

Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode Thirty-Two, with Dr. Tommy J. Curry

The Public Philosopher and the Gadfly

Transcribed by Drake Boling, January 19, 2018.



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

Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Tommy J. Curry, "The Public Philosopher and the Gadfly," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 32, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, July 11, 2017.



[Intro music]

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[Theme music]

Dr. Weber: Hey everybody. You are listening to WRFL Lexington, 88.1FM, all the way to the left on your radio dial. This is Dr. Eric Thomas Weber and I am here to bring you episode 32 of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. I have two things to tell you about it. First of all, this is a very special episode because a good friend and past guest, Dr. Tommy Curry is back on the show. He received a bunch of death threats for some publicly engaged philosophy, and by a bunch I mean 80. We thought we had to give this guy an opportunity to talk about what's going on, how he is dealing with it, and so forth. Thank you all for listening to WRFL as well as for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. Here is episode 32 with Dr. Tommy J. Curry.

[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 in SOPHIA and on this show aim to correct that misperception.

Dr. Weber: *Philosophy Bakes Bread* airs on WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, and is distributed as a podcast next. Listeners can find us online at philosophybakesbread.com

We hope you'll reach out to us on Twitter @PhilosophyBB, on Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread, or by email at philosophybakesbread@gmail.com

Dr. Cashio: Last but not least, you can leave us a short, recorded message with a question, or a comment, or, if you are feeling up to it, bountiful praise that we may be able to play on the show at 859-257-1849. That's 859-257-1849. On today's show, we are very fortunate to be joined by, once again, Dr. Tommy Curry. He is here today to talk to us about what it is like to be a philosophical gadfly, about some of the experiences he has had recently, and we will talk to him again about his new book, *the Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood*. As a reminder for our listeners, Dr. Curry is a professor of philosophy at Texas A&M University, where he researches and teaches about critical race theory and Africana philosophy, anti-colonial economic thought, and colonial sexuality studies, social and political philosophy, and biomedical ethics.

Dr. Weber: That's right. Dr. Curry does a lot. He's also a prolific author, as well as a recognized public philosopher. For more about Tommy, be sure to listen to episode 9 of this show. We recently had Tommy on to talk with us about his new book *the Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood*.

Cashio: How are you doing today, Tommy?

Curry: I'm doing well. How are you guys?

Dr. Cashio: We're doing good. Thanks for joining us. As you know, we usually open with a segment called "Know Thyself," but today's show is special, since we recently had you on in episode 9.

Dr. Weber: That's right. On episode 1 of this show, given that it was the first episode, we had Anthony on as a guest to introduce basically ourselves and especially him. Anthony explained that Socrates was known as a gadfly—the bug that essentially stings the horse of the mind in the ass, and gets it racing.

Cashio: The horse of the mind in the ass.

Weber: For this service, though, people will want to kill you, Socrates said.

Cashio: He didn't just say it, he was killed for it. It's a super fun episode (episode 1). You guys should listen to it. We like to have a lot of fun on this show, but some of us like Dr. Tommy Curry have had Plato's warning hit far too close to home. Years ago, Tommy was on another interview show, and was talking about self-defense and violence of African-Americans in response to white supremacist oppression. He was talking about history and about how even to talk about black people killing white people is treated as unacceptable.

Weber: There is a publication called *Conservative American*, and they published a short piece about Tommy's interview, in which the author of the piece suggested that Tommy was advocating violence against white people. This was clearly false. It was so

striking a case, in fact, that the stories generated an entry in Snopes.com, one of those famous websites that looks into the truth of something and you can go verify whether this or that document is really true, and so forth. Snopes is fantastic as one of those outfits that looks into things and lets you know if it's right or wrong. They correctly noted that this guy was clearly wrong and misleading, and dangerously so, unfortunately. The amazing thing is how clearly this story demonstrates, exactly what Tommy was talking about.

Cashio: Have we gotten the rough outline of these events correct, Tommy?

Curry: Absolutely.

Weber: We haven't gotten to the consequences, but we are going to get to those.

Cashio: We will get to them. That's where things get hairy. As a result of the publication of this piece, Tommy has received a slew of racial insults, judgments, and even death threats, not to mention a disappointing statement from his own university's president. In today's episode we want to invite Tommy to talk about his experience. We are going to begin with a segment by asking Tommy about the philosopher as gadfly. What does it mean to be a gadfly before this experience, and how about now?

Curry: I think every philosopher is given the image of a gadfly to understand the kinds of questions that we should be asking. We are taught from undergrad forward that the idea of the philosopher is to ask the questions that no one wants to hear or think about, to ruffle the feathers of the masses so they take a moment to think, "What if?" That's a useful idea. It's a useful image. But in the real world, once you get your degree, once you are a practicing philosopher, especially under this presidential administration, it seems that there is a tendency for gadflies in critical thinking to not only be deemed undesirable, but to also be extremely dangerous. I want to say that I'm not the only professor that has had their life threatened over the last month or so because they said something that the alt-right of the American conservatives have not liked about race or race relations. There are a number of professors who have been threatened, threatened to be killed, threatened to be raped. People have called, threatening to lynch me, because they said that I was a rapist. That's some of the death threats I have received. What we are entering right now is a kind of time period where no question can be asked if it runs against the narrative of the extreme right, which is that there should be no discussions of anti-racism, that America solves its race problem, that white people, in particular white men, are not to blame and have no obligation to deal with racism.

The other part of this is this insidious notion of racial inferiority and cultural deprivation theory, which suggests that the problems that black Americans find themselves in, be it police brutality or poverty, ultimately come from an aspect of their own racial inferiority, be it biological or cultural. In some of the websites that have posted and shared this story, you see them sharing some of the work of the bell curve that is also talking about the rise of whites to reclaim the republic, you see a lot of the work by David Duke suggesting that there needs to be a mobilization of whites,

specifically white men, against the language of the academy that is weakening the white race. You see people sharing Richard Spencer's stuff on the alt-right. This is part of a program, a movement that is not just popular, that is no longer on the fringes of American society, but something that is gained as a central position or platform in a way that Americans are now trying to deal with our supposed address of America's race relations. To be a gadfly, or a black gadfly in this period of time, talking about race has made it extremely dangerous. This harkens back to what we knew of in the McCarthy era, something that is also remnant of how black professors were treated during the Civil Right's period, where the FBI or the government would threaten their jobs or their lives, their livelihood if they spoke out against United States Government on race. WE are heading back to some very dark times.

Weber: There were a couple of references that not all of our listeners may know, or that people may want to be able to hear more about valuably. The first one I want to mention is the notion of the alt-right. My understanding, and correct me if I'm wrong, Tommy, or fill this in for us, if you would. My understanding is that the alt-right is kind of a euphemism is a new name for something, is it for neo-Nazis? What is it a new name for?

Curry: Some people are referring to it as an intellectual movement that is trying to take the failure of the right to address some of the core issues of the ideas of conservatism back to the white republic. For many people, the right, or the conservative movement did not go far enough in protecting and safeguarding the white race. This is both a political movement and an intellectual movement. You can see in some of the earlier writings that Richard Spencer did on the American Conservative, which was the publications that broke the news, allegedly about my support of violence, or armed self-defense. He used to be a writer there, before he was fired. This group of individuals, the intellectual forefathers of this movement seemed to believe there is this state in America being a white republic. It is a very old civilizational argument as to what it means to be an American. Even more so politically, what kinds of trails are involved when other minorities lose progress? Specifically, it is one of the tree ideas is that as other groups progress in this society, white men, and by default, the white race, becomes weaker and lose out.

One of the major arguments that I think cloud the attention of *The American Conservative* and other white supremacist publications in this regard is that a black person arguing that black people have the right to self-defense against white supremacy is seen as a real threat to the kind of life and population concerns that the alt-right is suggesting that the white race suffer under. Remember, the argument that many people claim on this side of the political spectrum is that there is an ongoing white genocide. Because white people are producing at lower numbers, because the white race will no longer be the majority race in the next couple of decades, that this is foreshadowing the extermination of the white race in America. This kind of fear and paranoia has generated certain kinds of calls for censorship, population control, immigration. I believe I discussed when I was on before, how when we look at Trump and the right's politics, his policies on immigration and his policies on abortion make perfect sense if

you are looking at it from a turn-of-the-century logical standpoint, which is that you have to have white women reproduce, you have to limit the potential non-white suitors through immigration, and then those people within the borders of your country, that they exterminate are segregated in such a way that they don't reproduce or threaten the endogamy of the white race. The endogamy is the ability for inter-marriage within the group. You have to make sure that whites marry whites, that whites reproduce with whites, and that there is a cultural affinity between whites that makes it undesirable to intermarry or mix with other groups. As I say, these are very old ideas. These are the ideas I study the most on, because I do intellectual history of the nineteenth century. This is a period of time, and the 21st century that Trump and a lot of the far-right are moving to some insidiously racist, insidiously isolationist and xenophobic ideas to try to make America a white republic again.

Weber: That's very insightful. In a sense, neo-Nazi is way too simple of a term. At bottom though, it is a white supremacist group. Very interesting. The other term you mentioned was the Bell curve. If I'm not mistaken, it's Charles Murray, and it was this text that was focusing on IQ and the differences between the races when it comes to IQ, which of course has been taken up and has been an inspiration for a number of people in this movement that you are talking about. Do they celebrate this text?

Curry: They celebrate the text and in many ways they suggest that the text is indicative of the degrading, the de-evolution of the American citizen. For many of these people that are on these white supremacist websites like *The Daily Storm* or etc., a lot of the arguments assume that the more race is mixed with the white race the more it devolves the white race from its proper place. Again, you have the biogenetic arguments or what we used to call in school biological determinist arguments. You have that kind of racism creeping up. You do have that alt-right, which is much more aligned with an intellectual defense of white supremacy. As for one of the reasons they try to distance themselves from Nazism, I think for the most part people have attacked the alt-right not inappropriately for being white supremacists, but they have done it on the idea of the old school biological determinacy that you get out of Nazism. The superior white race can't be polluted by inferior races. There is certainly that in the white supremacist milieu of all these people.

The alt right is actually taking up a very interesting spin. The alt-right is now suggesting that they are the minority group. Because they are the minority group, that all the post-modern theories of standpoint epistemology and all the post-modern theories of the revolutionary and the minority, the proletariat, etc. etc. They adopted those paradigms and they simply said, "Ah, white men, or white people are becoming minority. We know best, our experiences have to be heard, and these are movements to protect ourselves." This is why people like Richard Spencer are now able to claim, "We are not anti-other groups, we are just pro-us." By saying that "we are pro-us", he is not saying, "We are pro-white," he is saying, "We are pro- the people that are suffering as white men, as poor whites, as white Americans who have been stamped out by affirmative action policies, by liberalism, et cetera." He has utilized the discourses that

we have been doing in the academy for the last 20 or 30 years to put it around a certain population's story that focuses on white Americans.

Weber: It has the intellectual element, right?

Curry: Exactly. This is why they get to get out of claiming they are a neo-Nazi hate group. If they are not saying, "white people should triumph over the world," they are saying, "America should be a white republic because of these cultural ideas, and these cultural ideas have been stamped out by this kind of progressivism that is disadvantaged white people, specifically white men, and this needs to be an American white male republic because they have experiences too, they are suffering too, there are certain notions of memory that are being erased, as in the Confederate statues, etc." I want to be clear. It's a rhetorical device to put a progressive face on his white supremacy, but we should make no mistake that these people are calling for censorship, they are calling for racial superiority, and they are trying to hearken America back to a day where it was unquestionable, undoubtedly a white republic.

Weber: You are listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread* with Dr. Eric Weber and Dr. Anthony Cashio, talking with the great Tommy Curry, who has suffered death threats and unacceptable responses to a piece that mischaracterized and interview that he gave. We will be right back after a short break.

Cashio: Welcome back, everyone, to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber here talking with Dr. Tommy Curry. In this episode, we are talking about the importance and dangers of being a philosophical gadfly. In this segment, we will talk more specifically about recent reactions to the piece that came out in *The American Conservative*. At the end of the last segment, Tommy, we were talking about the alt-right, and how they have taken a position as the minority, and we began with talking about gadflies, attacking the majority position, poking it. A lot of people on the alt-right do see themselves as gadflies.

Weber: Isn't the interesting thing, though, that they will never really receive death threats the way Tommy has for that.

Cashio: Well, Richard Spencer, he got punched in the face.

Weber: OK. He would be a good punch to the face.

Curry: Here is the thing. In 2010, when Richard Spencer started coining and popularizing this term, the idea was set into motion by previous reactions to conservatives not going far enough. When you look at the paleo-conservatives, and the responses and reactions against multi-culturalism and immigration...

Weber: A pelo- what now?

Curry: A paleo-conservative.

Weber: What is that, for our listeners, and I am one of the people who doesn't know exactly what that is. What is a paleo-conservative?

Curry: This guy named Godfrey came up with the term. The interesting thing about the conservative movement is that it tries to conserve certain ideas of values, but sometimes people don't think they go far enough. There is a difference between conservative ideals and saying that there should be no immigrants, no blacks etc, in the country. Paleoconservatives were a reaction against mainstream conservatism, which felt that it had, in many ways, lost its way. This was in the late 2000's, 2007, 2008, when Godfrey wrote this essay on paleoconservatism. In 2010, you really see Richard Spencer picking this ideology up by coining the alternative right. This becomes a way to talk about the cultural and the idealistic constitution of the white race. The ideas that make white America great. This is where you see Trump get a lot of his pull. "Make America great again." The reason that speaks to so many people of that class, so many white people, why it motivated so many white voters is because it really does mean "Make America white again." The people who are saying that they are victimized by immigration, by affirmative action, by the economic crisis, have been white Americans.

This is going not only into what concretely affects them, but also their ideas and history. The confederacy. Immigration policies, religion. One of the reasons Islam is such a big deal now is because they see themselves as white Christians. These are major parts of the alt-right and the ideological movement that focuses around race, even though race is being displaced from it. It's easy to have a conversation about Islam and people who were Muslims as terrorists, blacks who were criminals, Mexicans who are rapists, without really focusing on the need for America to be a white supremacist republic. What that is looking like now is this call for censorship. Every time a professor in the leftist university makes a claim against America, makes a claim against the white race, says the white race is disposable, you get this outpouring of outrage. It's this false aversion to the idea that someone somehow is going to eliminate the white race from the face of the earth.

It is between this intellectual and political movement that is calling for the empowerment of whites, specifically white men. Then the at-large movement that calls for any censorship that is against the alt-right ideology that you find most academics today, which is why you found these backlashes. If someone says that black people should defend themselves, you say, "Racism does not exist, so this is hate speech." If you say that white people are inciting violence and vigilantism, a colleague of mine, Dr. Williams at Trinity shared a piece where he is like, "Listen, these people have incited violence, they have killed..." He is like, "Fine." She shared some of Baldwin's piece with the hashtag #letthemdie, in no way did he advocate killing anyone. They say, "Ah, he too was trying to kill white people." This is the kind of reactionism that universities are going to find themselves in the next 4 to 8 years. God, let's hope it is not eight. But 4-8 years possibly.

Weber: Tommy, we just scratched the surface in the first segment about what happened. Why you are on this show, and you have been invited to be on Tucker Carlson's show on Fox News, right?

Curry: I have. Several times, actually.

Weber: We are super fortunate to have you on the show. Dr. Curry will come on our show. We beat Tucker Carlson. I love that. I don't love the story that brought us here, but I do want you to be able to tell it. We just scratched the surface. From your mouth, in your eyes, what happened?

Curry: On March 8th, I got an email from Tucker Carlson's producer saying that they wanted me on the show to talk about healthcare and race issues or racial policies on college campuses. I declined that interview. Three hours later, the *American Conservative* published a piece saying that I was calling for the killing and genocide of white Americans. This is literally three to four hours later. There is a big uproar that appears over a podcast I did in 2012 addressing killing white people in context, responding to how the conservatives in America had tried to attack Jamie Foxx. Jamie Foxx was the main character of *Django Unchained*. In a Saturday Night Live skit, he said that he enjoyed making Django, and it was fun for them to kill all the white people who would enslave black Americans. The conservatives went into an uproar, suggesting that he was advocating violence against white people. This was a call for direct action and killing white people in contemporary society. Jamie Foxx said, "Listen, I am a comedian. It is a joke. Get over it."

What I try to do on my podcast, and this is the irony of the whole thing, is to say, "Listen, every time that we talk about violence against whites, we do so as if it is a fantasy and a spectacle. Something that never happened." What I tried to show is that there were concrete actions from liberation, like slave revolts in the case of say, Nat Turner, or actual Civil Rights movements as in the case of T. Thomas Fortune and Ida B. Wells or Mable Williams and Robert F. Williams of the Black Panther Party or Deacons For Defense, where black people had to arm themselves and take up guns to protect their civil rights. The right to vote, the right to protest, to protect themselves from the police state where they were sticking dogs and fire hoses on them. Black people had to arm themselves to fight for the civil rights that we claim were actually given by the Civil Rights movement. What I was trying to suggest is that there is a schism, a dissonance in the American mind between what Civil Rights was, which is where everybody says, "Oh, it was just Martin Luther King marching with people in the streets." It's a romantic vision. The ideas of Martin Luther King's nonviolence worked as if they weren't violent protests and people, students being killed during the Civil Rights movement. This is the debate between Martin Luther King and Stokely Carmichael, is, how do we stay peaceful when people are killing and raping and mutilating our peaceful students who are just exercising their right to protest. In response to that, black people took up arms to protect those groups, to protect students, to protect young men and women who were protesting for civil rights.

What I said was in the way, you see a long history, all the way back from the 19th century to the mid-20th century, where there were some black people who held the view that in order for black people to be liberated, some white people would have to die. That was the piece that was taken out of context. When you look at the history, and this is why context is so important...When you look at the history, black people have not been able to get civil rights in this country simply because they ask. Black people have not been able to get rights in this country simply because they march. The issue is that they had to de-stabilize society, and often that destabilization isn't the case with the Black Panthers, meant that they exercise their second amendment rights. The case with Robert F. Williams is so important because before Robert F. Williams decided to arm himself, they were peaceful protesters. White people were shooting into the black crowd. He recounts that they were shooting at a tree above the protester's heads. They reported this to the cop watching the protest and he said he heard nothing. Robert F. Williams argued that the rule of law failed to protect minorities. It failed to protect black people's right to protest and peacefully assemble. Black people had to arm themselves because the same white officer who didn't hear the gun being shot above the tree of the protesters also tried to kill him later when his car spun off the road because the KKK was chasing him.

This is the history of Civil Rights. It's not white America laying down and saying that we made a mistake and we were wrong. It has been black people having to fight to protect themselves under threat of life and limb to protect their families, to protect jobs. To participate in Civil Rights during the 1950's and 1960's was akin to being a terrorist. This is what Jackie Onassis said even about Martin Luther King. We can't keep living in this romantic dream with the idea that peaceful civil rights somehow worked but the black people who gave their lives and armed themselves to protect peaceful protesters, somehow that is the terroristic act. The terrorism, the violence, is what white America did to black and brown folks, to indigenous folks who wanted to be citizens and protested their whole lives to be able to enjoy the same constitutional rights as white Americans. If that history offends white America, it needs to take a very good look in the mirror to look at what kind of violence like slavery or genocide did it perpetuate against these groups of people such that they had to respond with arms.

Weber: Tommy, that's honestly just like in the Declaration of Independence where it is very beautiful and everything, but this is whitewashing the fact that this is a declaration about violence. "When in the course of human events..." if you treat us so unjustly we are going to respond! We are going to separate from you even if it takes force. We are going to make sure we declare intelligently our causes for that. It is an incredible imbalance where people forget that this honorific document, the founding documents, were declarations about violence, in a way.

Curry: Absolutely. This is one of the reasons that black philosophy is so important. When David Walker makes the same charge in his appeal in 1829, he is building it off the Declaration of Independence.

Weber: “Don’t tread on me” is all on everybody’s license plate. They are all over the place.

Curry: Exactly. The piece I said in the podcast was that self-defense is American except when it is applied to black Americans. The argument I made was that even talking about black people defending themselves from white violence, where white people would die because they were attacking black people, is censored in this country.

Weber: That is exactly the irony of your story because you are getting this crap exactly in the way you are saying. You get crap when you say this.

Curry: Exactly. It’s interesting because I am not making a call for revolutionary violence. We had this argument in your office back in grad school. The argument is not the indiscriminate killing of white people. The argument is, given the violence of a society that is white supremacist, where you can kill someone like Michael Brown, or you kill Tamir Rice, who is 12 years old, or with the Philando Castile case. When that happens, are black Americans supposed to cease thinking and say, “Well, we can only be victims.” The claim that Texas A&M’s president was making, and the claim that the alt-right is making, is that we cannot ever teach a history that shows black people fighting with their lives or with guns for their rights, that the only people that have the right to fight or bear arms to protect their livelihood or humanity are white people.

Weber: I want to ask and let you tell the story. What did Texas A&M’s leadership say in response when people were criticizing you for what it is someone took you to say?

Curry: Initially, the response was that my podcast was reprehensible and violent and...

Weber: This is what your university’s president said.

Cashio: Did he even listen to it?

Curry: I don’t think so. I point out constantly that the most embarrassing part of that statement isn’t just that a university president said it, but that the university president takes the *American Conservative* and *The Daily Stormer* to be legitimate sources of news. The only people in the country that have even taken onto the story of if it is true, have been *The American Conservative*, and white supremacist news outlets. Those are the only people who, even a month later, still try to reproduce this fabrication of what was said or what wasn’t said. Snopes has settled the story, *The Chronicle*, *Daily News* has printed the transcripts. It’s not there. That means that Michael Young, as the president of Texas A&M, said that white supremacists and alt-right news outlets were more trustworthy than the actually respected, peer-reviewed or professional venues and sources that we trust in the academy. Everybody reads *The Chronicle*. *The Chronicle* is the place that we get our news for the American universities. I think it is an embarrassment, and I think it shows how solidified this kind of trend of conservatism is, at a place like Texas A&M, where even the alt-right, which is an openly white supremacist movement, is able to have a hold on college administrations.

Weber: We are so lucky to be talking with Dr. Tommy Curry. We are having this conversation and Anthony and I, I could tell you I am having a lot of fun talking with Tommy. This is riveting to me, but my life wasn't threatened. Neither was Anthony's. There is just a world of difference in terms of what Tommy, you have had to endure. I am sorry that you have had to deal with that, but I am also very glad that you have been willing to come talk to us about this. We are going to come back after a short break to talk with you further. Dr. Tommy Curry with me, Dr. Eric Weber and my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio on *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. Thanks everybody for listening.

Cashio: Welcome back, everyone, to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber and we are here talking with Dr. Tommy Curry. He is the author of *the Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood*. In the previous segment we were talking about an awful experience that Tommy has had after a piece was run in *The American Conservative*, basically attacking him and misrepresenting some of his philosophical positions. In this segment, we are going to talk a little bit more about the consequences of that piece and some of the dangers of engaging in public philosophy in general. Tommy, you indicated in the last segment, you said that you had no support from your university president. Were there other administrators that did support you at Texas A&M or were you left flying in the wind, so to speak? I'm really sorry that happened to you.

Curry: Thank you. It was kind of a mixed bag. On the one hand, I think Michael Young prematurely trusted his constituents.

Weber: This is the president of Texas A&M University, right?

Curry: Right. Michael Young is the president of Texas A&M. He was responding to the paranoia of donors and alumni and I can tell you today, even...the unofficial alumni association, have been trying to put tremendous pressure on the administration to fire me. They have started a hashtag called, #notanotherdime, until me, Sharp and Young are fired. This is a group that has insisted that there should be no Africana studies, there should be no women and gender studies, that A&M, by hiring me was trying to change the culture into a University of California at Berkeley. These are harsh conservatives and alt-right followers who fundamentally believe that the culture at Texas A&M is the lynchpin of American conservatism, and that if it falls, that basically the world is going to hell in a handbasket. This is the group that very much believes that I should no longer be at Texas A&M.

I think Young was responding to and enforcing the will of those kinds of people. On the other hand, you saw support from administrators like the provost, the vice-provost of diversity, of the faculty. I was pleasantly surprised at the support that I received from the faculty at Texas A&M that were calling for protection of my academic freedom. To be honest with you, this is the most shameful part of it. My situation differed in a lot of ways from other professors in that I didn't give a tweet. This wasn't a

social media mishap. I was on a syndicated show at Sirius XM. *The Power, Rob Redding's News Review*. I was on that for about 2 or 3 years. My position on *Django Unchained* was really consistent with the 4-5 publications I have actually published and seen now in print on this area of research. It is my position that the militant civil rights movement had philosophical rules about how we think about the notion of equality, and that militancy and pessimism and the idea that whites will not simply be changed by moral suasion has been the dominant view of black Americans well within the beginning of the 19th century in this country.

That being said, what the president suggested was that those views are reprehensible. He is effectively saying that even though these publications have been seen by 3 or 4 different governing bodies within the university, that this podcast has been on my vita since I went up for tenure as an associate professor back in 2012. That all these publications, all this research is simply reprehensible because it cuts against the dominant idea, or should I say, white-washed idea of the civil rights movement would suggest that black people no longer suffer institutionally from racism, that black people are not the victims of hate crimes and violence, and that black people should never respond with their second-amendment rights to self-defense. The irony of this is that we are at a university that claims that even teenagers, if they are in the military, if you are an adult age 21, you can carry, conceal within classrooms. It is a contradiction that is so stark, that you can only say that it is racially insidious. It's a predominantly white campus, it is an overwhelmingly conservative campus that believes in campus carrying, exercise of the second amendment. Then you choose to not endorse a black professor who makes literally the same argument of self-defense of black people protecting themselves against white vigilantes, white supremacist violence, and a police state that is violating their rights. That is literally the same argument that Texans make in terms of keeping their guns, even assault rifles and their need to protect themselves from the encroachments of the state.

Again, this shows, as I said in the podcast, that this only bothers people when black people say that they have a right to self-defense. Overall, that kind of censorship really does threaten black professors, not only at Texas A&M, but it is a sign of the times to come. Academic freedom is going to become a central issue in the upcoming years. College administrators have to decide whether or not they serve the business interests of donors, or if they actually govern and try to protect the intellectual traditions of universities. One of the things that Michael Young said in a subsequent letter, they have released a few iterations of the letter that he was writing with some open records requests on TexAgs is that he was struck, and disagrees with the idea that the university can't be used to educate people. I assume that he is responding to the idea that critical race theory says that race is permanent. He fundamentally disagrees with the idea that white people cannot be educated out of their racism. It's so stark. What is so interesting to me is he, on one hand, claims that we should be educating white people out of racism, but then he says that the ideas and histories that show the mistakes, and shows the tyranny of white racism should be erased if they show something like militant self-defense or armed resistance against white people.

Weber: That is exactly the irony and hypocrisy altogether.

Curry: We should educate white people out of racism. Laws and education doesn't teach or tell white people they already think they know about racism. It's absurd. That is why you can tell that these responses are politically motivated, not intellectually motivated. There is not a black teacher scholar teaching Africana that doesn't start with violence. The Haitian Revolution. Haiti was the first free black republic in modernity. It happened because of violence. Black people became free from slavery because of violence. Black people won the civil rights movement because of violence. Black people fought in every revolutionary war in America, from the American revolution to the Civil War, etc. Violence was involved. To give a story of black people fighting for liberation, or even the story of America, outside of revolutionary violence or self-defense would be revisionist. Then when you place black people inside that story, when you say that black people have agency in that story, that black people took up arms to protect their own rights, somehow that becomes reprehensible.

Weber: We have the United States because of violence. We have confederate monuments because of violence. It is an unbelievable hypocrisy.

Curry: I think that in being in the academy at this period of time, it's going to really test the intellectual seriousness of professors, especially black professors. This is going to be a period of time where universities have to decide: Do they want black professors who are willing to stand up to the pressures of the alt-right and administrators to actually endorse academic freedom and intellectual pursuit? That's going to be a much taller task. This isn't going to be a decision of, well, let's just hire people from Yale and Harvard. It's going to be a decision of whether or not people have the intellectual character and courage to fight against a public that says they should not exist. Especially when you talk about issues of racism in this country, those conversations predominantly involve non-whites. It's not like when you talk about sexism, because you are talking about white women and white people still.

When you start talking about issues of racism, that's going to involve questions of islamophobia, xenophobia, protectionist policies, racism, imperialism. When you start holding in on those fundamental questions, given that America has decided that it is in fact now a white republic, even though it always has been, but is now paranoid about losing that, these are going to generate political controversy, and in many cases may escalate into violence, given the threat that is coming, the threat of professor's lives are coming. This is going to be a very different calculus. If you want these conversations to happen, it's going to be happening in brimstone and fire.

Cashio: You talked about...recalculating. Have these events made you re-think the way you are approaching philosophy, or at least publicly presenting your ideas in the future? Does it embolden you further? Has there been some thought on this?

Curry: There has been lots of thought on it, honestly. It's one of those things. I didn't do anything wrong. I did what I was hired to do. I have published God-knows how many

articles on these issues. They are in extremely well, very visible and prestigious venues. I guess I am confronted as a black man in America with the idea that I should be quiet because white racists are angry at what I say. That doesn't go down too smoothly. As of now, my answer is no. It has not changed what I am going to say. It's one thing, if we take the worst-case scenario. Let's say I call for revolutionary violence against whites. That is still protected in academic speech. I can write about revolution. I can be an anarchist. That is my freedom as a professor.

In this case, I didn't do that, because I am much more interested in the second amendment, which is very interesting, because they focused on one article I published in 2007, questioning whether or not we need a self-defense model or revolutionary violence model. Everything I have written in the last decade has been about the second amendment. The reason that I think that is so important is because it is something that is grounded within the understanding and tradition of how black Americans chose to speak about violence. It's what black people historically have chosen to say about their relationship to violence and white supremacy. For me to say that I am going to censor a whole area of my research because white supremacists find it offensive—we should be offending white supremacists.

Weber: They don't want to hear the truth.

Curry: They don't want to hear the truth. If a white supremacist isn't offended by my views on race, then God knows, what am I doing? This is the point, right? It's the same way that someone who supports Nazism should be offended by the work they are doing at Shoah. These counter-narratives, this research exists to offend the oppressor. The oppressor is trying to impose a certain will or silence, or in many ways genocide the lies and existence and histories of the oppressed. Just because we are in this political moment where the alt-right and white supremacists have a public forum, I am not dissuaded either by lessening my academic freedom, or to lessen the integrity of my research simply because they exert some pressure.

Cashio: I'm happy to hear you are going to continue with your work, because I think it is really important and powerful work you are doing.

Curry: Whether I continue in the academy is a different issue. I'm certainly going to continue the work.

Weber: Tommy, I was in Mississippi for 9 years, and I was advocating a lot for justice, and I got modest threats. I say modest, they troubled me. I was anxious. I don't know that I would say that I lost sleep, but it was difficult to take that. It was nothing like the level of what you have gotten. My question, and we have only got about a minute and a half here. My question is: have you lost sleep? Tell us about the experience you have undergone, what you have been feeling.

Curry: It does bother you. When I was at SIU and I wrote for the paper, I used to get death threats too.

Weber: Really? This is Southern Illinois University.

Curry: When I used to write for *The Daily Egyptian* I used to write about race issues and people would threaten my life then. I was a young man. It didn't bother me as much. Now with a family, you think about things a little differently. It's not just you trying to take on the world, it's about what the world would do to the people you love and care about. That changes the calculation a bit. My fears have largely come from making sure that my family, my daughters are safe. On the other hand, however, it does embolden me a bit. Think about it. If the conversation about black people defending themselves from a history of violence, we see case after case, we see white vigilante after white vigilante attacking black people, Muslims etc. If me talking about that means that these people are going to threaten my life, then what are we negotiating with? If speech leads to death threats and people saying that they want to kill you because they disagree with you, then what is the state of our democracy that says that the burden of saying things to not get killed becomes on the people who are really trying to improve society, and not the people who are using violence and death to try to destroy it? Again, that is a real question that these universities and these administrators have to ask themselves.

What does it mean for a university president to say, "We find the conversation about black people's self-defense," or, let's assume he assumed it was revolutionary violence offends him, "but I support, or am at least not going to say anything to all the people trying to threaten this professor and his family." What is the contradiction? From my viewpoint, it can only be racism, because there is no way you can tell me that I got 62-80 death threats. There is no way you can tell me, "That is not against Aggie values." God forbid this full professor that researches militant civil rights actually says that black people have a right to defend themselves from white tyranny. That is what is so offensive. It shows that part of the values that aggie conservatives have is the depreciation of black, brown and indigenous life. These are certain groups that A&M has traditionally and even contemporarily doesn't value as much as other white conservatives. That is a reality that the institution, and other universities that look at Texas A&M have to reconcile with.

Weber: I am blown away. I didn't realize you had quite so many death threats, Tommy. I am so sad that you have had to experience that. We are going to come back after a short break to talk with Tommy Curry one more time. We are going to ask him some final big-picture questions about whether or not people should engage in public philosophy. I think we have just heard some about how you are going to keep going in one form or another. I'm glad to hear that. I'm Dr. Eric Weber, with my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio. Thanks everybody for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*.

Cashio: Welcome back, everyone, to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber, and we have been talking this afternoon with Dr. Tommy Curry. We have been discussing the role and dangers of doing public philosophy, of being a gadfly, and some really unfortunate and awful things that have happened to Dr.

curry in the past few weeks. We are going to end this last little segment by asking some big-picture questions about these events and we will maybe end with a pressing philosophical question for our listeners. We do want to hear from you guys about your thoughts about what we have been talking about today. It has been a really important conversation. Tommy, why don't we jump right to it. We always ask the question about, based on the name of this show, does philosophy bake bread? We had you on last time, and we have your answer, and it's a really good answer. People can go back and listen to episode 9 of the show and they can get it.

Given the recent events and what we have been talking about with the responses to that article in *The American Conservative*, I think it is maybe worth revisiting about philosophy baking bread, about the dangers of doing public philosophy. Would you change your answer in any way from the last time you were on here? Does philosophy bake bread? How should we go about thinking about doing public philosophy, and what is the importance of public philosophy in general? Especially for someone who is doing really important work, it's cutting-edge work, and you are a black philosopher and you are in a frankly racist political climate? Do you find that changing the way you pursue your work?

Curry: I don't. Given the work I do, and I think there is a distinction here. This is something I write about constantly. Many people look at working on race in philosophy as a way to change how white people think about blacks generally. It's a way to further the integrationist impulse of American race relations, or it is a way to appease a certain group of philosophers or administrators to mobilize into the higher echelons of the academy. When I do race work, I'm actually trying to find out and do serious study into American race relations, which is why many philosophers find the work that I do to be so offensive, because it doesn't rely on the idea that we can simply talk these issues out in our local conferences or our national conferences and suddenly the world changes.

Again, one of the starkest things I remember is a few years ago at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, there was a heated exchange because I suggested the progress we see under Obama is at best short-lived and will lead to a backlash. There were several members of the audience, one in particular, that was extremely upset and started yelling, suggesting that my work was ideological, etc. etc. Consistently I have made this argument over the last several years. It seems that I am one of the few philosophers who has actually been right. That's not because I have some doom and gloom view of the world, it is because I actually read. If you read social sciences, if you read the materials that are focused on the problems and the studying of white attitudes, you can see even under Obama that three or four years into his presidency, there was a shift from the left of the moderate over to the right, and that this was going to lead to something that was going to be insidiously dangerous and insidiously racist, which gave us what we have now which is Trump and the alt-right.

Do I believe that philosophy does something? Absolutely. I believe I said it gives us a surety in the way that we think about and approach problems, question our

assumptions and that we take actions that have a panoramic view of what we intend. On the other hand, do I think public philosophy does the same thing? I think that it can. IF you are going to be a public philosopher in this era, then it is going to be something that is based in the integrity and character of the message, and not simply a search for celebrity status. These are going to be dangerous times. These are dangerous times. These are the times where someone who disagrees with what conservatives or white supremacists say will get their lives threatened. These people are threatening peoples' livelihoods, which is ironic given that they seek to end tenure. Tenure was installed in universities precisely for this issue, so that people and thinkers and scholars who made their lives by doing scholarship and research could not be threatened when the public disagree with their scholarship or research.

Now you have a call. This is what I mean about the time period we are in. Now you have a call for people to, in the protections, they give people the right to freely think and speak as they wish. The reason that this is an academic freedom issue and an issue of free speech is not because I am an individual and have a right to say what I want. This is an issue of free speech because as a professor, I have the right to research and produce knowledge about whatever I see fit. That is what my credential does. It gives me the ability to research within institutions, and I shouldn't have to fear for my life or safety to do so. In this world that we are in now, the effect of the call for censorship is to destroy the livelihood for people who think differently. There are lots of people I disagree with, but I do not say that because I disagree with those people they should be killed, or they should not have a job.

That is what we are entering today. We are entering a world where the public people who may have high school degrees, they may not have finished college, people who just like to play on the internet a lot are amassing the kind of power to threaten the livelihood of tenured professors. Public philosophy is going to become, and has become a very dangerous thing. This is why I think that the APA, as supportive as it has been in my situation, and even the situation before with George Yancy really needs to put into place programmatic safeguards, in the fund of legal council or assistance, to help professors in these times. Because if you are having students who are coming out as philosophers that want to pursue public philosophy, there has to be something that the natural organization does. Some organized response or mechanism to address these types of threats to the livelihoods of the profession.

Weber: Interesting. Just so everyone knows, APA stands for American Philosophical Association, which is the major body for professional philosophers in this country. This is a very interesting call to action and set of considerations for us to raise for our professional body, about if you are going to engage in public philosophy, how are we going to protect our people?

Curry: Exactly. They released a statement saying that they support public philosophy, but supporting public philosophy and protecting people for public philosophy are two completely different things.

Cashio: There is no tenure for public philosophy. There's none of those protections there.

Curry: Again, tenure itself is being threatened. This is a conversation that I have not seen a national organization as of yet. What does it mean when you have a call to roll back tenure? What does it mean for education? What does it mean to philosophy? Once we move beyond the analytic/continental / American distinction, what does it mean to ask a question that is unpopular? That is what we are talking about now. We are talking about something that is beyond disciplinary approaches. We are asking a very simple question. What is the stake, or the consequence of asking unpopular question under the Trump administration? If the answer to that is going to be death and the threat of unemployment or a pariah status within the academy because other universities are turned off by hiring controversial professors, then I think that our field and the academy at large is doomed. If administrators are going to listen to racist reactionaries, there is no place for scholars of color specifically, but even for other critical professors to go. That is a very damaging and damning position for American universities to be in, especially when we need critical professors and people who are going to archive and analyze the moment we are in now, under Trump and the alt-right more than ever.

Weber: That brings us full-circle to the theme of today's episode, which is the public philosopher and the gadfly, and considering the dangers and importance of this kind of work. I thank you, Tommy, for the work you are doing, and I want you to know that there are people out there who really appreciate what you are up to, and I am terribly sorry you have had to go through what you have, but this is a really important call to action for the profession and the country. I'm really glad you have been on the show. Even when we deal with heavy subjects, we also want to make sure that we remind listeners that there can be a lighter side to philosophy. In the last episode we had with you, we had a big of a difficult time because there can be such awful jokes about race. That's what we brought up last time, and it was revealing, I think. This time around, we have a bit of an easier target, because there was an administrator who was a bad boss, and so we want to take a second for the bit that we call "philosophunnies."

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(laughter)

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(child's laughter)

Weber: In this episode, Tommy, I want to ask you: Do you want to tell any kind of joke or funny story? My suspicion is, "Nah, I'm not in the mood to tell a joke."

Curry: No. I'm going to pass the baton to you.

Weber: We did talk with you about this in advance, so you are comfortable and happy with us to tell this one joke.

Curry: Have at it.

Weber: Here is the setup. If you got a terrible boss, this is the joke for you. We got one from Dilbert. It's called the Dilbert principle:

The most ineffective workers are systematically moved to the place where they can do the least damage...management.

[rimshot, applause]

Curry: I think it's appropriate.

Cashio: That is what we like in our jokes—appropriateness.

Curry: It's funny because you have to think about it. The administrators and management of these universities are the buffer between the faculty and the public. Wholeheartedly, they have done a horrible job at addressing these issues across the country. That is not to say that universities can't step up their administrators by default have to do such a bad job. They are so concerned with the PR, which is ironically appealing to a white supremacist public. If that is the concern of major universities, I don't know which way is up anymore. What is the task of the university if not to allow for contentious debate, or to allow for critical ideas. If administrators are going to stamp that out, then what is the function of the university? We might as well be vocational schools.

Cashio: Great question.

Weber: I do want to believe that there are better and worse administrators. There are acceptable ones and unacceptable ones, troubling ones and more inspiring ones. Man, do we have a bad story to tell this time around. Thank you, Tommy for encouraging us to tell this one philosophunny joke.

Cashio: A lesson to administrators that might be listening out there on how not to respond. Last but not least, we do want to take advantage of the fact that we have powerful social media that allow two-way communication, even for programs like radio shows. We want to invite our listeners to send us their thoughts about big questions that we have raised on the show. We have raised a lot.

Weber: Given that, Tommy, you know the drill. We want to know if you have a question we should pose to our listeners for the segment we call, "you Tell Me!" have you got a question to propose for our listeners?

Curry: I think we have to ask whether or not we believe that alt-right or white supremacist publics should constrain the mission and the discussion or discourse of the university.

Weber: Good question.

Cashio: I really want to hear what people have to say about this one.

Weber: Show your work, right?

Curry: Show your work.

Cashio:

Dr. Cashio: Thanks for listening to this episode of Philosophy Bakes Bread: food for thought about life and leadership. We your hosts, Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber, are really grateful today to have been re-joined by Dr. Tommy Curry. Consider sending your thought about anything that you've heard today that you would like to hear about in the future, or about the specific questions that we have raised for you. Once again, Tommy, I want to say that I think the work you are doing is fantastic, it is important, I hope you keep doing it, and i really am sorry you have had to deal with this awfulness. Thank you for joining us today and talking about it.

Weber: I mean it very deeply. Thank you very much, Tommy, for being on the show with us today to talk about this.

Curry: Thank you, I appreciate the invite, guys.

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

Cashio: If you are enjoying what you are listening to, maybe get on iTunes, or whatever your favorite source of getting podcast, and give us a positive review.

Weber: We would like that.

Cashio: It would be good. You can of course, email us at 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]