

Cakes, Capes, and Culture Wars

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[Intro music]

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[Theme music]

Dr. Weber: Hey everybody. You are listening to WRFL Lexington, 88.1 FM, all the way to the left on your radio dial. This is Dr. Eric Weber here with another fun, exciting episode of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. Today's show has an awesome guest. He has written for a number of outlooks, not the least of which is *Huffington Post*, under the name "The Gay Moralist". He is a terrific guy named John Corvino. I'm about to play for you part one of today's episode of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. I hope you enjoy.

[theme music]

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 am Dr. Eric Thomas Weber.

Cashio: And I am 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, some 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, I can say he is one of my favorite living philosophers, is John Corvino. Welcome John. How are you doing today?

Corvino: I'm doing well. Thanks so much for having me on the show.

Weber: It's our pleasure.

Cashio: It really is. John has been celebrated this year by having received the Community Hero award from the board of directors at Affirmations: Metro Detroit's LGBTQ+ Community Center. The award recognizes, "Inspirational leadership, advancing acceptance, equality, and inclusion." It was presented to recognize John's 25 years of advocacy since the debut of his *What is Morally Wrong With Homosexuality* lecture in April of 1992. John is also here to talk with us about his new book *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination*.

Weber: That's right. Corvino is also the author of *debating Same-Sex Marriage*, released in 2012, and *What's Wrong with Homosexuality*, published in 2013. In addition to his public lectures that have been recorded and posted as videos online, John has produced a series of enormously fun videos analyzing arguments and dispelling myths about topics concerning marriage, religion, sex, homosexuality, the Bible, and the source of morality. He was recently featured in *Pride Source* in an article titled *Philosopher Talks Bakers: Freedom and the Law*. How appropriate that you talk about bakers for our show, *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. Thanks for joining us, John.

Corvino: As long as it's just bread and not wedding cake, we should have no controversy and we'll be OK.

Cashio: I like wedding cake.

Corvino: I like wedding cake too.

Cashio: Alright John. We call this first segment of each episode, "Know Thyself." We just go back to the old dictum of knowing thyself. We would like to know whether you know yourself. Little test right off the bat. Let's see how you do. Tell us about yourself, and we'll ask you about how you got into philosophy and what philosophy means to you.

Weber: Just about you first.

Corvino: Just about me. I am a philosophy professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. I have been here for 19 years. It was my first job out of grad school. I did my graduate work at University of Texas at Austin. Grew up in New York and went to grad school in Texas. My sister followed me there and my parents followed my sister, so my family now lives in Texas. I live here in Detroit with my husband. We have been together for almost 16 years, but we have only been married for just over a year, after marriage became legal in Michigan, thanks to Obergefell in 2015, a year later we finally got married, and here I am.

Cashio: Congratulations.

Weber: How did you come into philosophy? How did you get into that?

Corvino: I couldn't get into welding school, even though Marco Rubio thinks... I had actually planned on becoming a priest when I started college. I was thinking of going into the priesthood. I knew I wanted to be a teacher of some sort. I thought I was going to be an English teacher who was also a priest. I was going to teach in a religious school. There are a couple different stories I tell about this, and they are all partially true or partially get at the truth. One is that when I decided to leave the order I thought, "What the hell am I going to do with all of these philosophy credits? Oh, I can become a philosophy teacher." As somebody going into the priesthood, you take a lot of philosophy classes.

Really, the biggest part of it was that while I was in college, St. John's University in New York, not far from home, where I grew up, I really enjoyed my philosophy classes. I had teachers who really inspired me, who really got me excited about it, and who convinced me that I could make a living as a philosopher. Frankly, if I knew then some of the things I know now, I would have thought, "My goodness, what are you, nuts? Thinking you can make a living being a philosopher?" But I have, in fact managed, fortunately, to make a living as a philosophy professor, and I'm really glad that I do because I love it.

Weber: That's terrific. This is a good point, because a lot of people worry about how philosophy is on the defensive, how little philosophy comes to be taught, as time goes on. Yet, it's true that Catholic institutions very often attend significantly to philosophy, see its value. They have courses on human nature, I believe, often. Philosophy is a love and various kinds of things.

Corvino: When I was at St. Johns, and this was back in the late 1980's, every student in the college of liberal arts had to take three philosophy courses, three theology courses, and one of either as part of general education. They were serious about that, and I'm glad. I'm very grateful for having this sort of classical education that emphasizes philosophy, and wish more people today saw the value in that.

Weber: That's interesting. A lot of other universities, you can get away, get your degree without ever having taken any philosophy classes sometimes.

Corvino: It's scandalous but it's true.

Weber: Within the courses you were taking that were philosophical, you said you might go into English. What was it in particular about the philosophy courses which were attractive to you over perhaps going into literature, or some other field. What was it about philosophy?

Corvino: I think a lot of it was the precision, a lot of it was the emphasis on ethics. I became very interested in ethics and working in ethics. Frankly, at the time, philosophy of religion, and really I think I just got the bug in my head, regarding these big questions that I wanted to chew on some more. Philosophy gave me an opportunity to chew on these questions alongside other people who were doing the same thing.

Cashio: We ask this of all of our guests, and it's one of my favorite questions. Since you have been doing philosophy for so long, we ask this: What do you think philosophy is? What is philosophy, for our listeners?

Corvino: That's funny. That's funny that you should ask that as I am thinking about my undergraduate training, because I do remember one professor who spent several days on the first week of class defining philosophy, and every time he would start the definition, it would

start with 'a body of knowledge that...' Even then, I thought, "that's not how I see philosophy, not as a body of knowledge, so much as it is an approach." An approach of critical scrutiny towards our fundamental beliefs and convictions, and not just our fundamental beliefs and convictions, but various things about the world where we can apply a philosophical approach that allows us to make careful distinctions, to see the underlying fundamental principles and so on. When I think about what philosophy is, I always like to emphasize the process rather than the body of knowledge.

Weber: So John, another question that we like to ask as a follow-up to what you take philosophy to be has to do with what texts you think can be terrific for people who may want to encounter philosophy for their first time, and want to get beyond say, listening to our podcast. They want to read something, what do you recommend as a terrific first text or texts to begin with?

Corvino: It's interesting. Yes, I think people should listen to your podcast. People should go to my YouTube videos. I think that's an excellent way to get into philosophy. I'm going to soon be doing a series of YouTube videos on philosophy, thanks to a small grant from the APA. Partly because I don't see philosophy as a body of knowledge so much as an approach, I think all different kinds of things can be texts for a exploration of philosophy, if you have the right philosophy teacher alongside you doing it with you, or the right sort of person who is interested in philosophy.

I often like to say that my favorite philosophical story comes not from a philosophy textbook or some classic work in philosophy, but from a cookbook. It's from Craig Claiborne's the *New New York Times Cookbook*, where he tells the story of a woman who receives a ham and is disappointed because she doesn't have a saw, and she knows that when her mother would cook a ham, she would always start by sawing a few inches off the end. She receives this ham as a gift, she doesn't have a saw, so she calls up her mother and says "Hey, I got this ham, I don't have a saw. You always used to start by sawing off a few inches, why did you do that?" The mother said, "I learned to cook from my mother, and that's how she always did it. I just thought that was the way you do things." The two of them got on and called the grandmother and said, "Hey, daughter got this ham, doesn't have a saw. Why did you always saw two inches off the ham?" Grandmother paused for a moment and said, "Because I never had a roasted pan large enough to hold a whole ham."

I love this story because it points out the fact that a lot of the things we do and also a lot of the things we believe, we do and believe these things because our parents did them and our grandparents did them and so on. We don't take the opportunity to step back and reflect, why? Are there good reasons for this? I think of philosophy as that process of stepping back and exploring good reasons. That's a story from a cookbook. It's not from a philosophy book.

Cashio: That was the *New New York Times Cookbook*, you say?

Corvino: The *New New York Times Cookbook*, by Craig Claiborne, which is now a fairly old cookbook. The New York Times has had several newer, revised, New, New New New... I don't know what they call it anymore.

Cashio: This is the old New York times Cookbook.

Corvino: Exactly. It's a Craig Claiborne story.

Weber: I want to make a plug for something that has been mentioned twice, very briefly. If you haven't had a look, go to Youtube.com and do a search on John Corvino, and you are going to find a wealth of these absolutely hysterical, as well as substantive videos about a variety of different philosophical issues that matter to the public.

Cashio: They are really great. I use them every time I teach on sexuality and morality and marriage.

Corvino: Oh. Thank you.

Cashio: The students are big fans.

Weber: I think it's fair to say that there are a lot of different ways to have texts, to draw in a variety of kinds of sources. Nevertheless, has there been a particular Platonic dialogue, or something that you loved most? Or a particular short text that was really accessible?

Corvino: I always loved the *Euthyphro*. I loved *the Euthyphro* in part because it combined both my interest in philosophy of religion and my interest in ethics in one short, engaging story of a dialogue. And, frankly, it has all kinds of interesting points about how we use language and how we define terms, and so on. If I had to give an answer from the history of philosophy, I'm going to say the *Euthyphro*. Even though my dissertation was on Hume, I will say the *Euthyphro*.

Weber: For our listeners, Euthyphro is a guy's name. It's a weird word but it's a guy's name, he was very famous for being wise about the subject of piety, which relates to our show for today very nicely, because we are going to talk, among other things, religious liberty and discrimination. Piety is doing right by the Gods, perhaps, or is it something else? Whatever definition. Thanks everybody for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This has been our first segment here with Dr. John Corvino. I am Dr. Eric Weber, and my co-host is Dr. Anthony Cashio. We will be right back after a short break.

Weber: hey everybody. This is Dr. Eric Weber here, live in the studio at WRFL. You are listening to a pre-recorded episode of *Philosophy Bakes Bread* that I am about to start up again in just a moment. I wanted to let you know something pretty cool and exciting. We are very happy about and grateful for all of the likes we have got on Facebook from great listeners and everything, and we really appreciate that. We have also seen quite a few downloads of our podcast, and I want to mention that for a moment because we have just exceeded a little bit over 9,500 downloads since we started putting out episodes in late January. We are pretty excited because 10,000 is kind of an important moment, and we really are excited to see how listenership is growing substantially each month, month by month over time. We want to encourage people to go check out *Philosophybakesbread.com*, listen to the show, share the link with your friends, post about it on Facebook, share an episode on Twitter and so forth. Let people know to subscribe, and if you're interested, go throw a review at us on iTunes or wherever you download your podcast. We really appreciate that. It makes a difference in making sure people listen to us.

When we hit 10,000 downloads, which is going to be pretty soon, in the next couple days, probably, we are going to do some sort of T-shirt giveaway and stuff. Watch for that. We will make an announcement on social media, Facebook and Twitter, for instance, to let you

know how you can get involved and get a T-Shirt. We have a pretty cool logo. Go to philosophybakesbread.com to learn more about the show, to share it with your friends, and to link up with us on social media in any of the ways in which you engage in that, and if you do. Thanks so much for listening, and remember that you can get a hold of us with all of your comments, questions, and bountiful praise. Here is segment 2 of today's episode of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*.

Cashio: Welcome back to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber here, talking with Dr. John Corvino, author of the new book *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination*. We are going to talk, in this segment, about your book, John. Why don't we just toss it to you? Want to tell us a little about your book and what inspired you to write it? We'll go from there.

Corvino: Well, I had written two books. One in 2012 and one in 2013 about the same-sex marriage debate, and about moral arguments against same-sex relationships more generally. After finishing those books, I went through what you might call a sort of academic mid-life crisis. I think a number of people experience this in their 40's, where they have accomplished some of the things they wanted to accomplish, and they have checked off some boxes of things they hoped to do in their careers, and then I'm thinking, "Now what? I'm still fairly young, I don't know what I'm going to write about or think about, and is there anything left for me to do?" Then some topic started coming up in the news about religious liberty, and particularly about people who had objections to same-sex marriage and as a result of those objections didn't want to issue marriage licenses to couples, like the Kim Davis case, who didn't want to sell cakes or flowers to same-sex couples for their weddings, didn't want to take pictures as photographers of same-sex weddings. I thought that these were rich and interesting topics at the intersection of ethics and law and public policy, and decided to do another point-counterpoint book.

What made this book different from debating same-sex marriage, and in many ways made it more challenging, and in some ways more interesting...debating same-sex marriage, there were two clearer sides on the issue. People in favor of legal marriage for same sex couples or against legal marriage for same-sex couples, and there were a lot of different things you can say about that, but it lined up very neatly. In this book it wasn't as if one side is in favor of religious liberty and the other side is against it. We are all in favor of religious liberty. Or, one side is in favor of discrimination and the other side is against discrimination...We are all against discrimination, at least in the unjust sense of discrimination. There are a lot of overlapping questions around issues of conscience and liberty and the role of government and the place of anti-discrimination law and so on.

I approached Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson, who were co-authors with Robert George, who is a well-known professor at Princeton of the book *What is Marriage* and I have known them through the marriage debate over many years. They co-authored the counterpoint. It's two sides. I did one side, the two of them together do the other side, and it covers some of these issues in some of these cases. The other way in which this new book is different is that when I did the book debating same-sex marriage, I had literally been debating same-sex marriage for many years, and had clear, worked-out views, things I wanted to say about the topic. Here, in some ways I was thinking out loud and thinking through some things. The book was an opportunity to look at those questions more carefully.

Weber: Very nice. You mentioned recent conflicts, and recent conflicts that our listeners are familiar with. You mentioned bakers. Bakers have refused to bake wedding cakes celebrating

same-sex marriage in bakers, who often cite religious reasons for their refusal. The conflicts often strike a chord in a sense for a lot of different people in different ways because they hit American values in terms of freedom of religion, freedom from discrimination, and they capture both of those norms, as you are nicely now saying. One such case is about to head to the supreme court in fact, as we record this now. Fundamentally, the question is: How do you think we should navigate these kinds of conflicts?

Corvino: It's an excellent question. One way that one might think about these things is to think about values like liberty and equality, and think about trying to balance them in cases like these. I actually don't think that is the best way to frame this. I think there are liberty issues on various sides of the issue: the liberty of people to operate their business as they see fit, the liberty to go into a place of business and be able to purchase the things you want to purchase. There are equality issues on different sides of the issue.

I have come to think about it as a moral design problem. This is a useful metaphor for someone like me living in Detroit, where we design cars and things like that. I say to people, "You're designing a car, you want certain things. You want speed, you want efficiency, you want trunk space. You realize if you want more trunk space, more trunk space means a larger car, a heavier car. You're going to have less efficiency and speed. You want speed and efficiency, that means you might lose a little trunk space. You're trying to fit together all of these things which aren't commensurable values that you can simply weigh against each other, assign points on one side, assign points on the other side and generate a tidy conclusion. You have to engage in this dialogue between different goals, different aims that you have, and see how many of those can be achieved and how they can be achieved, and how well they can be achieved. That's at least a starting point for me, thinking about the kinds of values we have as a society, or the kinds of values that we protect in law and in our Constitution, and how we apply them to these particular cases.

Weber: If I can follow up, John, there is an interesting point about design of cars that may be relevant here. When it comes to automobiles, someone wants a big car, and someone else wants a small car, and you can both have what you want when it comes to that, often. Some people will point to that when they say they don't want the federal government to make a ruling that will apply to everybody, because someone here may want X, and someone here may want Y in different states. What do you think about state versus federal distinctions as a way of trying to let different people trying to have the car that they want.

Corvino: I'm not sure how well the analogy lines up with the case at hand, because I am not trying to force people to have a small cake or a cake with rainbows on it, or no rainbows on it. What I am worried about, and I think this is one place where philosophers can be useful, in drawing distinctions. People say look, a Kosher bakery doesn't want to sell cakes made with lard. A vegan bakery doesn't want to sell cakes with real buttercream. Masterpiece Cake Shop, the bakery in the Supreme Court case, doesn't want to sell gay wedding cakes. One of the things I say as a philosopher, "A gay wedding cake is not a thing."

Cashio: That cake looks a little gay... I don't know. (laughter)

Corvino: The metaphysics of cakes right now. The gay wedding cake—this is not a category of cakes. When you go to order a wedding cake, they give you a catalog. It's not the gay wedding cake catalog. It's a cake catalog and you pick the size, you pick the shape, the design of the frosting, you pick the fillings and so on. What they are being told, with same-sex couples are

being told in cases like this, is “I’ll sell all of this to this person over here, who is having a heterosexual wedding, but I won’t sell the exact same item to you.” It would be different if they said, “I’m not going to put two men or two women on the cake,” or, “I’m not going to write a certain thing on the cake.” They are saying they won’t sell the very same designs to some people that they sell to other people. For me, that would be like saying, “OK, I’ll sell big cars, but not to you, because you are a red-head, or not to you because you are of a particular religion...” or whatever it might be.

Weber: That is a nice set of distinctions for thinking about how the state versus federal may not be so helpful sometimes in this kind of question, or at least the notion of emphasizing state level control over these kinds of things. The person who wants the big car may live in any state. Good points.

Corvino: We have cars here in Detroit. If you want a big car, a small car, come to Detroit. We have cars.

Cashio: Detroit has cars. I have heard of such things. John, and this is a kind of follow-up to this distinction you just made. You recently wrote an article for Slate where you argue the other side of this, that print shops shouldn’t be forced to make LGBTQ pride T-shirts. Can you follow up with that argument? It seems to be the exact opposite of the position you were just presenting with the cake.

Corvino: Actually, it is quite consistent with the position I presented with the cake. One of the things I try to do in the Slate piece is to show why the right way to think about the print shop case, based on what I just said about the cake case, says that the print shop doesn’t have to make the gay pride T-shirt. This was a case in Lexington, Kentucky.

Weber: right here in town.

Corvino: As you may know, Kentucky doesn’t generally have a book of accommodation protections for LGBT people, but Lexington does. A person called up a print shop and said, “Hey, we are with a local pride organization. We want to order T-shirts for our local pride event.” The print shop said, “I’m sorry, we reserve the right to not do designs that we don’t believe in, and this is against our beliefs, and we will not do this design.” It’s interesting. This is something that the print shop had invoked before on unrelated cases.

So for example, I love this. This is what happens when you read the footnotes in court cases. You find funny things. They had refused to do a T shirt that involved Jesus selling fried chicken. (laughter). I don’t know if someone else did the T-shirt. They said, “We refuse to do this T-shirt.” My view is that this is not a case of saying, “Hey, we sell this thing but we are not going to sell it to you. This is a case of them saying, “Here is a particular design. We are not going to sell this particular design to anybody.” The freedom that allows them to do that is the same freedom that allows me to say, “You know what, I’m not going to make a KKK T-shirt, or I’m not going to make a white pride T-shirt, or I’m not going to make an anti-Semitic T-shirt, or a Leviticus 18:22 ‘man shall not lie with man’ T-shirt. I don’t have to do that because that is not a T-shirt I am not going to sell to anybody. It’s the distinction between what we are selling and to whom we are selling it.

Cashio: Excellent. I think that’s a very important distinction. Lets you navigate that on moral and legal ground.

Weber: It's a nice subtle point that at the same time can worry about the fact that we want to make sure people have access to the services and products that they want and need, and yet beware about compelling people who aren't discriminating against particular people necessarily, but focusing on the products that they won't sell to anyone. That's a very interesting distinction. One question for you, did you get backlash for that position?

Corvino: I did get backlash. When you are introducing this topic, here is a case where you argued for the other side. We tend to think of things in such a polarized way. There is the religious liberties side, and the gay rights side, and we are on different sides, whereas when we think about this as philosophers, we realize that the way these things line up are more complicated. I did get some backlash about that. People think I am a traitor to the cause, partly because they think that any time people who are members of the religious right take a position on these things, we don't want to give them any ground at all, because the moment you say, "OK, you don't have to make these T-shirts" or so on, they are going to go that much further. My thought is that it is better for us to think clearly and carefully about these things, and I think we have an opportunity and responsibility as philosophers to help people do that.

Weber: Hallelujah. Amen. Wouldn't it be nice if more people had set down their signs and bumper stickers and picked up a conversation with somebody instead, and tried to hear out the details of their points of view. I really appreciate that. Here is a next point to raise for you. We have only got a couple minutes here. Issues like bakeries and flower shops and so on, are informative and important, but in a sense, how often do I go buy a wedding cake? Not very. A cake seems like a luxury item, and not as essential as basic liberties like having a place to live and work and speak, and those kinds of things. One of the questions is...

Cashio: Or adopt a child.

Weber: Do we miss something important when we focus on things like cakes? Do we miss something about the systematic forms of discrimination, or more fundamental issues when we focus on these cases? Or do these cases instruct, nevertheless?

Corvino: I do think the focus on wedding services does misleadingly suggest that the worst problem we have as LGBT people is that we can't buy cakes and flowers. That's not the problem. Employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and more generally, discrimination of a powerful or subtle sort where people feel the pressure to remain in the closet, which can be demoralizing and debilitating. When I'm ordering a wedding cake and they ask me the name of the bride and the groom, and I say, "Actually, there's not going to be any bride", that outs me. In other cases, I have to ask myself, "Do I want to mention my husband? Do I want to mention that I'm gay?" I know a lot of people who are in employment situations where there are policies in place that protect them yet nevertheless they feel the need to be closeted, because they worry about the culture of the company they are working. It's a challenge.

Weber: There are some deep challenges that we are going to talk some more about after we come back from another short break with *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is me Dr. Eric Weber and my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio, talking with Dr. John Corvino. Thanks everybody for listening. We will be right back.

Cashio: Welcome back to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber, and we are having a wonderful time this afternoon talking with John Corvino. As we said earlier, John has been recognized this year for the Community Hero award, which is a nice title for an award. We need a hero.

Corvino: Feels like I should have a superhero costume or something. Or a cape. I want a cape. Where is my cape?

Cashio: He was given the Community Hero award from the board of directors at Affirmations, Metro Detroit's LGBTQ+ community center. The award was presented in recognition of John's 25 years of advocacy since the first time he gave a presentation titled *What's Morally Wrong with Homosexuality?* You must have given that in graduate school, is that correct?

Corvino: It was 25 years ago, so I would have been four years old. I was a very precocious child. I did that in graduate school. It was 1992 and I was a graduate student at the University of Texas. This was back when LGBT student groups did not have a lot of campus support, necessarily, and didn't have big budgets. When it came time for our pride week, we were wondering what we should do. What kind of programming can we do? We ask different people in our group, "What can you do?" someone who was a history graduate student did something on the history of the struggle for equality, and they said to me, "Well John, you work in ethics. Why don't you do something on the moral arguments around homosexuality?" I said OK. I put together this lecture, and it was videotaped, and people getting copies of that videotape at other campuses and would call me up and invite me to come give the lecture there. That sort of launched a speaking career.

Cashio: An early viral video.

Corvino: It was an early viral video on VHS tape. People had to call me up on the phone, because we weren't using email that much in 1992, so they had to track me down that way. I would get in my stage coach and go off and visit...

Weber: I wouldn't have thought a video on VHS tape could go viral.

Cashio: Used to happen all the time. It was always a weird thing. Tell your friend, "Oh I got this tape. You should watch it." They are like, "I don't know if I want to..."

Weber: John, I understand at the ceremony that Anthony was describing that the organizers played a video compilation of talks you had given over the years, starting very early on. It's hard to believe you have been doing this for 25 years, because frankly, you seem young. You were four at the time, as you say. In any event, we have a short set of clips from the video that was played at the event for your ceremony. It's just a set of recordings from talks that John has given over the years. As I say, it's fairly short. We are going to play it right now and ask you about that, as well as your work doing public philosophy. Here is that set of clips.

Corvino (from recording): Consider the fact that right now there are thousands of people across the world having sex. This is a little bit disconcerting when you think about it. Especially when you realize that you are stuck here listening to me ... [Transition to next clip] Hi, I'm John Corvino. Some people object to same-sex relationships on the grounds that they are unnatural. What does that mean, and why does it matter? [Transition to next clip] I think the most important thing we can do as gay and lesbian people, is to let society know that we are here.

That we are here and we are part of it. We are not 'those people'. We are here, and we are their doctors, and their lawyers, and their judges and their politicians and their social workers and their teachers and their nuns and their rabbis and their priests and their ministers. We are here and we are valuable and we are not going to apologize for something that is not wrong. We are not going to hide something that we have no reason to be ashamed of... [Transition to next clip] I'm asking you to judge people, not on whom they love, but on whether they love. That is my moral vision. That is my agenda. I thank you for listening so patiently to it tonight. You have been a great audience. Thank you very much.

[uplifting music]

Weber: John, that's pretty moving. The music doesn't hurt.

Corvino: Twinkly piano music. When they play that video, and that video is available on my YouTube page, of the 25 years. It's about a 4-minute long video with a number of segments in it in addition to those. When they played that video, I genuinely ugly-cried. It was partly because it is such an emotional thing with the tinkly piano music. It was partly looking back at 25 years in the rearview mirror of work as an adult, realizing, OK. That is a chunk of my life. Life goes by pretty fast. A lot of it was about thinking about how far we have come. At the very beginning of that, and towards the end of that, were from the 1992 lecture, the part where I talk, "We're here. We're doctors and lawyers and so on." You can still tell, I have a little bit of a New York accent in parts of that. In an earlier clip from 1992 I actually say, 'watah', as opposed to water. It is realizing how far we have come and realizing some of these arguments are still powerful and have influence in peoples' lives and are still out there hurting people and need to be addressed.

Weber: You were a New Yorker in Texas talking about homosexuality in 1992. Then you were recognized in Detroit 25 years later. Tell us about this award, and how did people know about 25 years for you? Tell us about the community you have been engaged with and how this relationship developed and what such an organization, such recognition has meant for you.

Corvino: It was certainly very gratifying to hear people express their gratitude for the work, which has not always been easy. I have had a lot of support over the years. I have had a lot of people I have leaned on, including other philosophers. I want to give a shout out to Richard Mohr, who wrote the book *Guys / Justice* and wrote various other books on gay rights and equality way back, starting in the late 1980's. When I was in grad school, and frankly when I was at a point in grad school when I thought about getting out of philosophy, because I just didn't know if what I was doing was really relevant. There were so many real-world issues, and I started my work at Notre Dame, and went there to do philosophy of religion, and then decided I wasn't as interested in those questions anymore. It was Richard who said to me, "Maybe you just need to be working on different things and at a different place," and really encouraged me to do the work in public philosophy and to do work on equality for LGBT people.

Richard and various other people, and people in the local community. That award was given by Affirmations, which is an LGBTQ community center here in metro Detroit which has a variety of social services and support services. I know some of the people who are involved in the organization, and they certainly know some of my work and have followed that. I'm also somewhat known around metro Detroit because when I started to do my column *The Gay Moralist*, I actually started in a publication called *Between the Lines*, which is the Michigan

LGBT paper. That was back in the early 2000's, around 2002 I started writing a regular column for them which was eventually picked up by 365gay.com. That's actually a funny story, how that started, because I was in a coffee shop one day, and I recognized a fellow who was in there because his picture was in the paper in *In Between the Lines*. I said, "Hey, you write a column for *Between the Lines*." He said yes, and he started talking to me. His name is Charles Alexander, and he said, "You are a philosophy professor. You should write for the paper." I said, "I'm a philosophy professor. What do I know about writing for newspapers?" Then a couple months later, we would run into each other, we would chat at the coffee shop, but a couple months later the sex abuse in the priesthood scandal hit very publicly across the country and newspapers across the country were writing about this and Charles knew that I had been interested in becoming a priest, he knew I was interested in ethics. He said, "You would be a good person to write about this and talk about this from an ethics standpoint and a public policy standpoint," and so on.

My first column was called "Pedophilia and the Priesthood: Are Gays the Problem?" You could tell that I was used to academic writing more than column writing. I had long paragraphs. You could tell I was itching to put in footnotes, but you can't really do that in a column. That was supposed to be a one-off thing. Then a couple months later, a case was in the news about a lesbian couple who chose a deaf sperm donor because the specifically wanted to have a deaf child. They were a deaf lesbian couple. There were several people, including people in the gay press who were like, "this is terrible. This is child abuse." I said that we need a philosopher here, I'll write about this case. This is an interesting case. Before I knew it, I was writing a bi-weekly column that became a weekly column, and was a hero in the local LGBT paper and more national venues.

Cashio: So you have been doing public philosophy for 25 years now.

Corvino: I have been doing public philosophy since before we were calling it public philosophy, I guess.

Cashio: We gotta give everything a name. That's how it works now.

Corvino: I think back then we used to just call it applied philosophy. Even that wasn't quite the same thing as public philosophy. You can do "applied philosophy", which is a term I really don't like, you can do that at a high scholarly level that is relatively inaccessible to the general public. Public philosophy is a different sort of thing.

Cashio: Your work for the past 25 years, award ceremonies aside...let me ask you in the form of a negative question. Do you have any regrets about taking this path?

Corvino: I do not have any regrets. I am very grateful to be able to both do the work I love as a philosopher and do the work that is important to me as a gay man and as someone who cares about fellow members of the LGBTQ communities. To integrate those things and make a living doing that, I have been really fortunate. I would do it all over again. There might be minor things that I would do differently, different opportunities I might have taken or not taken, but overall, I have been very glad to take the path that I have taken.

Weber: That's wonderful. Let me push on a sensitive topic for a moment, which is that I understand in our initial conversations about this episode that you have received death threats for the work that you have done, or threats of various kinds, at least.

Corvino: Back when I started, when I was a graduate student at Notre Dame, again this is before we were using email and things, I got involved in the gay group on campus, which was a very unofficial gay group, because at Notre Dame we're not allowed to have a gay group in 1990 when I was there. It took many years for them and I'm still not entirely clear what's there now. We used to have a contact number in the advertisements we put in the local paper, and I was the contact number. I would sometimes come home to some nasty messages on my answering machine. I would play the tape and it would be pretty nasty.

Weber: Back before it was called voicemail.

Corvino: We had little tapes in them, and would tape...

Weber: Sounds like the stone age.

Corvino: In many ways, including some of the attitudes expressed in these messages. Being a fairly recognizable, at least locally, public figure, yes it does sometimes mean that people come up to me and say, "Oh I saw a lecture of yours, or read a book of yours or I saw something you did on YouTube and it really meant a lot to me". It also means that people who are not as nice or people who are not as stable can have some access to me and know who I am. There have been some points in my career where that has been a little bit scary, but for the most part I have been fortunate.

Weber: That's good to hear, because our friend who has been on this show a couple times, Tommy Curry, has gotten gobs of death threats, not just awful things said to him. There can be a high toll, price to pay for putting oneself out there in the public.

Corvino: I have to be very cautious and careful because nowadays with the internet, it's quite possible for people to find not just me—I'm easy to find. I work at a state university, my office number and email are readily available online, but to pretty quickly figure out who my husband is, and who my sister is, and who my nieces and nephew are. People can do these various searches without too much challenge. I have to worry about the other people in my life too. Some of them have no interest in public figures or being exposed to that kind of scrutiny on the internet or elsewhere.

Weber: I think it's really important for people to think about these sorts of sobering aspects of public engagement, because if we only attend to the lovely award ceremonies, some people will be in for a shock. I think people need to be aware. At the same time, Socrates gave his life for what is right and what is meaningful. Sometimes we make these big sacrifices, but he thought it was important to make sure that we knew there would be kinds of threats and dangers to doing so. Everybody, you have been listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread* with Dr. John Corvino as our great guest today. I'm Dr. Eric Weber, speaking with my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio. Thank everybody for listening. We'll be right back.

Cashio: Welcome back everyone. It is your privilege today to be listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. We have been talking with Dr. John Corvino, and in this last segment we are going to have some big-picture questions, and some light-hearted thoughts, and we'll end with a pressing philosophical question for you, our listeners, as well as information about how to get a hold of us with your comments and questions. I think we can take criticism. Are we up for that? Can we handle that?

Weber: As always.

Corvino: We are philosophers, right? It's the coin of the realm.

Weber: We prefer the bountiful praise, though.

Cashio: John! You have been doing this for 25 years. In that time, and you have noted this already, we have seen a lot of progress in LGBTQ rights in that time. Do you feel hopeful about the future, about where we are going with LGBTQ rights and about public philosophy and so on? Is it two separate realms? It could be nice to end on a more hopeful point.

Corvino: You better hope my answer is not 'no'. (laughter)

Cashio: I know with current political situations has gotten me down...

Corvino: This is what I'm going to say. I am not entirely hopeful at the moment. It is not just because of the current political situation and the presidential administration that I think does bad and sometimes really embarrassing things. I'm not talking about LGBTQ issues here, I'm just speaking more generally. The main thing that makes me not as hopeful as I might otherwise be is the level of polarization that we are currently seeing, and the lack of thoughtful engagement and the way it becomes harder and harder to bridge those divides can be really dispiriting.

I just finished another debate book, a point/counterpoint book. I really believe in the value of reaching across the value. I really believe in the value of bringing different perspectives to the table. But that has become harder in the years I have been working on these things, not easier. While yes, I am very grateful for the progress we have made for LGBTQ rights, and I'm grateful for the fact that we have marriage equality and I am grateful for the visibility and the additional comfort in this country. I am also very much aware that some of those gains are fragile and tenuous and that there are real challenges to continuing to make progress on these and other issues because of the polarization.

Cashio: Instead of lifting me up you have just bummed me out.

Weber: We are really going to need the jokes in this episode.

Corvino: Maybe you should play the tinkly music again to lift us up. I don't want to make this sound more gloom and doom than it should. I am generally an optimistic person. I am very happy with where a number of things are right now and where we have come. Certainly from the time that I started doing this work to now, some of the changes are incredible and deeply gratifying. But I don't think we should become complacent because of that, given these other challenges.

Weber: We have noted over the course of this conversation a number of different points, but we have been pretty brief about them, that are remaining challenges or deep challenges still for the LGBTQ communities, of the communities around the country. My question, and we can end here, if you would—help us focus on what are some of the remaining challenges, beyond issues of polarization, which are problems for any issue you want to change. What in particular do you think are perhaps the most difficult and pressing of the great challenges right now for LGBTQ communities?

Corvino: The main thing I want to draw peoples' attention to is the fact that it is one thing for the state to let you marry, and it is another thing for your family to show up at your wedding and

be happy for you. Both of those things are important, and even though people all across the country have access to legal marriage, there are a lot of people who live in the closet. There are teenagers who are kicked out of the house for being gay/lesbian/bisexual or transgender. There are trans people in various states who can't find a safe and comfortable place to go to the bathroom, because of the ways in which some of the anxiety around sex and gender has now been moved from same-sex couples to transgender people. I want to point out that the legal changes are extremely important, and culture is also extremely important. Culture is quite variable as we travel across the country and even more so as we travel across the world.

Weber: Very interesting. For our listeners, this is one of the nice distinctions that helps us illustrate what we refer to as political philosophy, and we use another term with it, which is social philosophy. Social and political philosophy are often associated, but there are important distinctions at work like that one. You can't get the judge to get your daddy to treat you with love.

Cashio: That's the harder one to do. One final question, that comes from the inspiration for our show and that we ask everyone who comes on the show. Would you, John, say that philosophy bakes no bread, as the famous saying goes, that it's not practical, or that it does? You have been doing this for 25 years. Does philosophy bake bread?

Corvino: I think philosophy certainly bakes bread. We can see that in the issues that we have been discussing, the issues I talk about in the book where it allows us to make careful distinctions. It allows us to figure out how to live together. Really, in some sense, that is ultimately a very practical goal. I want to make it very clear as somebody who appreciates a range of philosophy, and someone who works out of the department that has been historically a very traditional metaphysics and epistemology department at Wayne State University is where Edmund Gettier wrote his *Justified True Belief* paper back in the 1960's. That's a big one.

I don't think that philosophy has to be useful in order to be worthwhile. I want to make sure that we always carve out a big space for people to explore the more abstruse questions that don't necessarily have an immediate practical payoff—these kinds of things that interest us and excite us and get into our heads and bug us as human beings who are trying to figure out the world and figure out the fundamentals of the world. I think all of that is important, but certainly in my own work and my own life, I have seen a very practical end of philosophy.

Cashio: Philosophy does bakes bread but it doesn't have to. I like it.

Weber: that's a nice succinct statement. John, as you may know, and you know by now, I think—we like to make sure that everybody that listens to this show sees not only the serious side of philosophy and philosophers, but also the lighter side. We are ready now to jump into a moment of levity in a segment we call "Philosophunnies."

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(laughter)

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(child's laughter)

Corvino: That was not me speaking, by the way. In want to make that clear.

(laughter)

Weber: We want to ask you if you have got a funny joke, or a funny story to tell, either about doing the work that we have been talking about, or about philosophy. Have you got a funny joke for us, or a story, John?

Corvino: I will tell a funny story about being a public philosopher. Before I do that, I want to point out that as you may know, all of my short YouTube videos, in the middle of the end credits have a little gag in them. In a recent one, in one of them, I dressed as a baker wearing nothing but an apron. You will have to watch the video to get the setup for it. In another one I am in a wedding dress. I do believe in the value of humor. That started with the videos I did for the marriage debate book, where I had this idea about doing one for the definition of marriage video that involved guacamole and lawyers. Same word for lawyer and avocado, yet nobody tries to make guacamole and lawyers, not even in France. I used this joke, and I thought about doing this little gag at the end, and then my video guy said, "If we're going to do that for this, we have to do it for all your videos." We started doing that for the videos.

One of the things about being a public philosopher is that a wide range of people recognize me both inside and outside of philosophy, including at the American Philosophical Association, meeting people would sometimes come up and say it says John Corvino and say "Oh I have read a piece of yours," or "I have taught a piece of yours, in an anthology in my class" or something like that. One of the scholarly pieces that I am best known for was a 2005 paper in the journal *Ethics* called "Homosexuality and the PIB Argument." PIB stands for polygamy, incest and bestiality, the alleged slippery slope from same-sex relationships to relationships with multiple partners, or with relatives or with animals. I was once at an APA meeting and I saw somebody at a reception who was staring at my nametag, and finally walks up to me and looks at me and says, "You're John Corvino! You are the bestiality guy!" (laughter)

Cashio: Just how you want to be known...

Corvino: Which is not how I want to be remembered! I really wanted to re-think... There you go. I'm going to put that on my door.

Cashio: Put that on your business card.

Corvino: "John Corvino, the bestiality guy."

Weber: That's a great example. One of the dangers of doing public philosophy. You may be called the bestiality guy.

Corvino: I have a colleague who works on the problem of evil, and he had somebody walk up to him once and say, "You're the evil guy!" (laughter).

Weber: Nice variant.

Corvino: Be careful of what you work on. It's much better to be the Hume guy or the Plato guy than the evil guy or the bestiality guy.

Weber: The justice guy.

Corvino: Be the justice guy. I bet you the justice guy gets a cape too. We need to make some capes here. I want a community hero cape, and a justice cape. No bestiality cape. (laughter)

Weber: Each episode Anthony and I gather one or two, occasionally more. We have two this time, a couple little jokes ourselves. They are on a theme, because we have been talking about bakers. I'll tell the first one. This is very silly. Anthony's is better. Question: What did the cake say to the fork?

Cashio: I don't know. What did the cake say to the fork, Eric?

Weber: Want a piece of me? (laughter)

Corvino: I like that one.

Weber: This next one I think is even better. Raise the stakes, Anthony.

Cashio: What do you see when the Pillsbury dough boy bends over? Doughnuts!

(laughter)

Corvino: When I heard the one about 'You want a piece of me', I thought "I could tell that to my 6-year old niece." Not the second one.

[laughter, rimshot]

Cashio: Last but not least, we do want to take advantage of the fact that we have powerful social media that allow for 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.

Weber: Given that, John, we would love to hear your thoughts, if you have any for us, about what question we should pose to our listeners for a segment we call "You Tell Me!" Have you got a question to propose for our listeners?

Corvino: In fact, I do. Related to the topic of my recent book, *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination*, and that Slate piece we referred to earlier, I am curious how your listeners would approach or resolve the three cases I talked about in that piece.

There is a case of Masterpiece Cake Shop, where the baker refused to make a cake for a same-sex wedding. Then there was a case a year or so later where a person went into a cake shop, said, "I want you to make a bible-shaped cake that says 'Leviticus 18:22' and says 'homosexuality is a detestable sin.'" The baker said "I'll make the bible-shaped cake, but I'm not going to write the words on it." The customer charged that baker with religious discrimination, and the local civil rights commission threw that out and said, "No they are not guilty of religious discrimination, even though the other cake shop was judged guilty of sexual orientation discrimination. Then of course there is the third case about the T-shirt, where T-shirt printing shop refuses to make a gay pride T-shirt.

My question is, how they would resolve those three cases, and how they would make their answers consistent between the cases, particularly between the first two cases, which seem similar on the surface, but may not be exactly the same.

Cashio: Alright guys, we have some homework for you. You need to go and think about these three cases, maybe do some research on them, and let us know what you think. How would you resolve them?

Weber: Absolutely. Check out John's book.

Cashio: I want to thank everyone for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread: food for thought about life and leadership*. Your host, Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber are very grateful today to have been joined by Dr. John Corvino. Thank you John. It has really been a wonderful pleasure and a real privilege for me.

Corvino: It has been a lot of fun. Thanks so much for having me.

Cashio: I'm assuming it's a privilege for you, Eric. He's smiling a lot.

Weber: It is.

Cashio: We want to encourage our listeners to consider sending us your thoughts about anything you've heard today that you would like to hear about in the future, or about specific question we have raised for you.

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 @PhilosophyBakesBread, and check out our SOPHIA's Facebook page while you're there, @PhilosophersInAmerica.

Cashio: 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. If you are enjoying the show and like what you are listening to, and downloaded this podcast off of iTunes or another podcasting site, maybe take a second and hop on there, give us a positive review. It really helps us reach more listeners who would also enjoy listening to the show. We would appreciate if you can do that. We love listening to all your comments. Join us again next time on *Philosophy Bakes Bread: food for thought about life and leadership*.

[Outro music]