

Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode Fifty-Three, with Dr. Arnold Farr

## Kneeling and Civil Protest

*Transcript by Drake Boling, February 12, 2018.*



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### [Intro music]

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### [Theme music]

**Dr. Cashio:** Hello and welcome to *Philosophy Bakes Bread: food for thought about life and leadership*.

**Weber:** *Philosophy Bakes Bread* is a product of the Society of Philosophers in America, AKA SOPHIA. I'm 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](http://philosophybakesbread.com) We hope you'll reach out to us on Twitter @PhilosophyBB, on Facebook @Philosophy Bakes Bread, or by email at [philosophybakesbread@gmail.com](mailto:philosophybakesbread@gmail.com)

**Dr. Cashio:** Last but not least, you can leave us a short, recorded message with a question, or a comment, or the some bountiful praise that Eric thrives on. He loves it. We may be able to play it on the show at 859-257-1849. That's 859-257-1849. On today's show, we are very excited to be joined by Arnold Farr. Thanks for joining us this afternoon Arnold. How are you doing today?

**Farr:** You're welcome. I'm doing very well. Thank you for inviting me.

**Weber:** Our pleasure.

<https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/12/14/057-ep53-kneeling-and-civil-protest/>

**Cashio:** It really is. Today we are going to talk about kneeling and civil protest, for his insight on the recent kneeling protests in the NFL. I don't know the proper title to give the kerfuffle, and what philosophy has to say about the relevant conflicts of such protests.

**Weber:** Kneeling and civil protest.

**Cashio:** I didn't know if the news had a tagline for it. Kneeling-gate or something.

**Weber:** Not to my knowledge. Arnold is a professor of philosophy at the University of Kentucky. He authored *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision: Herbert Marcuse and Recent Liberation Philosophies*. He is currently writing a new book on the new white supremacy. He is focusing on race and African philosophy. In addition to these works, Arnold has written numerous articles and book chapters on subjects like German idealism, Marxism, Critical Theory, and philosophy of race. In addition to his writings, Arnold is the founder of the international Herbert Marcuse society. Very cool. Busy guy.

**Cashio:** Sounds busy. And You're in Kentucky, a local boy for the listeners on the radio. Arnold, we begin our show with an opening segment we like to call "Know Thyself". We invite you for a few minutes to tell us about yourself. We want to see if you know thyself. A little test right off the bat. Tell us about your background, what about your background shaped who you are. How and why? We want to get to know you, Arnold Farr. Tell us about yourself.

**Farr:** Here's a fraction of my story. I am from the south. I was raised in Union, South Carolina. I was raised in a religious family, Christian. We spent a lot of time in the church. It was in the church where I learned to sing with my brothers and sing with the choir and that kind of thing. I still try to sing a bit to this day. I went to college on a wrestling scholarship and my first major was theater. I was walking in the footsteps of Arnold Schwarzenegger. I was a bodybuilder and did other kinds of sports. I was an actor. All kinds of crazy things were going on then. Then I changed course in college. To make a long story short, I ended up majoring in religion, philosophy and psychology. After college I went to seminary for two years, and interestingly, my first semester in seminary, I became an atheist. I'm an agnostic now, but that didn't go over so well in seminary.

**Cashio:** It tends to not.

**Farr:** A lot of sermons from seminary are officials in my family. In terms of what led me to where I am now, a couple things: one is, when I was studying theology in college and seminary, I gravitated towards various interesting German theologians who were steeped in the German idealist tradition. They taught me to see things in a very different way. At the same time, I began reading Erich Fromm, who at one point was a member of the Frankfurt school. I read some Freud and Marx in college and fell in love with that stuff. Something about the kind of theology and kind of philosophy I was reading felt liberating. I literally felt my mind expanding, and I fell in love with that. It's almost like catching a cold. I caught it and still have it to this day.

**Weber:** Philosophy as an illness.

**Farr:** As I studied theology, I became aware and was sensitive to various contradictions in my own religious tradition, which led me to think more seriously about various contradictions in our society at large. I guess it was time to come to terms with various contradictions that I experienced. It put me on the critical path, and led me to where I am now. To this day, my way of putting things is still struggling to resolve certain social contradictions.

**Weber:** Interesting. I want to come back to this notion of contradictions, but the first thing I want to ask you about is this experience that you had when you were in seminary, you were in a place learning to be a leader in the religious realm, and that is when you came to agnostic and atheistic beliefs? What prompted that? Did you have a particular experience? Some insight? What led to that transformation?

**Farr:** It may have been certain insights, but it didn't seem to happen all at once. It seemed to develop over a period of time. Even right before I left college. I'm beginning to think differently, and I am beginning to see that religion as I knew it was somewhat oppressive for me. I couldn't really make sense of a lot I had been taught anymore. An interesting thing though, is that I had to go through this moment of removing myself from it and thinking fresh. The position I have now, I said I am an agnostic now, I take religion seriously, and people who are religious seriously, but at the same time what bothers me is religious conviction can be so easily manipulated.

I have a friend who teaches at DePaul University, he teaches political science, and he says that you can't understand American politics without understanding religion. His research project is looking at the two of those and how they intersect with each other. When Marx said religion is opiate for the masses, my position is that it doesn't have to be, but unfortunately it does become such depending on the kind of society that you are in, and the kind of society that we have. Religion does become something of an opiate because it is used to manipulate people.

**Weber:** That's very interesting. I have long been concerned and worried about the fact that in my study of Mississippi, the interesting thing to me, is that when there are so many divides of rich and poor, white and black and so forth, there is a unifying feature of so many people living in that state, which is that they all say they believe in these things in common. The most important beliefs. Theoretically, that could bring them all together. "We are all children of God," they might even all say. Yet, as MLK would say, the most segregated hour in America is on Sunday morning.

**Farr:** It should be something that unifies, but...

**Weber:** But it can be just as easily a tool of division, as you are pointing out.

**Farr:** Absolutely.

**Cashio:** I grew up in Alabama, and I always said, "You want to understand Alabama, you have to understand that politics is done from the pulpit." The preacher's pulpit.

**Weber:** You mentioned a little bit about how you got into philosophy. Marx and Freud, those are atheist thinkers. Were they some of the thinkers who pulled you over, so to speak? Or did they come later in your transformation?

**Farr:** They may be responsible for pulling me over to some extent. I read both of them when I started in college prior to going to seminary. In seminary I continued to read them. We can lay some blame on them.

**Cashio:** I want to know what led you to leave your Schwarzenegger aspirations behind. Was it a class you took, where you were like, "This is far more interesting?"

**Weber:** You are both named Arnold.

**Farr:** Probably two or three things. Some of it is because of a class I took. My first philosophy class, which blew me away. This is where I literally felt my mind expanding. I was really impressed and wanted to pursue that. Two other things. One is that bodybuilders have to follow a strict diet. I have trouble with that. (laughter).

**Weber:** You are not alone there.

**Farr:** I love good food. I competed for a while, but the competition I was in, it was really hard to get well-defined and also along with that, as I was saying for bodybuilding, I was invited to be a professional wrestler once, and I turned that down for two reasons. One is that by that time I had already gotten involved in philosophy and theology, and also because when it comes to stunts in the ring, I didn't trust other people to throw me and catch me properly. I didn't want to break my neck.

**Weber:** We like to ask each guest. What was it about philosophy? You mentioned this liberating experience. Maybe that's what it was. We like to ask. What attracted you to philosophy? What made you love it? Was it this liberating feeling, or was it something else? How did that come about? Was there something in particular that you read that was liberating? What hooked you for philosophy?

**Farr:** I think it was the liberating feeling, but I can say a little more about how that came about. We are all from the deep south, and you get conditioned to think within certain boxes. The first class that I took, the textbook was an anthology with readings from the entire history of western philosophy from Greek to medieval period, through modern and contemporary. We had a wide range of stuff. I remember specifically, we read some stuff from William James, I don't remember exactly what from James now, but I do remember William James stood out, among the others. Reading through that text and learning that I could think outside of the box that I was conditioned to live in, that there were many other ways of thinking and approaching life, intellectually meant a lot to me and inspired me. I found that I couldn't go back to my mental framework prior to having taken that class.

**Cashio:** It's hard to do. It's hard to go back, right? Like you said, it's a sickness and you can't get cured.

**Farr:** Almost like coming out of Plato's cave. Once you come out of the cave, you don't really want to go back.

**Cashio:** You left your acting aspirations behind, you came out of the cave. I like that a lot. You got the philosophy bug. When someone asks you, "What is it you do? You're doing philosophy? What is it?" What is philosophy? What do you tell them? What we're asking is, what is philosophy to you?

**Farr:** That's a hard question to answer, but I have to answer it a lot. One of the definitions of philosophy that I really like is Merleau-Ponty, who said philosophy is a form of interrogation. I try to explain to people that on a day-to-day basis, we take various things for granted. Things appear to us to be true because they are familiar to us. Certain ideas, or beliefs, or belief systems appear to be true because they are familiar. With philosophy, it teaches you to read between the lines, it teaches you how to interrogate and it teaches you how to dig beneath the surface, beneath that which is immediate, and discover what's really going on. I try to give people examples in terms of using philosophy on a daily basis, in everyday life. We get snowed a lot by political figures and people in the media because we haven't cultivated that capacity to read

between the lines or to interrogate and figure out what's really going on, how the language is working to maintain a particular idea or system or practice. I won't say that they get it when I put it that way, but maybe half a light goes on.

**Cashio:** A dim bulb.

**Farr:** Yeah, flickering.

**Weber:** This is nice. I like the extent to which you are emphasizing the fact that philosophy is something connected with our everyday lives, which is one of the premises or one of the companion value belief that inspires the show *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. I'm delighted to hear that. Everybody, thank you so much for listening to this first segment of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Eric Weber. My co-host is Anthony Cashio. We have been delighted to be talking with Dr. Arnold Farr of the University of Kentucky. We'll come back after a short break.

**Cashio:** Welcome back to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber here talking today with Arnold Farr on kneeling and civil protest. In this segment, first let's talk about recent NFL protests, and what they are protesting in America. We're going to talk about that in this segment, and then in the next segment we'll ask you about philosophy and what you think it could teach us about the protests and relevant concerns. Arnold, you gave us this beautiful definition drawing from Merleau-Ponty about philosophy as interrogation. We're going to put that to the test. We're going to do some philosophy about American events. It'll be fun. A lot of our listeners are probably familiar with the NFL protests, generally speaking. Maybe you could help us review what has been going on with them. What are the specifics about what happened, and the story of what was going on? We can use that as a springboard into the conversation.

**Farr:** The movement started, the kneeling during the national anthem, more than a year ago, maybe almost 15 months ago now, when Colin Kaepernick first sat on the bench during the national anthem, and was pulled aside by a former military person. Interestingly enough, the military person, I forgot his name, understood the nature of the protest and said it would be more respectful to kneel as opposed to sitting on the bench. Kaepernick took his advice and began to kneel, then a few others joined him. Now we see that he doesn't have a job. No team in the NFL will hire him, and other NFL players have joined the protest.

One of the things that is most problematic is that at this moment, it seems the most people have forgotten what the initial protest is about, and they made it about something else. They have shifted the narrative away from the real issue, to make it about disrespecting the flag or disrespecting the military, or the country. It has nothing to do with that. They are protesting the way in which a particular group of people, let's say black people, are grossly disrespected in the United States. Disrespected in terms of, I could give you a long list, but primarily the protest began as a protest against police brutality. The news has been replete over the years with incidents where on their own, black people were killed or brutalized by policemen, and quite often policemen would get off the hook. There was George Zimmerman and the killing of Trayvon Martin. George Zimmerman wasn't a policeman, he was a citizen who killed an unarmed black youth.

There are cases we have heard about, but there are many incidents that we don't hear about. If you live in the black community, especially in larger cities like Chicago or New York,

Detroit, Philadelphia, where I lived for 12 years, you know that these are only a few cases of many that we ever hear about. This practice has been around ever since blacks have been in this country. It never stopped. If you are my age and you are from the south, you know stories you have heard from your grandparents and parents about a relative who went to the grocery store one day and ended up missing. It's the Emmett Till story all over again. Almost every black family of a particular generation from the south has some kind of Emmett Till story that didn't make the news.

There's an experience of black skin or dark skin being a mark of disrespect. This is when a protest begins. It's kind of hard to expect people who, if they are not liable to be victimized, then they have cousins or relatives or friends that look like them, who are not going to be victimized by policemen, law, or a citizen like Zimmerman, and the perpetrator gets off the hook...if you aren't living under those kinds of conditions, it would be morally irresponsible to not do whatever you can in your power to bring attention to those kinds of conditions. This is precisely what the NFL players are doing. It's not about them.

I have to remind people because I have seen so many people, whether it be on the news or via social media, criticize NFL players and call them spoiled brats because, "What's wrong with them? They are making 11 million dollars a year. They are living a nice...what are they protesting?" It's not about them. It's about others. It's about others. All of those guys, they might be making the millions, but they have got some cousins in the hood somewhere who aren't making those millions, and they are living in the projects somewhere. It's about that cousin over there of mine that hasn't done anything wrong but might be shot down at any moment. Actually, their protest is based on altruism. I went on a long diatribe. I always...

**Weber:** Oh no, that's good. We asked you to paint a picture for us of how you're seeing what's been going on, and people have been attending primarily to the act of protest, and not the motivation of protest. I think that's clear. Next question does a little bit of that. Not to ignore the cause, but you brought it up. Something about kneeling as something recommended by a veteran. The question is, in your eyes, why kneeling? What is it about that? What is connoted by kneeling versus maybe sitting that makes a difference that would convince Kaepernick to do that instead of sitting?

**Farr:** Two things. One is that someone in this whole conversation some time back mentioned the way in which, say you were on the field playing football, and my son plays soccer so I see it all the time when he is out on the soccer field playing a game, someone gets hurt, they all take a knee. It's out of respect for the fallen player. Take a knee until the player is up and able to go to the sidelines or whatever. This is a sign of respect and solidarity for the fallen player. Also I think that one of the arguments a soldier made is that soldiers often, and I can't remember the context exactly when they kneel to show respect for their fallen peers in the military. There is sort of a history of kneeling to represent solidarity and respect for those who are injured or harmed, or who have fallen.

**Weber:** Nice point. Let's not forget that Tim Tebow kneels. He's not doing it to disrespect his religious beliefs, but the opposite. Kneeling is a sign of deference and love.

**Farr:** That's an important move from this part.

**Weber:** I appreciate those additional thoughts about that. That's really helpful.



**Cashio:** Why do you think the protests have angered so many people? It seems like such a small gesture. Just a kneeling, not really calling attention to yourself too much. There's no shouting, there is no waving a flag. It's a small, arguably respectful way of protesting, yet it has caused us vehement anger in certain parts of the country. What has triggered that so much?

**Farr:** That is a very good question. I have a lot to say about that, I'll try to limit myself. A couple of things. The Black Lives Matter movement in this country, that movement grows out of the recognition by black people that the practices in America suggest that black lives do not matter. The attitude in America suggests that black lives do not matter. When blacks can be killed at random and there are no consequences, that is a statement that black lives do not matter. Since we are in a situation where black lives do not matter, for many Americans, it's very easy to ignore blacks when they are trying to highlight or point out or call attention to their suffering.

Also, we have bought into a kind of patriotic narrative in this country that has become almost like a religion of sort. This has been a reification of the flag and the military and things like that. We bought into a kind of narrative that conditions us to not be able to see the suffering of others. There is this blind glorification of the flag and what it means and what it stands for. There is a disconnect between what the flag originally stands for and the social reality in which people live. It's kind of difficult to claim that the flag represents freedom when quite a number of citizens in the US have never been free.

People have a gross misunderstanding of the very concept of freedom and what that means. Really, it's interesting. People say this is a free country as if all of the individuals in the country are free. That's not the case. They have confused freedom in terms of individuals being free and freedom in terms of being your own sovereign nation-state. When the United States won its independence from Britain in 1776, that didn't mean...there were slaves then. Not all people were free. But the United States as a sovereign state was free. A free sovereign state with slaves inside. That narrative, and the misunderstanding of freedom, this narrative that you have to be patriotic at all costs, this willingness to look away from the suffering of fellow citizens, all of that is a part of the rejection of the protests. There may be more, but at least that much.

**Cashio:** I'm worried, and this is my own personal concern, but with the backlash against the protesters and the conversations about patriotism and the flag, that the protesters aren't actually being heard.

**Farr:** I think that's correct. This is what is so problematic. The protest itself is being silenced. In a lot of my work on race I talk about ways in which the black voice is always put under erasure. As soon as a black voice begins to speak, there are mechanisms in place to put it under erasure. What has happened is the protest began as an attempt to draw attention to unnecessary suffering that blacks endure. You get this particular narrative about black suffering. Then it gets covered over, put under erasure or silenced by another narrative—all of this disrespecting the flag or disrespecting the troops.

You switch narratives to avoid paying attention to the one you ought to be paying attention to. To pay attention to that first narrative means to really respond to the protests appropriately. That calls for radical social change. That's what a lot of people aren't willing to participate in. If we had them really engage in a moment of deep, deep self-reflection, people don't want to do that because it is painful. One of these has to happen where you move from the position from oppressor to liberator. There is this necessary moment of radical deconstruction, deconstruction of the self. I was raised to be sexist and homophobic. In order to remedy that

problem, I have got to engage in a process of radical self-deconstruction whereby i, like a snake shedding its skin, I shed or peel away like layers of an onion. I peel away those layers of sexism and homophobia. It's not like there is nothing there. At the same as I'm deconstructing, I'm reconstructing. This transformative moment where you really have to become a new person. Marcuse uses the term 'new sensibility'. He literally claims that for us to have a new emancipatory society, we have to become different people.

For me to be in solidarity with people who suffer, whatever social group, means I can't be the same person that I was prior to entering solidarity with them. That is painful for a lot of people. This unraveling of the self, to put oneself in the place of solidarity with those who suffer. Some people stand to lose something. You stand to lose perhaps friends. You put yourself in a position to be ridiculed by members of your family who still hold onto certain prejudices or whatever. I have said this for years, that to really understand what is going on in our country, and how to properly deal with it, it doesn't require a lot of intelligence. I'm a poor old grandson of sharecroppers from South Carolina. I'm not that smart. I just worked hard, but I'm not that smart.

**Weber:** I disagree with some of that assessment, but I get your point.

**Farr:** (laughter) It requires a courage. The most important ingredient is courage, and that's where I think a lot of people are lacking.

**Weber:** I see a close connection between our first segment and now, which is this notion of coming out of Plato's cave and you need a new sensibility. We have one sensibility inside the cave, where we can see in the darkness, but someone is flashing a light, trying to get us out of there from the brightness, and it's irritating. Plato said they are going to want to kill you for trying to liberate them, right?

**Farr:** Watch your tongue My students [were talking] this morning about that.

**Weber:** People aren't going to be grateful, but they need a new sensibility, and a new sight. Thank you so much everybody to listening to another segment of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. We are talking with Dr. Arnold Farr. This is Eric Weber. My co-host is Anthony Cashio. We are going to come back after a short break to ask about what philosophy can teach us about the kneeling civil protests. We'll be right back.

**Cashio:** Welcome back to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber talking this nice fall afternoon with Arnold Farr. We are talking about the kneeling that is going on in the NFL during the national anthem, and the kerfuffle that has followed from that. In the last segment we were getting more of the details about what was happening, and we had begun the process of radical self-deconstruction, beginning to think about what that might mean. In this segment we are going to do a little more of that, continue with our philosophical investigation, thinking about this. What does philosophy have to say about these protests, Arnold? You have hinted a few things, but you can be more explicit about it.

**Farr:** That's an interesting question, it's a very hard question. A couple of ways to approach it. One is that it depends on what kind of philosophy you are talking about. By and large, philosophy, the way that it has been done in the academy, almost has nothing to say because philosophers tend to extrapolate themselves from social reality and engage in abstract



metaphysical kinds of questions, which there is nothing with that. The problem is when philosophers say that is the only way to do philosophy. In recent decades, there have been attempts to remedy that problem in philosophy by people from oppressed groups. I'm thinking about feminist philosophy, Africana philosophy, philosophy of race, even some native-American philosophy.

What philosophers forget, even though philosophy requires a moment of abstraction, we don't abstract from nowhere. We always abstract from a particular place. The kind of questions that we raise, the kind of questions that we take to be important are often features of that place from which we abstract, that social world in which we live, move and have our being. A couple of things I want to mention, in terms of working my way toward how philosophy can now say something about this issue, is that there has to be—another term by Marcuse—a great refusal. A great refusal by some of us who are philosophers, we have to refuse ourselves to be duped into thinking we have to do philosophy just like it has always been traditionally done, by those who are in a place of comfort.

I'll give you two examples that have been very influential to me. She is not a philosopher, she is a sociologist, but still she is doing theory, is Patricia Hill-Collins, in a book from years ago, *Black Feminist Thought*. The introduction is beautiful. She talks in the introduction about how she is going to violate all of the rules of sociological research. She is writing about black women, and black women like the women she grew up with, her mother, her aunts, and black women in her neighborhood. She wants to do sociology from the perspective of those women and the way in which they are situated in our society. The way sociology is traditionally done would not allow her to raise some of the questions that she wants to raise. Another example is Charles Mills, who is a friend of mine. His book *Blackness Visible* is challenging the traditional ways we do philosophy and opening the door to doing what we call philosophy of race. He talks about the nature of philosophical questioning.

Most philosophers are raising questions from a place of comfort. He talks about how much ink has been spilled over whether or not other minds exist or other people...and he says that to raise a question like that you have to come from a place of privilege. If you are black, you can't raise that kind of question. If you are black, you know that other people exist, because they have got their foot on your throat. The only meaningful question you can raise with someone's foot on your throat is, "Why don't you get your foot off my throat?" Philosophy begins with trying to figure out how to get this foot off your throat. That's going to give birth to a very different kind of philosophy, yet it is philosophical, it is a form of interrogation. "Why is his foot on my throat? How do I get it off? What are the conditions that produce a situation where somebody can put his foot on my throat and think it's okay?"

You often limited with the kind of interrogation. Another example too, is that there have been several volumes published over the years, and Charles talks about one of them, volumes that are supposed to be the discussions about the most important political movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and quite often the Civil Rights movement, a movement involved with blacks are not included. They are just excluded. There is a practice of exclusion in political science, in philosophy. The question is always: Who is being excluded? What's being excluded? Why? That requires some type of philosophical investigation too, right? When you read anthologies of philosophy, and all of the authors look the same, that leads you to some kind of questioning, interrogation about why this is the case. The kind of questions they raise—even the talk of social contract theory, who is entering the contract? Who is left out of the contract? What are the

conditions for including certain people in the contract and excluding others? At the same time having the audacity to talk about a general will.

**Weber:** That's true. There is a nice book by Martha Nussbaum, *On the Frontiers of Justice*, where she highlights the fact that the notion of a social contract theory leaves out obviously people with cognitive impairments who can't possibly negotiate and deliberate with you and talk with you about their circumstances. We totally leave that group of people out entirely. Animals, the environment. Of course this has so many different implications. The social contract theory for our listeners, in a nutshell, what is social contract theory for listeners who haven't heard of that term before?

**Farr:** There are several versions of it. The more popular ones are Rousseau, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes. The Hobbesian version might be the easiest to understand. There are other twists on that. The Hobbesian version is that at some point human beings live in a state of nature, just like other animals out there living, and at this point there is no such thing as morality, no law, no rules. We are just animals in the state of nature. This state of nature, he calls it a state of war also. Even if we are not at war at the moment, there is always preparedness for war.

**Cashio:** Nasty, brutish, and short.

**Farr:** We imagine the state of nature as nasty, brutish, and short. In a state of nature, let's imagine the three of us in the state of nature. Any one of us, one of us picks food to eat, we are hungry. The other comes along and hits him over the head and takes the fruit. The one who does the taking can't sleep at night, because he has to worry about a retaliation. This is back and forth. Hobbes argues that at some point that we can't continue to live this way, so we need to figure out how to protect ourselves from each other. We come to an agreement about certain laws, principles or rules that we are going to live by in order to protect each other, and protect us from ourselves.

To make sure those laws are enforced, we elect a sovereign, this would be the government or governing body or king, to enforce the laws so that now each of us know that if someone is collecting the fruit, mixing his labor with nature, that is his property. If you come along and hit him over the head and take it, you are going to be punished. The idea that we enter into a contract together, there is a consensus among us about these rules by which we are going to live and who the sovereign should be. Of course it's a hypothetical, but it becomes a way of justifying the idea of government in the first place. The question is: Who is left out of that contract?

**Cashio:** That's kind of what the protests are about, right?

**Farr:** Exactly. If we talk about social contract in the US, even hypothetically, we can talk about why a range of things, in terms of our identity documents, which King used all the time during the civil rights movement. He would make reference to things like the *Declaration of Independence*, a document where we say, "This is who we are. Here is what we believe". Then you will say these identity documents identify you as a people who believe XYZ, but the social reality says otherwise. Look at what's happening here on the street. Look at how we are dealing with each other on the street. It is contrary to the way in which we identify ourselves. If we use the language of 'the American people', people will use that and run off about what the American people are like, what the American people believe. But it really means nothing for a large

segment of the population, because they are not experiencing whatever it is that we say we believe. If we say we believe in equality, we believe in justice, we believe in fairness, a lot of people are not experiencing that. Those people, if there is a contract where we come together and say “We as American people believe XYZ,” there are many people who are excluded, and they are not protected. They are not protected by law. They are not protected by their citizenship.

**Weber:** Arnold, in the field of philosophy, one of these social contract thinkers, John Rawls, has written about civil disobedience, and justifying civil disobedience. In general, civil disobedience has to do with the violation of laws for just cause, and done in a way that doesn't necessarily hurt other people. At the same time, it's hard to draw from that kind of theory to think about the protests because there is nothing unlawful that Kaepernick is doing. It's civil. Is it disobedience? Or just civil protest? If it's civil protest, we need even less justification, it would seem like. Is that a fair assessment? If there is a charge that some people will raise, it's that it's unpatriotic. Would you agree with that kind of criticism? If you want to talk about Rawls feel free, otherwise just kind of, what do you think about the criticisms that people raise? Is it disobedience? As protest, is it unpatriotic? Do you think it's unpatriotic? What do you think?

**Farr:** It's not disobedience, because there is no law they are violating. In terms of being unpatriotic, there is two things here...It's patriotic because they are taking a stand on behalf of American citizens. People talk about the military fighting for our freedom and protecting us, and we are not protected within our own borders. It is patriotic to bring attention to that and to say, “Hey, these Americans over here are suffering.” It's very patriotic in that respect. On the other hand, even if that argument doesn't convince people, and people will say to me that if I take a knee I am being unpatriotic. My response is, “Really? You're going to ask me to be patriotic, when my black son could just, walking home from school one day from basketball practice, could get shot by a cop or a random citizen like George Zimmerman because he looks funny?”

I live in a predominantly white neighborhood. It's a very nice neighborhood. My son can be walking home one day, and his dark skin makes him look out of place. I pay to live in that neighborhood. He could be pulled over or shot, or anything could happen to him. I have to think about that when he's out. If a person wants me to be patriotic, then they have got to address issues where other people with sons and daughters like mine are losing their sons and daughters unjustifiably. I get the argument that it is patriotic and I can make another argument that if it's not, whoop-dee-doo. Do something about our racism and then I'd be more inclined to be patriotic.

**Weber:** There you have it.

**Farr:** I think a lot of the stuff about patriotism is asking us to buy into a lie. It's asking us to accept a narrative about the country that is not true. It's asking us to simply deny our own experience and go ahead and stand and pledge and talk about the land of the free when some of us are not. That's really hypocritical. I don't think anyone should ask that of anybody. I'll stop there for a minute.

**Weber:** This has been another very powerful, and for me, inspirational and moving segment of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. Thank you everybody for listening to me, this is Eric Weber, my co-host Anthony Cashio, and the great Arnold Farr, talking about what philosophy can think about and tell us about civil kneeling protests. We are going to come back with one concluding segment after a short break. Thanks everybody for listening.

**Cashio:** Welcome back everyone, to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber, and today we have been having a very powerful, and I'm finding it an extremely insightful conversation with Arnold Farr. We have been talking about civil protest, especially as it has been playing out recently in the NFL with players kneeling during the national anthem. In this last segment we are going to ask a few big-picture questions, maybe do a philosophunny, tell a joke or two, and we will end with a question for you guys, our listeners.

**Weber:** That's right. Arnold, we have talked some about the causes that motivate the NFL kneeling protests. We have talked about justifications, we have talked some about what philosophy has to say. My question for you now, in terms of the big picture is: What do you think might be the kinds of changes that such protests would call for? What kinds of changes would we ideally need to see to say we have alleviated the forces motivating the protests?

**Farr:** I remember reading, I'm actually teaching it this semester, a book by Iris young called *Inclusion and Democracy*. She talks about when she lived in Pittsburg they would have problems with police brutality. She and some of the citizens got together and formed a committee, and they made demand they presented to the city. They formed a committee of citizens that would hold policemen accountable. These citizens would have the opportunity to investigate actions by the cops. They had to get so many signatures for this to pass, and they got out in the streets and they got the signatures needed, and formed this body of citizens who would police the policemen.

That's a possibility, in a practical way. People need to come together and unify and put pressure on the local politicians so that something like that might happen. That's the first thing. The second thing is education. We need to really be aggressive in trying to educate people and increase awareness and help people become more and more sensitive to violence and things like that. That, the whole education piece, we could talk about that for a long time because there are a lot of details and things that have to be put in place. That's a step in the right direction.

**Cashio:** Very nice. I'm about to ask you a question that might be hard to answer. It's about hope. I'm wondering if you are hopeful about the prospect for change for the better, with regard to these problems in the United States. Do you suspect that we can reasonably approach the wishes and aims of the protesters in our lifetimes through education?

**Farr:** I'm hopeful but not naive.

**Weber:** Hopeful but not naïve. I like it.

**Farr:** I think we have made some progress in terms of race relations, but this is to be expected, that when there is progress made, there is going to be some backlash. We must prepare oneself for it and continue the fight. I do think that the problem with race can be isolated from other problems and other forms of oppression. I'm very influenced by the black feminist notion of intersectionality. That is looking at various problems of oppression and how, although they have their separate distinct narratives or logic, they do intersect, overlap in particular kinds of ways. If we are going to properly address the race issue, we are going to have to properly address the problem of economic class exploitation. Unless you are doing that...

I have two companion books. I'm working on one, *The New White Supremacy*, the other is *The New Slavery*. *The New Slavery* has nothing to do with race. That book is all about

economic exploitation. There are other forms of oppression too, but for those two volumes, those two things I am trying to work on and work out. That's the way to go. I do feel hopeful, but I also think right now, this present moment, we are in for a long fight. I think we have some difficult days ahead. It may get uglier before it gets better, but it depends on how we play our cards right now. We can make things better, but it's going to get maybe a little uglier at first. That's the downside.

**Cashio:** It strikes me, and we didn't have a chance to get to it this episode, one of the problems is that the protesters are talking about police brutality, and 'get your foot off our throat', and then those who are so upset about the protests are worried about patriotism and respect for the flag, and respect for the military. It seems that one side is so willing to reject what the other side has said...I won't say which side specifically I'm talking about... just because the other side said it. How do you begin to have a conversation going forward? It's a problem of understanding each other and conversing. Is there any way that philosophy can begin to heal that division, return us back to inquiry?

**Farr:** I tell my students all the time about democratic discourse. We talk all the time in my classes about democratic discourse and what that's like. We had this moment, maybe a year ago, two years ago maybe, where we had a town hall meeting in the library, in the big auditorium in the library. It was about confederate symbols. We knew that there were going to be coming from every possible position, so we laid the groundwork for the rules of civil discourse, and part of what happened there was that people expressed themselves civilly about their position and why they held the position that they held. It helped us understand each other and where each one was coming from.

In another example, when I give lectures on race in a big public forum, I quite often walk up to the podium and I will say 'forgive me.' And I will tell the audience I forgive them. By this time, they are looking at me funny, because it's like "What are you doing? We are forgiving each other for what?" Then I explain. We are about to talk about race, and it's a topic in my country we have really avoided and we have had conversations about it, but they never go beyond the superficial because people start seeming uncomfortable with that. We are going to have to have a conversation where we are going to be uncomfortable, and since we haven't been taught how to talk about race, it is inevitable that you are going to say something or have a question that you think is stupid or offensive. The pre-emptive forgiveness opens a space where we can have this deep, serious conversation and not have to worry about somebody thinking we are stupid, or in a negative way.

People are free to talk and try to get to the bottom of the issue. Also, when I have these conversations, I bring in other issues too, because I don't want the audience to think that I am just pointing fingers at you. I talk about my own struggle to overcome sexism and homophobia, so fingers are pointing back at me too. I let them know that I am engaged in the same kind of process of self-deconstruction and reconstruction that I am asking you to engage in. Those kind of things, I have had personal success in those kind of approaches. Maybe that can happen on a wider scale or something. People get in a combative mode, and I have been talking with progressive friends about how to move forward politically. I talk to them about the importance of being able to talk to Trump supporters, for example. Quite often you hear them say, "You can't talk to those people. You can't talk to them. They are racist" or whatever.

I say that some of them you probably can't talk to. But I bet you there are some you can, and some of them made the decisions that they made because they themselves are in pain. You



better figure out what that pain is, and be willing to not worry so much about the theoretically correct, but go to the pain, and talk to them about that pain. That way you can move them along and pull them into a more civil conversation about other issues and problems. You have to take their pain seriously. That's where I am right now. These are ideas I am trying to develop right now. Don't know where they will go, but that is my project.

**Weber:** That's powerful. Very nice. An extension of what we have been talking about, I think, relates the inspiration of the shown that we are holding right now, Arnold. The question is, would you say, as the old saying goes, that philosophy bakes no bread? Or would you say that it does? If you would say that it does, what would you say to people who deny that philosophy bakes bread? Let us know what you think? What would you say, does philosophy bake bread?

**Farr:** There are many many philosophers, I would say quite a number of philosophers in the tradition try to avoid baking bread. (laughter). But philosophy can bake bread.

**Cashio:** Bodybuilders can't eat too much bread.

**Farr:** That's right. I love bread. It can bake bread. There are some philosophers who are baking bread. There are examples of philosophers. Angela Davis, Cornell West, Herbert Marcuse himself. He developed his theory in terms of his engagement with activists. He didn't sit in the ivory tower and just construct theory. He was actually learning from students who were involved in protests in the '60s and modifying his theory according to what he was learning. Philosophy was very practical for him. There has to be a unity of theoretical and practical reason. Karl Marx comes to mind here, that philosophy has to be able to address the material conditions in which we live. I think you find a number of people, feminist philosophers and people doing philosophy of race, to all of them, philosophy must be able to address the material conditions in which we live and ways in which we are embodied and the ways in which certain forms of embodiment might make you more susceptible to certain kinds of treatment. There are quite a number of philosophers who are baking bread. That's kind of a new thing for philosophy, though.

(laughter)

**Cashio:** We're getting better at it, hopefully.

**Weber:** On the show, and in SOPHIA we want to encourage it, and highlight when people are doing it. I'm glad you pointed us to, in addition to the idea, you pointed us to some examples. I love that. That's great. Excellent.

**Cashio:** As you know, Arnold, in addition to baking bread, we want people to know that there is both a serious side, we have had a very serious conversation today, we want people to know that there is a lighter side to philosophy. That philosophers can have fun, and that we are also human and not so abstract. Part of that coming from the concrete lived world is the joy of laughter. To that extent, we have a short segment we call philosophunnies. We want to invite you to tell us if you have a joke or a funny fact about philosophy or about protesting, or about really anything.

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

**Sam:** Philosophunnies!

(laughter)

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

**Sam:** Philosophunnies!

(child's laughter)

**Weber:** Arnold, we want to know if you have a funny story or a joke to tell us.

**Farr:** I've got plenty, but I'll give you one. I have mentioned Herbert Marcuse a few times. He is one of my heroes in philosophy. I do a lot of work on him and his work. He is sort of a rock star of philosophy in the 60's and 70's. Tremendously popular all over the world.

**Cashio:** Back when philosophers could be rock stars.

**Farr:** Back when philosophers could be rock stars. Right. The writers for Playboy approached him and asked if he would give them an interview, and he puzzled over it for a bit and finally responded. His response was that he would give them an interview if they would allow him to be the centerfold. (laughter). They refused to.

**Cashio:** They missed out a real...

**Farr:** Could you imagine if they allowed Marcuse to be the centerfold? (laughter) Could have changed the course of the magazine forever.

**Weber:** A 70-year-old man. Sounds great.

**Farr:** Part of what he was trying to do was to disrupt their notion of beauty and sexuality, which I think could have been really disruptive.

**Weber:** And objectification. If you are going to objectify someone and have my interview next to...do it to me. Pretty funny. I don't understand, why didn't they take him up on it? Anthony and I always gather a couple jokes in addition, because it's fun. You want to tell this first one, Anthony?

**Cashio:** What do you call someone in the white house who is honest, caring, and well read? A tourist.

(laughter)

**Weber:** This is a silly joke about protesting by Mark Cohen. He says, "I'm relaxing on the beach and all of the sudden, all these women start gathering around me. They have got these signs saying 'fur is murder! Fur is murder!' I said 'lady, that's my back, now get off it.' (laughter) Not a pretty picture, maybe. We have got two jokes by Jason Mack, who is a comedian and veteran who has spoken up about Kaepernick in particular. Anthony, you want to tell this first one?"

**Cashio:** This is Jason Mack speaking. Hopefully he forgives me. "I sat in 1,500 combat flight hours for Cap's right to sit and protest. I have the hemorrhoids to prove it." I didn't deliver it as well as he could. Sorry, Jason.

**Weber:** #VeteransforKaepernick. He's got another one, also Jason Mack. He says, "Kaepernick afro is the answer to preventing quarterback concussions."

**Cashio:** It is a beautiful head of hair.

**Farr:** More padding.

**[rimshot, applause, laughter]**

**Cashio:** Last but not least, we want to take advantage of the fact that today we have powerful social media that allow for two-way communications 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, Arnold, 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?

**Farr:** I do. My question is: What is democracy and how do we achieve it?

**Weber:** Woo. What is democracy and how do we achieve it? That’s a good one.

**Cashio:** Brought out the big ones.

**Weber:** We are one, and we have already achieved it in this country, right? I like the implication of the question, that we are not there yet. In fact, John Dewey, a big philosopher of democracy, would say we have never achieved democracy anywhere in the world. We have only tried and gotten a little closer to it, he said. We want to know what you all think. Thank you everybody. Send us your thoughts. Thank you, Arnold, for the great question.

**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. Arnold Farr. It has been a fantastic conversation, Arnold. Thank you again for joining us.

**Weber:** Indeed. Thank you.

**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. What is democracy and how do we achieve it? That’s a big question. I would love to hear what you guys think.

**Dr. Weber:** Remember everyone. You can catch us on Twitter, Facebook and on our website at [philosophybakesbread.com](http://philosophybakesbread.com). There you will find transcripts for many of our episodes thanks to Drake Boling, an undergraduate student at the University of Kentucky. Thank you, Drake.

**Cashio:** Thanks, Drake.

**Weber:** I also want to give a shout-out and thanks to Stephen Berrera, who is an undergraduate student here as well, who did some work helping us in preparation for this episode and some other ones. Thanks, Stephen. One more thing folks. If you want to support the show and be more involved in the work of the Society of Philosophers in America, SOPHIA, the easiest thing to do is to go join as a member at [philosophersinamerica.com](http://philosophersinamerica.com).

**Cashio:** If you are enjoying this show, we hope you will take a few seconds to rate and review us on iTunes, the podcast app, or wherever you are finding us this day. You can of course, email us at [philosophybakesbread@gmail.com](mailto:philosophybakesbread@gmail.com), and you can also call us and leave a short recorded message with a question or a comment that we may be able to play on the show. You can reach

us at 859-257-1849. That's 859-257-1849. I hope you'll join us again next time on *Philosophy Bakes Bread*: food for thought about life and leadership.

**[Outro music]**