that you have some anxiety about, like death, and you repress it in a positive way, namely something creative and potentially powerful comes out of it. There's also negative potential ways of acting.

**Dr. Weber:** So not just drinking and watching reality TV.

**Dr. Cashio:** When you were in Dr. Long's class, was there any particular reading or philosopher that you found was the most engaging for you at the time, as a young thinker, where you were like, "Oh this is it. I got to think about this"?

**Dr. Long:** It was probably Plato and *The Euthyphro*, and the questions of piety have really occupied my attention too much, because they are early classes, although that came back in one of my classes where students really wanted to focus on that. Part of the challenge that I had was, and I don't know if it was a challenge or an opportunity, was that both my father, was a Lutheran minister, and my step-father was a Methodist minister. I needed some way to think some of the thoughts that they were concerned about without all of the dogma. This philosophy class turned out to be exactly the right medicine for me. We were playing with these ideas about the nature of God and I remember thinking about trying to be provocative in class, referring to God as 'she'. The class was floored: "You really think God is a she?" I was like, "Yeah. Why?" I realized that this was going to be fun.

**Dr. Weber:** You have a topic, especially, and some particular authors, in this case Plato. What were some of the other things that kept you going? This was an introduction and that got you perhaps hooked at first. What continues to pull you in and make you love philosophy from those early days? Lots of people take some philosophy, and that was great, but kind of move on. What kept your passion really inspired? What made you want to pursue this further?

**Dr. Long:** It was a combination of things. One was the inspiration of a teacher that Eric, I think you know. Doug Anderson was teaching at Wittenburg at the time. We had an Emerson class and he gave me compliments, he would say, "Hey you're good at this." He continued to try to work on that. That was great. That was all I needed was the little nudge and I was off and running. But then as I went to graduate school and began to think about how I was going to put my philosophical commitments into practice, and those commitments really had to do with issues of social justice and trying to create and cultivate enriching relationships with one another. The philosophy of Martin Buber was very important to me at an early age and so that still stuck with me. I began to realize as I grew into PHD student and then a young faculty member, that if we could put our values into practice through teaching first, and that is really where it started, and then we could have an impact on generations to think more reflectively about the world that they share.

**Dr. Weber:** That's tremendous. We have about a minute and a half left in this segment. Now I'm going to ask you an enormous question. In light of all of this, Chris, what do you take philosophy to be then? Now we have heard about you and about your background. What's philosophy in your eyes?

**Dr. Long:** Philosophy is an activity. It is an intentional activity and a kind of life. Philosophy is putting into practice a way of life that is attuned to the world and responsive to the world in a way that enriches the world. That doesn't sound like a discipline. It sounds like a lot of things could be that. Actually that is what it comes down to for me, is that living an intentional life in the shadow of death without succumbing to the temptation to say, "Because we don't know what happens after death, because we don't have absolute certainty, then we can't enrich our relationships with one another." The point that philosophy helps us learn to do is to think about what a finite life means in the context of trying to enrich our experiences together. How do you make the world a better place without absolute principles on which to rely?

**Dr. Cashio:** Beautiful answer. That is always the challenge of philosophy. To live life in the shadow of death and do the best we can.

**Dr. Weber:** That's a terrific spot to say that we're going to be right back talking further with Dr. Chris Long. This is me, Dr. Eric Weber with my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio. Thanks, everybody, for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*.

**Dr. Cashio:** Welcome back, everybody, to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber and we're here today talking with Dr. Chris Long. In today's episode we are going to start by asking Chris about his creative book that came out in 2014, *Socratic and Platonic Political Philosophy: Practicing Politics of Reading*. I have a question about that title. In the next segment we're going to learn about his work putting these ideas into practice with *the Public Philosophy Journal*.

**Dr. Weber:** Chris, I think the title of your book leads us to our first question. What do you mean by 'the politics of reading'? Are you suggesting that the very act of reading is political?

**Dr. Long:** Yes. The short answer, yes. (laughter) The question of what politics is in a sense is the topic of the book but more specifically the book really grew out of the question of what Socratic politics might be. We have this situation that emerges out of my reading of the dialogues but also my teaching of the dialogues in which the question became: What does it mean for Socrates to say, as he does, "I am the only one of the Athenians who practices the true art of politics"? On the other hand, when he is defending himself in *The Apology*, he says "If I had ever practiced politics I would have been killed long ago." This tension animated the question of the book. The book is really animated by the question first: What is it for Socrates to practice politics? That lead, in the course of my investigation and my investigation with others, to the broader question of: What is Socratic politics? You can't really understand what it means for Socrates to practice politics without asking yourself about Plato.

We know about Socrates through the writing of Plato. We know about Socrates through other writings as well, but I was really limiting myself to: How does Socrates appear to us in the Platonic dialogues? It's a broader conversation which I'm sure we can have here, but the basic principle here is that what emerged to me was the notion that Socrates thought of himself as practicing politics by transforming the lives of those he encountered in dialogue. Plato saw that, but he decided to adopt a new technology of the time, name writing and say, "Can I through writing, transform lives in a similar way to the way that Socrates did? Can I write dialogues that capture something, the spirit of that performance, and change the lives of those that read my work?" The play between the oral and the written is obviously a key part of Socrates' and Plato's



thinking, and it became an important part of mine. I tried to take it to the next level, which was, “Could I, writing now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, put new technology into practice to cultivate dialogue around the ideas that I was writing about in the readers of my book?”

**Dr. Weber:** I want to follow up on something you said, if you don’t mind, Anthony. When you mentioned the lines from Socrates, him saying that “the only one who practices real politics is me”, and later he says, “If I had practiced politics,” maybe he means your politics. Is that the distinction? If so, what exactly is real politics?

**Dr. Long:** He says this, “I’m the only one of all of those living now, to truly practice politics”. He says this is *The Gorgias*. Then in *The Apology*, completely different dialogue, a completely different context, he says this other thing, mainly, “If I had practiced politics I would have died long ago.” You’re right. A simple distinction to make him consistent is to say that the politics he meant when he was defending himself in *The Apology* was traditional Athenian politics--expediently manipulating your colleagues to get what you want, to put it bluntly, which is probably how we think about politics very often in Washington. What I’m trying to unpack and uncover and think about is a different kind of politics. A kind of politics that Socrates says he is the one who truly practices, which is: Can you use words to create community? Can you use words to create enriching community that leads to fulfilling lives? I think that’s really what Socrates is really trying to do and it relates to my own deal to what philosophy is all about—the attempt to create community to help one another live fulfilling lives.

**Dr. Cashio:** You mentioned that you were looking for new ways to bring technology in. Let’s talk about that, because you’re doing something pretty innovative with this book. Let’s see if I understand this correctly. Readers of the digital copy of the book can comment on the book as they are reading it, and then also comment on other commentators. Is this correct? That’s pretty exciting. How did you come to this idea?

**Dr. Long:** It all goes back to this idea of what I’m calling performative consistency, which is to say: Can we put the things that we value philosophically into practice? I am a firm believer that there should be no divorce between thinking and life. This is a huge issue where you distinguish between somebody’s philosophical thinking, and you see them and they are a horrible person in real life. I’m trying to advocate and perform a performatively consistent life, by which I mean the arguments that I’m trying to make in this book, I knew I needed to put into practice. “How could you do that?” I thought to myself. One way was to try to create something or capture something of the orality of the Socratic dialogues in a digital format in this book. The other part of this that is significant to me is that the book itself came out of a dialogue with my students, but it also came out of a series of podcasts that I produce called *The Digital Dialogue*.

The podcast is really designed to practice and cultivate the habits of dialogue in a digital age through the kind of conversations we are having right now: technologically mediated, publicly accessible, but rooted in these philosophical conversations. What I did was I invited my colleagues, who I was reading for my book, in terms of secondary sources, people who had written essays on Socrates and Plato and other things related to my work. I would invite them to come and talk about their articles in the podcast, and we would have great conversation. In the book, when those issues came up and I was writing about the ideas that we were discussing, I embedded the podcast into the book. The book is a digital book from beginning to end, even though Cambridge has published it as a hardback book that is also accessible in the library, I have always thought of it as a digital endeavor. One of the things that I continue to be frustrated by is that the vision for the book is beyond the grasp for our capacity to do it technologically, at

least it was beyond the grasp of us to really put it into practice in the way I envisioned it from the beginning. We can talk about the ways in which this project fails...

**Dr. Cashio:** That is interesting. What did you expect to happen, and what is not happening?

**Dr. Long:** There are a couple of problems. One is that the interface is not enticing, it's not intuitive. It's not really effectively creating the kind of community that I was hoping it would be. The second point is that people aren't used to doing this public reading. What I'm asking people to do is to write comments and let those comments that normally appear in the margin of your book be actually open for people to comment on.

**Dr. Weber:** Chris, I want to disagree with you that there is failure here, just because there were an awful lot of efforts that came to the Model T. Now vehicles are everywhere. I'm not going to get on a horse anytime soon. I disagree with you that there was failure. At the same time, I want to come back to a word that you used that some of our listeners may not understand or caught. You used the word 'orality', and I want to interpret what you said and I want you to correct me or refine what I say in trying to make sure that people follow what it is you're getting at. There is a distinction between Socrates who was dynamically talking with people, and as he was thinking, would get responses from people who would refine his thinking and steer it, whereas when we write things down and other people read it, there is just consuming, maybe not exactly passively, but in a way that they can't alter the direction of the text. Orality means oral, means this conversation that is ongoing and can steer things in certain ways. You are doing something pretty innovative insofar as you are taking the book format, which is the quintessential "I've got this text here, you consume it as it is", and you are opening it up to be a conversation. Is that a fair interpretation of what you are doing?

**Dr. Long:** That's exactly right. One issue that emerges between Socrates and Plato is that Socrates made the decision not to write and Plato decided to write.

**Dr. Weber:** Thank goodness, right?

**Dr. Long:** Exactly. There are affordances and limitations. There are benefits and things that are detracting from that decision. On one hand, the benefit for us that Plato decided to write is that we can still talk about Socrates. The permanence of writing has been handed down across generations. Part of my argument is that that is the distinction between Socratic and Platonic politics. Socrates was oriented towards changing the life of the person that he was in dialogue with in the moment, whereas Plato understood that through writing he could transform lives across generations. That is an important benefit. The problem is, and this is the element that is a limitation of writing, is that then you lose the dynamism of the dialogical encounter, the oral exchange.

**Dr. Cashio:** It does seem that Plato did try to grasp it some. He wrote in dialogues for a reason, as an example of how to go about this. You're right, it's still static.

**Dr. Long:** Taking it seriously philosophically, that he wrote in dialogue for a reason means that you have to read the dialogues in their dramatic context and you can't distill them for their argument. That does relate to how we read and how sometimes Plato is taught in undergraduate and elsewhere. Courses where we distill, "The only thing that is important about this dialogue is the argument or the effectiveness or the failure of the argument". What I want to argue is that Plato situated conversations in historical context with these people that have real lives. He in principle, undermines that desire to distill everything to the argument.

**Dr. Weber:** Chris, you touched on contemporary relevance and the unreal or problematic approach to politics, and a lot of people see that in American politics. I want to invite you to continue on that thread, thinking about how and why we should look to Socrates today. You, I'm sure, have heard the people complain that we are talking about more dead white philosophers. Why focus on ancient philosophers if your interests and intentions are fundamentally to move into contemporary public philosophy?

**Dr. Long:** That's an important point. The critique of the canon, the critique of how philosophy as a discipline has been practiced is something that we have to take very seriously. It's something that I've thought a lot about and think is very important. Having said that, I think it's very important to recognize that Socrates and Plato, to the extent that he performed this through his writing, really attempted to put philosophical values into practice and to put his weight on the side of making the world a more beautiful and just place. That's really at the heart of my own attempts in my life, both as philosopher and as father and also as an administrator. That means that we need to be attuned to the real critiques that are genuine and important about how philosophy has been practiced and how it has been exclusionary and has marginalized certain ideas and certain kinds of people.

**Dr. Weber:** I think it's definitely great to keep the good and let go of the bad. We shouldn't forget what's good.

**Dr. Long:** I also think that we need to recognize our role in the bad and the fact that we are part of that history and trying to divorce ourselves from that history will perpetuate the problem.

**Dr. Cashio:** Bad faith.

**Dr. Weber:** We are going to come back for the third segment with *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, talking with Dr. Chris Long, and we're going to hear, after we have just heard about Socratic and Platonic political philosophy, we're going to talk about putting that into practice with some of his very exciting experiments that he has been working on. My co-host dr. Anthony Cashio and I Eric Weber have been very pleased to be talking with you Chris. We'll be right back, everybody.

**Dr. Cashio:** Welcome back everybody. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio with Dr. Eric Weber and you have had the privilege today to listen to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. We are talking with Dr. Chris Long of Michigan State University, the author of *Socratic and Platonic Political Philosophy: Practicing Politics of Reading*. He is also the co-founder of *The Public Philosophy Journal*. In this segment, we're going to talk a little bit about the *Public Philosophy Journal*, but first I want to get back to a point we were playing around with at the end of the last segment. Chris, to your average listener today, would you not say that it sounds kind of weird that a conversation between a few people is a political act? Is this a political act? Right now are we engaged in a political act? How do conversations transform people politically today?

**Dr. Long:** This is a political act. We are engaged in a political activity, not only because the three of us are talking but because we are making this conversation public. There is a number of levels in which this is political. I happen to ascribe to the notion that even private conversation are political, have political dimensions to them, and are political to the degree that they create or erode community. There are all kinds of issues that could come up in that, with that view of politics that it reduces the distinction between the public and the private. All kinds of things are



associated with that idea, but I'm committed to the notion that words have the power to shape communities in positive and negative ways.

**Dr. Weber:** When you say 'political', that doesn't mean for instance, that SOPHIA needs to lost its nonprofit status.

**Dr. Cashio:** Is that what you're worried about?

**Dr. Long:** Let's talk about that because I'm trying to defend a much more noble conception of politics, although the idea of the concept of nobility is also problematic. I wouldn't necessarily...

**Dr. Weber:** A virtuous sense of it.

**Dr. Long:** Virtuous in the sense of the notion of excellence and an openness to the possible. An openness of the possible oriented toward a conception of the good and the just and the beautiful. This is what I think Socrates is asking us to think about when he orients his attention to these bigger concepts. What we see happening in traditionally understood politics and what was happening in Athens all of the time and what's happening all of the time in Washington, is the use of words to manipulate others or to be expedient in the sense of trying to get what you want. That is certainly a way of using words. It certainly is also political. Often it is corrosive to community.

**Dr. Weber:** At the very least, for your average listener today, you would make a distinction between what is typically thought of as political and you would want to emphasize that there is a bigger picture and it involves virtue and not just the nasty stuff of making the sausage.

**Dr. Long:** I hope so. I admit that this is an idea that is probably controversial within a broader public sphere, but it is also controversial in the discipline of philosophy. I think people would not be happy with my attempt to expand the idea of politics beyond the way that I have done it.

**Dr. Weber:** Chris, this is really a continuation of what you have been talking about in regard to your book, your efforts in the *Public Philosophy Journal*, it seems to me, build on your experience of trying to experiment to transform the way traditional book publishing. You have been engaging in a big experiment with regard to how journals work. Journals are shorter form; books are obviously considerably longer. Journals involve articles that are peer-reviewed. They come out as these static, as we were saying a lot like books do: "Here is my contribution, you're not going to change it. If you're going to comment on it, you have to publish your own piece. It's separate." Tell us, what is the *Public Philosophy Journal*? Why did you found it? Those are the two starting questions.

**Dr. Long:** The *Public Philosophy Journal* is really designed to be an ecosystem that lives at the intersection of philosophy and issues of public concern. The challenge is that philosophy has become a professionalized discipline in the academy. When it does that, it gains some credibility in the academy, but it also loses some credit in the world. What we thought we would try to do is, and this has emerged and morphed over time. What we want to try and do is think about what publicly-engaged work means where the public is engaged in the scholarship and the scholars or the academics are engaged with the public questions. How do you put that into practice in the digital world and to do it in a way where both the public and the academy are enriched by it? That's the big vision behind it. How we are operationalizing that, how we are putting that into practice is an interesting challenge. Here is where we are now. I won't go into all of how we got here. One thing has been to listen to the conversations on the web, we try to

curate interesting conversations to the website, the [publicphilosophyjournal.org](http://publicphilosophyjournal.org) website. Then we are trying to take that...when somebody blogs about something of interest, interesting ideas are seeded. We are trying to invite people to submit something to the journal that would then be put through a peer-review process, what we are calling a developmental peer review process because it's not oriented toward the evaluation of the piece with an eye towards rejection or acceptance. It's really oriented to trying to make the piece better in terms of its timeliness, in terms of its intellectual rigor, in terms of its coherence. What we are doing is that we have two registers of review. One is that when you submit something you nominate somebody from the public to be a reviewer. That person is going to be asked to read the piece for relevance and for accessibility. All of the things, Eric, that you have been doing with me, "Orality, what does that mean? Let's get that into real terms that people can understand." That's the register in which the public peer review is going to do. On the other side, we are going to have an academic who is going to be reading for intellectual coherence and the degree to which the piece is engaged in academic dialogue. What we are trying to do is engage the academy with the public and engage the public with scholarship. It's exciting but it's a little daunting.

**Dr. Weber:** You are creating the new Model-T. This could transform how this all functions. It's gotta be terrifying because it's really hard to do. You're going to encounter all kinds of bugs along the way.

**Dr. Cashio:** For our listeners, there is already a pretty streamlined, concrete process for publishing in a philosophy journal. You send it off, they send it to a couple other reviewers at different institutions. Usually someone writes something mean back to you. (laughter) It says, "Try again, sucker." Then you write again and write again after you've cried and drank a lot and then you do it again. What the *Public Philosophy Journal* is doing is really innovative and new and I think it is pretty exciting work.

**Dr. Long:** I think there is a number of levels. It's new in its public sense, but it's hopefully new in trying to create an environment where we cultivate practices of collegiality with one another where we are orienting, not knocking something down but making it better, enriching it in our feedback. One thing that happens in academia is that the peer review process, which is often a blind process, namely, you don't know who is reviewing your piece, that means that a lot of scholarship, a lot of powerful intellectual work and feedback is shrouded behind a curtain of blindness. As a dean, I can't measure that with respect to evaluating faculty and as a faculty member who tries to publish things, it is sometimes difficult to get a purchase on "Where is this comment coming from?" Can we orient our feedback to one another in such a way that we are helping one another enrich their work because it is an important issue, one that we care about so that we have this shared endeavor of trying to make the work better as opposed to "This is terrible for this or that reason," which leads you to crying or drinking.

**Dr. Cashio:** That's part of the writing process.

**Dr. Long:** That's the thing! It's so much part of what we expect of things. It's funny but it is also really sad because we are not nurturing each other intellectually. I'm talking about now, just in the academy. When you bring the public in, there is a whole different set of questions that come up. Why would a member of the public want to participate in this? Whole set of conversations around that.

**Dr. Cashio:** I have a question about this. Do you think there is a difference between doing public philosophy and doing philosophy in the public? Would you make a distinction between the two?

**Dr. Long:** For me they overlap a lot. Especially since we have talked about, my understanding of politics is very expansive. I do think there is a difference in the sense that a public philosophy is oriented toward questions of public concern. Questions that are of concern to actual communities. Part of me also thinks that every philosophical question is in fact an issue of concern to us as human beings because we are philosophical beings at heart. That's not enough. I buy into the idea that there is a difference when you are thinking about a question of something that seems unrelated to the real world, that still can be philosophy, but it's not public philosophy. You can do that in public in a podcast or a blog. But the exciting thing for me is with the emergence of the internet and the world wide web is that there are a lot of people that are beginning to think out loud in many dynamic ways. Could we take that thinking and nurture it? Seeds that can be nurtured in a soil that is collegial and nourishing as opposed to toxic. So often we experience the academic environment as a toxic one and not one that nourishes ideas that are transformative.

**Dr. Weber:** One of the key themes of this show involves philosophy and bread. One of the metaphors for philosophy and ideas having purchase is that it has cash value. I'm stretching a lot here...

**Dr. Long:** I'm hearing William James.

**Dr. Weber:** That bread is dough and you have to make some dough, and dough is cash. I have made a ridiculous transition to...

**Dr. Cashio:** Talk about a tortured metaphor.

**Dr. Weber:** My point is that the Mellon Foundation has put a lot of dough behind what you are doing. It was a long way to get to there. The point is that the Mellon Foundation is supporting this significantly, and the question is: Why? What are they trying to support? Why are they even thinking about supporting this kind of stuff? Tell us about them and how you came to connect with them.

**Dr. Long:** When we got our first amount of funding, I think they were very happy to see a project from philosophy. This was a case where we benefitted on the one hand by being a discipline that didn't often get funded from the Mellon foundation, historically. They saw a philosophy project that was really related to the common good and related to being public, they thought was intriguing. The great thing about the Mellon Foundation is the process that they put you through when you are doing these grant proposals. They force you to refine your ideas. In a way it is exactly the kind of, it doesn't feel like it in the moment, but it's exactly the kind of enriching feedback that is trying to make your project better, because they know if they can help you make it better now as the funding process happens, it will be sustainable over time. I think they see, and it's always hard and dangerous to imagine what anybody is thinking, but they have expressed a real interest in trying to cultivate habits of public discourse that are enriching and that are addressing the way in which we become so antagonistic in our political conversation. Could we find ways to operationalize and put into practice and cultivate and create and learn with one another the habits of enriching dialogue? They see this as a way to try to begin to do that. I certainly see this as a way to try to do that, but that means that the aspirations are very

large and actually implementing them and putting them into practice is very difficult. I'm not going to say it's a Model-T moment, that's a whole different set of things, but it is very hard and I don't want to be delusional about how difficult it is.

**Dr. Weber:** It is terrific that we don't just have scholars talking about an idea as if it is a pie in the sky, but we actually have people out in the world with resources thinking about how to make the world better saying, "You know what? This philosophy stuff has some interesting things going on." I think it's quite an affirmation.

**Dr. Long:** I agree. The Mellon foundation has been tremendous in that regard. They continue to put their weight on the side of some very interesting projects. If this is going to be successful, we're going to need people like your listeners to be engaged with the *Public Philosophy Journal* and be patient with us as we try to work out the interface and as we try and reiterate and try and fail and succeed. It's really exciting.

**Dr. Cashio:** Sometimes when you are baking bread you burn some loaves and then you start over. There's my tortured metaphor.

**Dr. Weber:** We have one more segment that we are going to have with Dr. Chris Long here on *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. Thanks everybody for listening to me, Dr. Eric Weber, with my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio, and as I said, with Dr. Chris Long of Michigan State University. We'll be right back.

**Dr. Cashio:** Welcome back to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber. We have been talking this afternoon with Dr. Chris Long. We have been talking about public philosophy, digital spaces, how dialogues are an act of politics, so we have been engaged in an act of politics in a deep and broad sense, Chris has convinced me of that. In this last segment, we are going to do some final big-picture questions, some lighthearted thoughts and we will end with a pressing philosophical question for you, our listeners, along with information about how to get a hold of us with questions, criticisms, or comments. You can hit us up with some bountiful praise. That's always good. Chris, I have a question for you. You are the dean of the college of Arts and Letters and Michigan State University. How do you see your role as dean, how does that connect to the scholarship you are doing and the journal? Is there a connection there? How does it all fit together?

**Dr. Long:** There is absolutely connection there. It really goes back to what we were talking about earlier about how to put your values into practice. One of the things that I realized as I became a young faculty member and philosophy professor and saw the power of introducing students to ideas that they hadn't particularly considered before coming into college. It really made me recognize the transformative power of education itself. Then I began to be asked to take on more administrative roles. When I was at Penn State I was asked to be the associate dean for undergraduate and graduate education in the college of liberal arts there at Penn State. I really began to see, in making that transition to administration, that two things became important to me. One is that we need advocates for the liberal arts, the study of the liberal arts that empower people to write effectively, imagine ethically, and use words to enrich our lives. That's one thing. The other thing that became clear to me is that when you move from a faculty member perspective to an administrative perspective, you have to shift your focus from your own success to empowering the success of others. That has been a tremendously rewarding

experience, with all of this talk about administration coming from a Latin word that means to serve or to care for. We don't often think of administration in that way, I think.

**Dr. Cashio:** In some places, it's a dirty word.

**Dr. Long:** A lot of people say, "Oh you're going over to the dark side. What are you doing?" Which I get. Institutions also have that coercive dimension to them. What I recognized at Penn State and I also recognize here at Michigan State is that there are some very wise politicians who, during the civil war, created institutions of higher learning committed to educating the public, educating citizens. This tradition, which was established through the land grant act that gave colleges and universities land. Where they got the land from is an important thing to remember. It was often taken from indigenous people, so there is a legacy there that has to be addressed. This land grant mission is one that is rooted in the idea that education is transformative and that citizens' leadership requires education in a broad sense. We need to make education accessible, and we need to make educational opportunities open to everyone. That mission was so important from my perspective because it roots the liberal arts endeavor, the endeavor to make a meaningful life, in the political endeavor to create and nurture citizens who are capable of doing just that. There has probably been nothing that has been more transformative for our economy of the United State than the establishment of these land-grant universities.

**Dr. Cashio:** The very establishment of the land grant fits in with your idea of politics and philosophy as community-building, where it goes to the very founding of them.

**Dr. Long:** Yeah. For me, the question is: Who is taking care of these institutions? We rail against them often because they hold us accountable in certain ways, they coerce us in certain ways. But they also enable us as faculty and as students to participate in this educational endeavor that is transformative, and it allows us the time and to provide students with the time to reflect on what's meaningful which is how you are going to lead a life that enriches the world and makes the world more just.

**Dr. Cashio:** I often find myself reminding my students how lucky they are that they get to take a philosophy class and think about these ideas. You don't get to do that the rest of your life. They are very lucky to be able to do things like this.

**Dr. Weber:** There are a lot of philosophers who are very much on the defensive in trying to talk about how their philosophy programs are threatened and so forth, and yet so few of them actually want to put themselves into the positions of leadership that might actually prevent that, that might actually be able to speak for their discipline.

**Dr. Long:** I think that there is a history to what professional philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and moving into the 21<sup>st</sup>, I think we are moving out of it, but this desire to be respected as a profession had costs that came with it. Because we make our language much more technical and facilitate these modes of communication through journals and other kinds of publication meant that we were being respected as scientific or as rigorous in certain kind of ways. Our engagement with the world, which is part of what we've been talking about from the start, it's bound up with the very foundation of philosophy itself, being engaged with the world in a certain way. It sort of fell out of that during that process. We're finding our way back to it through a variety of means and I think you're exactly right that taking leadership roles within the university and also within matters of public concern is really important, but also not only taking a leadership role but



learning the habits of listening. Learning the habits of attending. Bring in problems with people rather than presuming that you are the expert.

**Dr. Weber:** Over them, right. Generally we ask for final big-picture thoughts, but I think we just got some. Let me move on to the next part of this segment, which is to ask you, Chris, in terms of the inspiration for this show, would you say that philosophy bakes no bread, as the famous saying goes, or would you say that it does? Why? Why not? How, and all that stuff?

**Dr. Long:** Philosophy bakes bread every day. For me, I return to my philosophical commitments, my orientation toward the bigger questions of what's valuable: What kind of contribution am I making with my activities on this very day with my relationships with one another? For me, that's how philosophy bakes bread. If you think about bread as the basic metaphor for what's nourishing, what is needed for us to live with one another together, to think about breaking bread together, it's a community activity. At the heart of that is philosophy. One of the things that turned out to be, or is sometimes for my students comical is the moment in *The Apology*, probably the moment that killed him, when they asked him, "What punishment should you have?" He said, "I think you should feed me at the Lyceum, the hearth of Hestia for my life. That should be my punishment."

**Dr. Weber:** To house and feed him.

**Dr. Cashio:** "I make you happy. You don't think it, you don't know it, but yeah.

**Dr. Long:** That just set them over the top. They were like, "This guy isn't even taking this seriously. This is ridiculous." But if you read that as serious, it means to put philosophy at the center of the city, he was going to be at the hearth of Hestia. That's the center of the city, the place where the fire burns, bread can be baked, and nourishment happens when community gathers. That's where philosophy lives. That's where it needs to live.

**Dr. Cashio:** Very nice. Philosophy bakes bread at the heart of the city. That may be the best one yet. As you know, Chris, we want people to know both the serious side of philosophy and the lighter side. We have our super-famous and popular segment called "philosophunnies", in which we would love to hear a funny joke or a funny fact or a great story that you might have to share with us.

**Dr. Weber:** Say 'philosophunnies'

**Sam:** Philosophunnies!

(laughter)

**Dr. Weber:** Say 'philosophunnies'

**Sam:** Philosophunnies!

(child's laughter)

**Dr. Long:** One of the things that happens in graduate school is that we started this conversation talking about anxiety. There is nothing more anxiety-producing than graduate school. My story comes from...We'll see how funny it is. It became funny for us. I went to this new school in New York, and I came there and everybody is trying to be smart and to look smart and all that. There was a conference that was being held at the Cordoza School of Law right next door to the new school and Drucilla Cornell was going to be there and Jacques Derrida and

Reiner Schürmann, who was a professor of mine at the new school who died of AIDS early in my career there and who I just finished writing a book about. My first year of grad school, this is really my first memory of him, was going to this packed auditorium where these big-named people were going to talk and they were talking and had the discussion, the idea of conversation was on politics and the imagination, and at one point somebody said something, it was Derrida or Cornell said something, and Reiner Schürmann put his glasses down and he said in only the way that he could say, "I find that metaphysical and very very boring." (laughter) I was blown away. I don't even know what that means. I knew two things. One: you didn't want to be metaphysical, that would be bad. And you don't want to be in his sights when he is about to lay into you about something like that. Of course it became a comical thing for us to say to one another, "Well I find that metaphysical and very boring." It was how we talked to one another. That's a philosophical inside kind of thin for us as graduate students. It was an example of how the personalities of a teacher can be transformative for you at moments, even when it's a comical moment and a moment that allows you to take the anxiety out of your experience in a powerful way.

**Dr. Weber:** That's great. Anthony and I gathered two little jokes that connected with Socrates or philosophers just for the sake of it. Why don't we throw those out there?

**Dr. Cashio:** At a meeting of the college faculty, an angel suddenly appears and tells the head of the philosophy department, "I will grant you whichever of three blessings you choose: wisdom, beauty, or ten million dollars. Immediately the professor chooses wisdom. Why wouldn't he? There is a flash of lightning and professor appears transformed, but he just sits there staring at the table. One of his colleagues whispers and says, "Say something." The professor looks up and says, "I should have taken the money." (laughter)

**Dr. Weber:** That's one of my favorites from the *Plato and the Platypus* book, right? One more here. This one is short. How many philosophers does it take to change a light bulb? It depends on how you define 'change'.

**Dr. Cashio:** I find that metaphysical and boring.

(laughter, rimshot, applause)

**Dr. Weber:** in our last minute here with you Chris, we want to ask you if you have any questions for our listeners for the segment that we call "You tell me!" Have you got a question that you think we should post for our listeners?

**Dr. Long:** The question that I think about when I think about the issues that we have been talking about is really the broader question about... I'd like to ask each person how you will contribute through your lives, to living your life intentionally, to enriching the world, enriching your relationships with other people and your relationships with a broader set of public concerns that you find addressing you each day. I think that is at the heart of what we have been talking about. It's not easy to consider what the answer is and then to live out the truth of that answer. I think that's really in the end, what I would like to leave with people. What contribution will you make?

**Dr. Cashio:** That's a good question. Thank you everyone for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, food for thought about life and leadership. We have had an exciting conversation this afternoon with Dr. Chris Long. Your hosts have been Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber.

We want to thank listeners for joining us. Thank you for joining us, Chris. I hope you have had fun. You're a great conversation.

**Dr. Long:** It's been great. I really appreciate the work that you're doing on this. It's fun to talk to you and it's been fun to listen to you too.

**Dr. Cashio:** Thank you very much. We hope our listeners will consider sending us your thoughts on anything that you've heard today that you would like to hear about in the future, or about the specific question that we've raised for you. How will you enrich the world through living intentionally?

**Dr. Weber:** Once again, you can reach us in a number of ways. We're on twitter @PhilosophyBB, which surprisingly 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. Cashio:** You can of course, email us at [philosophybakesbread@gmail.com](mailto:philosophybakesbread@gmail.com), and you can also call us and leave a short recorded message with a question or a comment that we may be able to play on the show, 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.

**[Outro music]**