

Who Bakes Bread Anymore?



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[Intro music]

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[Theme music]

Dr. Weber: Here is the first of two *Philosophy Bakes Bread* breadcrumbs. Hope you enjoy!

[Theme music]

Dr. Weber: Welcome, everyone, to a special short edition of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, which we call a breadcrumb.

[bread crumbling noise]

Dr. Cashio: *Philosophy Bakes Bread* is a production of the Society of Philosophers in America. In our breadcrumb episodes, we are going to include either little snippets of past episodes that got cut off of the loaf of previous episodes, or something interesting and special, like this episode.

Dr. Weber: That's right. We may include more responses to your feedback that we received on Twitter @PhilosophyBB, Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread, or by email at philosophybakesbread@gmail.com. Dr. Mariana Alessandri, assistant professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, was with us on episode 22, "The Little Engine that Couldn't".

Dr. Cashio: "I think I can't. I think I can't. Welcome back, Mariana.

Dr. Alessandri: Hi. Good to be here again. I'm good.

Dr. Cashio: For our listeners, I'm going to set this up and then I'm going to let you talk for a minute. Shortly after we recorded our episode, and as anyone who has been listening to our episodes knows, we always end with a question, "Does philosophy bake bread?" You sent us this email with this amazing insight. I just want to toss it to you and let you share this insight with us about the question, "Does philosophy bake bread?"

Dr. Alessandri: That same night after we recorded, I was trying to put my two-year-old to bed. He was up in the middle of the night. It was 3AM, I was just rubbing his head, and I just started thinking about philosophy baking bread. Philosophy baking bread and how funny of a metaphor it is to think about baking bread. I just thought that baking bread has to be the best metaphor for philosophy today, because: Who bakes bread anymore? People consider it a waste of time when they can just go to the store. Nobody needs to bake bread. Philosophy baking no bread is an old metaphor back from a time when baking bread was considered respectable. Now both of them are in a same camp. Baking bread and philosophy are both considered a waste of time. I feel like we have to think back about what it means to be a waste of time and what it means to do something productive. It seems like today, baking bread doesn't even mean baking bread because baking bread is considered a waste of time. I am just thinking about the new way society thinks about baking bread, which is more like 'makes you money'. "Bakes bread" is like "gets you a job." Today, baking bread bakes no bread.

Dr. Weber: One aspect or version of baking bread today is the artsy-fartsy or highfalutin, "I'm going to make this artisanal blabbity-blah bread."

Dr. Cashio: That's good though. It tastes good.

Dr. Weber: It tastes good. It's also, though, a luxury.

Dr. Alessandri: It's something you do in your leisure time. It's something you do because you want to do it. It's something you do almost to flaunt doing something that is not going to make you any money. Presuming you are not the person baking artisanal bread to go sell at the farmer's market.

Dr. Weber: It's really funny that you say all this, Mariana. A few years ago I had a sabbatical, and I took up a little hobby of baking bread. It was a lot of fun. People told me I should sell it at the farmer's market. So I gave a go. I went twice to the farmer's market and had baked a ton of bread to do so. To be honest with you, I made quite a bit of money. That said, that wasn't going to be my career. I have different goals. At the same time, I can totally see why people would enjoy that kind of thing. It isn't your everyday thing. It's very special, it is kind of a luxury item compared to if you were to go to the grocery store, you're going to find it for much cheaper. It's bread and it's fine. That's what most everybody does.

Dr. Alessandri: Your story is fascinating, because even the fact that someone would see something that you are doing in your home for your family, that is beautiful, and saying, "Oh, that can make you money."

Dr. Cashio: Monetize it!

Dr. Alessandri: That's our first instinct, to be like, "How do you make money out of that? You should be making money." Of course, it's going to be more stressful, and if you did continue it, it would probably take time away from your family. It would be like, "No, don't eat the bread. It's for the farmer's market."

Dr. Weber: It involves baking a heck of a lot of bread and it takes a lot longer, but when you do so it does make good money. You're right. One aspect, to be generous for a moment, is to say that people thought, "Wow this is great. I'll buy some. I want some of this." That's nice. You're right, that it does somewhat commodify.

Dr. Alessandri: I think back to Socrates, and with this metaphor that you have pointed out before on this show, this phrase comes from this quote that says, "philosophy bakes no bread", but it is no less true that we live by bread alone, which is from the gospel of Matthew. The point was that there was this split between feeding your body and feeding your soul--something that even Socrates knew about. He chastised the Athenians and would likewise chastise us for paying all of this attention to our body, but you're not filling up your soul. While in the metaphor baking bread was for the body, today it is almost like baking bread is for your soul. Taking the time, taking hours and kneading it, letting it sit overnight, it is something more for our soul. If I want to eat something and just shove something in my mouth, I can go to the store and buy bread. If I'm going to take the time to bake it, then I'm doing something that is good for my whole person and I think philosophy is good for that too.

Dr. Weber: While we have this show *Philosophy Bakes Bread* and everything, you make me think about the metaphor in ways I had not even considered. One of the things I love about baking bread is attending to and knowing all of the intricacies of something very basic that I then consume, that I usually don't know anything about. There is something in a way philosophical, loving to know about what is involved in some of the basic things in our lives.

Dr. Alessandri: It's also communal. You are tapping into all of these other people who have baked bread with similar ingredients. It doesn't have to be something fancy. It's really nice. I think Socrates had it right, that there is this split, and our society is living for the wrong things. Maybe just living to make money, to make this other kind of bread that we call dough. The whole thing is so funny to me, that we are still using these terms, but even that the terms have shifted. If we are upside-down in our values and are too much into appearances or buying things or 'making dough', and not enough into baking bread and spending time with each other and spending time with our families, I do think that he is right that we would be better off cooking from scratch. Even Juana Inés de la Cruz said that if Aristotle had spent more time in the kitchen, he would have written more philosophy. This is a beautiful thing, bringing the kitchen into philosophy. There are these parallels or these crosses, even within written philosophy that reference work that is done in the kitchen as very beautiful and communal and philosophical in and of itself.

Dr. Cashio: That's good. I always imagine, when doing these interviews, that baking bread is a big metaphor that we are doing the kneading. The conversation is the kneading of the bread and putting all of the ingredients together, and hopefully people go out and listen to it, and that's where the real baking and rising of the ideas come in.

Dr. Weber: It's worth noting in what you said that there are a number of interesting philosophers who are doing philosophy about or of food. It may be time for us to bring some philosophers of food to come talk about that.

Dr. Cashio: We'll make sure we eat beforehand.

Dr. Weber: I want to push back for a moment on some of the things that you said. On the one hand, I agree with it. I bake bread for the kinds of reasons that you are saying. Some of my

reasons for engaging philosophy are related to what you are saying. On the other hand, there are so many things we might be able to do or aspire to in our lives, that it's nice that some things can be made simple and easy. For one thing, in a sense, the fact of manufacturing bread means that so many more people can get bread cheaply. We may bemoan Wal-mart, their vision of the world, though, is that everybody should have the goods of life. That's what they say, anyway.

Dr. Cashio: More like everyone pays them to have the goods of life.

Dr. Weber: I'm just telling you what their mission statement stuff says, is that they want to make sure that everybody has access to the good life. Whether or not you agree with that or buy it, the point that I'm trying to make is that when we make these commodities, when we make things easier, we make sure more people get access. I don't have to worry about baking bread. If I had to think about baking bread each day, it would take some planning and time out of my day to think about when I'm going to do this. It's got to rise a certain amount of time, you have got to punch it down at a certain point, and then at a certain point you have to knead it. There isn't that much time involved in making bread, in terms of the actual doing. It doesn't take that long, except that it has to be in a structured timeframe, over time. You have to plan for that. That then will distract you from all of the other things you have to think about. What I'm saying is that these commodification and so forth buy for us time to think about other things, if we're not trying to focus on baking bread.

Dr. Alessandri: That's the idea. I don't think that is actually what it does.

Dr. Weber: In other words, it does more harm, it sounds like you think.

Dr. Alessandri: I think we are back at the conversation about the cost, that we don't really ask about the cost of it. There are so many costs. You have had enough ethicists on to talk about the costs of things like Wal-mart and cheap goods. My bigger point is not even that everyone should have to bake their own bread. It's to say that let's remember that baking bread is a respectable activity. That it is beautiful, that it is valuable. That reading books, yes there are movies, and yes you can go watch the movie, but when you read the book everyone says the book is better. The reason for that is that if you take time with it, it's valuable to read the book. I tell my students, reading for yourself and really grappling with a question that you don't understand is more valuable than looking at Wikipedia and having some bunch of fools tell you the answer.

Dr. Weber: That reminds me of another aspect I like about baking. I don't know how much of this is truth and how much of it is the distortion of having made something myself, but the best pizza I have ever tasted is my own.

Dr. Alessandri: That's beautiful. There are so many valuable things about making it yourself. Your family loves it, it's a gift.

Dr. Weber: Is it my narcissism for having enjoyed my own creation?

Dr. Cashio: It might have actually just been good, Eric.

Dr. Weber: When you have bread right out of the oven, it's insanely good right then.

Dr. Cashio: We used to have this bread machine, so this is in between the two. We are not making our bread, but we are not buying it either. You put all of the ingredients in, and you could set a timer for when you wanted it to go off, if you wanted to do that. My wife, shortly after getting married...

Dr. Alessandri: Everybody gets a bread maker.

Dr. Cashio: Right? We set a timer for it go off in the middle of the night so it would wake us up in the morning and wake up to the smell of the fresh...It was worth it. The smell of freshly baked bread was great and you would get out and the bread was hot and you cut it up and eat some cinnamon bread for breakfast.

Dr. Weber: One of the things you are pointing out that I think it is really important to emphasize, Mariana, is this notion that we can forget something and its value. Something crucial. It is definitely the case that as a society we come to forget the value of philosophy and remember both that it can be useful and also awesome in itself. That is something where there has been an interesting movement. I think YouTube has valuably contributed. The internet has valuably contributed to helping people learn how to do things themselves. I watch a lot of 'how-to' videos for that kind of thing.

Dr. Alessandri: I think that is what it's best for, actually.

Dr. Weber: Maybe we can, as philosophers, encourage people to go back, to learn how to do some of these things themselves, and enjoy those activities in themselves so that we can perhaps have the metaphor and analogy hopefully be learned and noticed across areas like philosophy.

Dr. Alessandri: For me, also the question comes down to: What do I want to spend my time on? Not thinking that everything that I want to spend my time on has to end in some monetary value.

Dr. Weber: We had Dr. John Lachs on the show a while back, and at one point in one of his essays, the rat race, and how we can be thinking about this or that little achievement that gets us further down the line for something or other and never thinking about happiness in the here and now. You can get hit by a bus at 45 and never have made it to that retirement you have been focusing your whole life on, or working towards never to enjoy your time in the meantime. I think the idea of enjoying the bread is reminding us to take some time each day.

Dr. Cashio: It's not even the bread itself that is the most important part. Sometimes it's the time spent with the baking. You take that moment, and it just gives you time with yourself, thinking about your life being in the moment, and then it also opens up the rest of your life to you.

Dr. Alessandri: In other countries they know this. I lived in Spain for a year, and their dinners were three hours. It was wonderful. You just spend time on dinner. You spend time eating. You spend time talking. You are not rushing through it. Thinking about time well spent. Socrates would agree with me that we have a very distorted sense of what is time well spent. We forget about things that take long times, things that bring us closer together. We are out for efficiency, and I think that's the wrong goal. WE should be out for actually quality of life right now, like you were saying.

Dr. Weber: I think that is a terrific thought and that is exactly where we should call this little breadcrumb to a close. Any final thoughts you want to add, or does that sum it up for you, Mariana?

Dr. Alessandri: I think that sums it up. I wish that people would not have to measure up to what other people think is time well spent for them but think for themselves. Philosophy, and thinking about yourself and who you are and what you want to do, and who you want to be, I

think that is all time well spent. Especially for college students who are pressured to take exams and not think. Let people have time to think and stop pushing them to the next thing.

Dr. Cashio: I hope everyone enjoyed this little breadcrumb. I hope you will take a moment to think about what we have been talking about here today. I like that. Take time to think for yourself.

Dr. Weber: That's right. Remember that 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. 859-257-1849. You can also reach us on Twitter, Facebook and email. For any of that information, visit philosophybakesbread.com

Dr. Cashio: This has been Dr. Anthony Cashio, Dr. Eric Weber, and Dr. Mariana Alessandri with *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, food for thought about life and leadership.

[outro music]