

Saving American Culture in a Yurt

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[Intro music]

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[Theme music]

Dr. Eric Thomas Weber: Hey everybody. You're listening to WRFL Lexington, 88.1FM, *all the way to the left* on your radio dial this is Eric Weber here for another Tuesday at noon timeslot here where I'm going to play for you the next episode. This is Episode 34 of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. I hope you enjoy. Strap in and give a listen.

[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'm Dr. Eric Thomas Weber.

Dr. Anthony Cashio: I'm Dr. Anthony Cashio. A famous phrase says that philosophy bakes no bread, that is not practical. But we in SOPHIA and on this show aimed to correct that misperception.

Weber: *Philosophy Bakes Bread* airs on WRFL Lexington 88.1, and is distributed as a podcast next. Listeners can find us online at philosophybakesbread.com, and we hope you'll reach out to us on Twitter, @PhilosophyBB, on Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread or by email and philosophybakesbread@gmail.com.

Cashio: Last but not least you can leave a short record a message with a question or comment, or, if you're feeling up to it, some bountiful praise we like that we may be able to play on the show. You can reach us at 859-257-1849. That's 850-257-1849. On today's show we're very fortunate to be joined by Dr. Randall Auxier, or, we prefer Randy tonight?

Auxier: Call me what you will.

Cashio: So, we are here with Dr. Randy Auxier--I call him Randy—and a friend of the show Dr. John Shook.

Auxier: I prefer to be called Randall.

Cashio: Randall. Randy, Randall. We will keep this straight. We are sitting in a yurt in the middle of Asheville North Carolina.

Weber: This is a big moment because it is our very first recording of this show entirely in which all of us are in the same room.

Cashio: Don't give away all our secrets.

Weber: I like giving away secrets.

Auxier: Do you want to say what a yurt is, before we...

Weber: Yeah, what does a yurt? Our listeners may not know what a yurt is. What is a yurt, Randy?

Auxier: It's a circular off-the-ground Mongolian structure.

Weber: It's pretty cool.

Cashio: Not something you normally find in Asheville.

Weber: It's my first time in the year actually. I'm a yurt virgin.

Cashio: I mean this is my first and it's nicely decorated. Lots of leopard print.

Shook: We are in a leopard-print yurt.

Cashio: Dr. Auxier studies process philosophy, American idealism, contemporary pragmatism, and the philosophy of culture. He's the author of the newly released *Metaphysical Graffiti: Deep Cuts in the History of Rock*. I want to hear about that one, Randy. That sounds awesome...as well as *The Quantum of Explanation*, which he coauthored with Gary Herstein, a book about the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. He's also written numerous articles on the philosophy of culture, the history of philosophy, the philosophy of science and metaphysics.

Weber: That's right. Randy has also been the editor of numerous volumes in the Library of Living Philosophers series, which by the way is an absolutely awesome series of books. Dr. John Robert Shook is also a prolific scholar who has additionally edited several journals and books. John is the author of *The God Debates* and *Dewey's Social Philosophy* among many other books. John was on the show early on, in episode 3: *All Shook up about World War III*. Welcome back to the show John, and thank you for joining us Randy.

Shook: Glad to be here.

Auxier: Meh.

Cashio: Meh? Listeners, if you haven't listened Episode 3 yet, is an amazingly interesting episode about *the Fourth Turning* and...

Weber: The coming apocalypse.

Cashio: Given recent stuff that's been happening in the administration, and given the influence of that book *The Fourth Turning* on certain people in the administration...

Shook: You do realize that all people believe that they are living in the end times. This is the atheist apocalypse, is what's upon us.

Cashio: So, someone in the administration, this is their favorite book, and they are trying to cause it.

Weber: Well Randy on this show, at the beginning, we always start with a segment that we call "Know Thyself!" We have had John on the show before and we've asked John about himself. We're going to have him chime in again after we hear about you first, because we like to ask each of our guests always "What is philosophy to you?" but that will be our last question for this segment. First we want to just know about you know about yourself, and then we want to know about how you got into philosophy. Tell us about yourself.

Auxier: Oh my. I'm a hot mess. I would say no, I don't think I know myself. I cannot. "I would tell you *Phaedrus* that I cannot as yet know myself." Socrates says. So no I don't think that my accomplishments are anything more than meager with regard to either spiritual development or self-knowledge. On the other hand, that doesn't mean that one doesn't keep trying. So no. I don't know myself at all. I have successfully broken down seven or eight layers of self mythology, and yet it's like the layers of an onion and you never get to the middle.

Cashio: What do you mean by self-mythology.

Auxier: It's the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves in order to be able to live with ourselves. I really think that there are the versions of those stories that we know are false, and that we entertain lightly. But then things happen in our lives, and we realize that the deeper stories that we've told ourselves about ourselves are actually not true. The things you thought you'd never do. The things that that you believed only happened to other people. The dilemmas that you feel like you know what you would decide if you were in them. One by one, life tosses up its challenges. I think we shouldn't be surprised when it turns out that we aren't what we thought we were. It's almost never good news or so. If I had a motto it would be that some knowledge is almost never good news.

Weber: What we thought we were, we are just peeling off these layers of self-mythology. Is there is there a you that is you? Is there a Randy that is Randy? Or is it just going to be stories all the way down?

Auxier: I think the Randy that's Randy is a process. It's not the same thing now that it was 40, 50 years ago. It's not the same thing now that it's going to be 20 or 30 years from now, if I get that many years.

Weber: So let me ask you a personal question, but you can you can push back with an abstraction or with someone an example from someone else if you like. I want to hear a little bit about you know what you mean by a story or mythology that you have busted. Or you can tell us about, "Well someone else..." I just want an example. Make it concrete for people.

Auxier: Here's the thing. When I was in college, I was a criminal justice major along with philosophy. Philosophy came along later for me. I remember studying in a criminal justice class a survey that had been done by, I believe Clinard and Quinney, but I could be wrong because it's been a very long time. They were asking inmates in various correctional facilities whether they believed they were good people or not. These were people who had been convicted and were serving time. Consistently, what the reports were, is that the people who were incarcerated would rate themselves as just below what they call good. They would follow this up with a question about what's bad.

It turns out that bad is correlated with whatever crime was just a little worse than the one that the relevant inmate had been convicted of. I think that our self-ratings are almost always like this. I don't think you have to be incarcerated or convicted, because we incarcerate and convict ourselves in this regard. "Am I a good person?" I suspect that on the outside of the extremely messed up US prison system, most people who are going to rate themselves just a little bit on the good side, as opposed to just a little bit on the bad side. There will always be bad people out there, defined as those who would do what I wouldn't do. Then that would be good people. That's always going to be a list like Gandhi and Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King or something.

Cashio: Saints among us.

Auxier: Saints among us. I would say that everybody realizes that there are people in the world who are morally better than themselves, and everybody realizes that there are people in the world who are morally worse than themselves. Given this, where do you set yourself? Well here's my advice. Wherever you put yourself, you're probably a little worse than you think. In other words, whatever it is you tell yourself you would never do that's relatively close to what you would do. You would probably do it.

Cashio: You hear that, listeners? You're all probably jerks.

Auxier: I think there are many people who strive for self-sincerity. But self-sincerity fall significantly below the level of self-knowledge.

Cashio: To take you back to your story, we can talk about this level of myth. You started as a criminal justice major, and then you start getting into philosophy. Why made you stick with philosophy?

Auxier: I didn't know why I was in college. I majored in criminal justice because it had dawned on me that I had the kind of mind that would make it possible for me to practice law. This was a respected profession. I wasn't excited about it, but I didn't know what else to do. I got further and further into music until finally I just dropped out of school. My grades were not that good, because my dedication and devotion were not that high. After a couple of years, a little more, out of school trying to make money as a musician, which is very tough road to hoe, I went back to school. Going back to school, I resumed my criminal justice major and took a required intro to philosophy class. I had a wonderful teacher whose name was Hoak Robinson, taught at what was then called Memphis State University. He was a Kant scholar. Within just a few classes, I was thinking to myself, "Wow, you could get paid for this? I've been doing this for free."

So, after my first test, I made a C on it, and I went to challenge the grade and he cut my exam to pieces. I can tell you what the question was. It was whether the Socratic method was a method of teaching or a method of discovery. The trouble is, is that in my essay I had started with one thesis and then talked myself into the other thesis in the course of the essay. He gave me a C=minus actually. I challenged it, and he cut it to ribbons and then gave me a C-plus and

sent me away. My life had been changed in that meeting because I got it. I understood what he wanted. I understood what a philosophical argument was as a result of that one meeting with that one professor. I made an A-plus on the next exam. From there forward, for me philosophy was like rolling off a log. It was so natural and, I hate to say it, it was easy compared to... there are lots of things I can't do. But this I can do. I thought, "You know, I believe that I've been doing this my whole life anyway. I'm put together this way. I think this way, and I would never grow bored a single day in my life reading this kind of text and doing this kind of thinking. I could see myself as a teacher of this kind of material. So I went after the A-plus exam, back to the same professor and I said, "So, how do I get your job?" He said, "Well, we're always looking for a few good majors." I said, "I don't think you are saying what I'm saying. I said, How do I get your job?" He said at that point "Well, we're always looking for a few good graduate students," because they had a nice master's program at the University of Memphis at that time. I said, "Now we're talking."

He gave me the real spiel about what it would take to become a philosophy professor, but I felt called to teach. I felt like philosophy was natural for me. I was seeking answers to certain kinds of questions that were intensely personal questions. In particular, questions that corresponded to the kinds of experiences I had had as a musician. Those were the most important questions to me. It's true that on down the line I discovered that the kinds of questions that were most important to me were not the ones that were being dealt with by professional philosophy. But they did make room for my questions, if I asked them in the right way.

Weber: Well Randy and John, we have one minute left or so in this segment so I'm going to ask you a very small question each of you together. What's philosophy? Just an easy little question.

Shook: Philosophy for me, is finding out that you can waste an awful lot of time asking the wrong questions. So you've got to learn how to find out why the old answers aren't enough, and find why the old questions aren't enough. We are constantly discovering new and better questions to try to answer. Then that leads into a whole host of methodological questions: how to explore, how to learn, how to question one's self. That's the hardest task of all, to question oneself. But if you can do even that then you're a philosopher.

Weber: Alright, Randy. You've got 20 seconds Randy...

Auxier: I don't have any objection to what John said, apart from the fact that John said it. (laughter), which is in and of itself a disqualifier.

Weber: All right well thanks everybody for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. You've been listening to Dr. Anthony Cashio, my co-host, Dr. Eric Weber, that's me, Dr. Randy Auxier and Dr. John Shook. We'll be right back after a short break.

Cashio: Welcome back everyone to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber, and we are sitting here in a yurt in Asheville, North Carolina with doctors John Shook and Randy Auxier. In this episode we're going to talk about the work that John, Randy, and a colleague not present with us today, Dr. Larry Hickman, are doing together in developing what they have called the New American Institute for Philosophical and Cultural Thought. I have a bunch of questions about that. In this first of two segments on this subject, we propose that we tell our general audience about the history of professional philosophy, and how we got to where we are today. Then in our next segment we'll talk more about the institute you're forming.

Maybe you guys could just jump in and tell us what led to even beginning to think about forming a new institute of cultural thought?

Weber: What are the issues and problems in professional philosophy? Think about listeners who may not have even studied philosophy as you tell this story.

Auxier: I remember when I went to college that I didn't even know the difference between an assistant professor and associate professor, a full professor, a dean, a chancellor, a provost. I didn't understand academic organization at all, and how the hierarchy worked. I didn't grasp what a college curriculum was.

Cashio: I barely do.

Auxier: The thing about it is that, when I was a student at least, all of this was really quite a mystery to me. My notion was, and I suspect that many of your listeners are similar, that anybody who was being paid by the state to carry out the teaching mission of a state university, when I went to a public university (I think the experience is different when you go to a private one. I've taught at some private ones and attended some) but I had this sort of naive faith that the people in whose trust my education had been placed must know something about how to organize that. I did not feel that it was my job to understand in any grand detail how they organized themselves. As you enter deeper and deeper into the slaughterhouse, and you understand how the sausage is made, it's pretty much the same in every area of culture which is to say there's a place where the rubber meets the road. There's a place where the decisions get made.

There is a place where the buck gets passed and the place where it stops. It can be terribly disillusioning as a student or as someone going through graduate school, to learn how things actually work. Professional philosophy is not at bottom different from professional sociology or professional biology or professional physics or any of these other disciplines that have been professionalized in our university structure. The university structure was created for the benefit of the democratic society as it was understood in the multiple phases that it went through and especially the development in the 20th century. The 20th century posed some really really difficult challenges. It was not obvious that modern liberal democracy, as Richard Rorty would call it, was going to prevail, and that American exceptionalism would actually become an alternative to communism and fascism. Most of the 20th century, we have to have sympathy for the people who worked, who strove, who did not know what history held in store.

Those who defended communism, those who defended fascism, those who defended all kinds of variations of these views and the reasons they defended them and the institutions that supported them. There was a university that supported Soviet communism, a university that supported German fascism or Spanish Fascism or Italian fascism, and there was a university that supported the American exceptionalist democratic ideal. I am a product of that, as are most of your listeners. We come out of this and we don't understand until we become more mature and we have an opportunity to see more about how the world works—how we have organized ourselves, and that includes the university, as a society in which people who call themselves professionals, most of them middle class people with a high level of education, they wield authority in our society. The same is true in the university. You've got dozens of disciplines filled with people who are credentialed as professionals, and you've got an entire institutional system supported by the state and supported by very powerful private interests that certifies such people.

Now, on the surface of it, nothing that I've said should give any trouble, I think. Except that the problem is that as the world changes, the reasons and the principles that may that may be associated with the certification of professionals can get in the way of our highest ideals. Every civilization declines, every culture goes through, writhes in the seeds of its own undoing,

to put it in Foucault's language. The United States, and in particular Western liberal democracy, has been suffering since about 1980, is when I would date it. This was the onset of the Reagan era, but in addition to that, it was also the shift of the generations, when what Tom Brokaw called the greatest generation let go and the baby boomers began to take over on en masse as leaders. They didn't want to pay for the education for the next generation that they themselves had received at the hands of the greatest generation. This massive wonderful university system the greatest not only in the world but in the history of the world, that was built during the Cold War in the western world and especially in the United States—that great university system was enormously expensive and it required taxpayers to be extremely conscious and cognizant of the idea of the public good.

Weber: Some of these motivations for paying for it came from wanting a more educated populace to defeat communism?

Auxier: That's exactly right. As communism went into decline, of course fascism was defeated in war, communism went into decline. We found a generation of people who had theirs and weren't willing to pay for their children to get theirs unless their children paid for it for themselves. The year that things changed was in 1967 in the sense that this is the year we ceased being a creditor nation and started being a debtor nation. This comes from Andrew Bacevich's book *The Limits of Power*. He's done wonderful research into when things changed We ceased being a creditor nation and began being a debtor nation in 1967, and by 1979 Jimmy Carter was giving the Malaise Speech informing us of what had happened. The public's withdrawal of its support for taxpayer subsidized education has proceeded apace ever since 1980, ever since Reagan was elected. We are dealing with a profoundly changed situation in the present. Nobody wants to pay for public education anymore, and that puts pressure on every discipline, and the humanities especially. These are the disciplines, these are the forms of study that probably got a free ride during the Cold War, but were never deeply valued by the American public anyway.

Weber: I heard an important moment in what you said, Randy, which had to do with certification because it's pretty important for our nurses to be certified, for our doctors to be certified. We have teacher certification so on in so many technical and vocational and career areas. We have certifications and require them, and maybe they're a great thing. I don't know. People need to tell me. But an interesting question is: What does that mean? I'll turn this to John. What is this process of certification when it comes to philosophers? Is that part of the problem? That seems to be what we're hearing a little bit in development from what Randy said. Tell us about certification as it has applied differently to the field.

Shook: The function of a university of course was to be an engine of intelligence. Western civilization has been at crossroads before. It's hard to keep a civilization going, and Western civilization has had to reinvent itself about every 200 or 300 years. The engine of it was the university. Let me put it this way. If you want to understand deeply a civilization or a major culture, find out who wears the funny clothes. (laughter). No really. Who wears weird clothes that nobody else wears? Now in a different civilization it'll be different clothing. It might be the shoes, it might be the hat, it might be the blouse, it might be...In the West, it was the robe. And there are only three kinds of people allowed to wear the full robe, neckline to floor. That was the priest, the judge, and the professor. They represented, each of them, the three fundamental institutions of Western civilization. When they cooperate, when all three function properly and functioning in cahoots together, Western civilization goes well. When they don't, things do not go well. Now in the last 200 years we added a fourth robe: the white lab coat of the scientist. That was a bit of a disruption. But now we have four...

Cashio: I was going to say Lady Gaga.

Shook: Well that would be really cool. At any rate, we now had to add the scientists and specialists social scientists, but we managed it. The University managed to do this. However, what is happening now is that economic forces are stressing us again. The open question is whether or not the four fundamental robe-wearing professions are going to be able to handle it, and whether or not they deserve the public confidence—whether or not we have four professions that are all of them contributing to what we call democracy. If they are not, democracy will fall. It will just fall. That's the bottom line. It will fall. We may have to reinvent ourselves once again, and humanities will be at the center of it. You see, humanities is prior to all four of those professions. It's prior to them. It will survive them. It will outlast them. It will be at the heart of the next civilization that surpasses us. But if we're going to reinvent ourselves it will be the humanities. The problem is that the public doesn't know this anymore. Forty years ago they did.

Weber: John, what are the humanities?

Shook: The humanities, fundamentally, if you go by discipline or philosophy, history, the arts in the sense of right aesthetic performance, finding out what it means to be an artist, and of course literature as the study of the linguistic arts. Performance arts, the language arts , philosophy and history.

Auxier: You already said those.

Shook: I know, but I was wrapping it up. The four, right?

Auxier: Yeah pretty much. That's what I think we think of as the humanities.

Shook: And of course they're absolutely essential to all four of the robed professions. You cannot become an expert at any of them without that grounding and that's the point of it.

Shook: Many folks believe that you can become an expert in those things without the humanistic grounding.

Auxier: They are what we call wrong.

Shook: You find scientists or judges or ministers who actually don't have a broad background in the humanities, and believe they can still carry out their duties to civilization.

Auxier: You're pointing out part of the malaise, part of the dimming of the light bulb. It's going to be a major problem. If the four professions can reassert the primacy of the humanities and demand that things carry on and are protected, then things will go well. If any or some of the four abandon the humanities, they will not only professionalize themselves and become just part of the corporate economics, which would be disastrous, but those would be the cracks that would widen into the chasms that would destroy the civilization.

Weber: Well John, I heard about robes, but what about credentialing? Let's come back to this point.

Shook: Only a profession can credential. There are only four professions that can credential people. So, it's the Ph.D., which is the highest, the doctor of philosophy, but not just philosophy narrowly.

Auxier: In all of the disciplines.

Shook: Of course, lawyers credential who shall be the next generation of lawyers and the clerical class shall credential who shall be the next clerical class. Only scientists can deem who shall be the next scientist.

Auxier: That includes medicine, in which he is really speaking of the medieval university, with the four faculties of theology, law, medicine and theology. Those still remain our robes, however they have taken on a slightly different form.

Weber: We have got about 30 seconds left. Last thought for this segment?

Auxier: Professionalization is the responsibility of those four fundamental professions, and they cannot be duplicated by any economic scheme of capitalism or anything else. Until a democracy learns that, a democracy is going to be in for hard knocks.

Auxier: Your humanistic lawyer is always your best lawyer. Your humanistic doctor is always your best doctor. Your humanistic minister is your true minister, and your humanistic academician is your true academic.

Cashio: There is a lot of medical schools now pushing for liberal arts and humanities.

Auxier: Wise medical schools.

Weber: Well everybody, you have been listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread* on WRFL Lexington. Thank you so much for listening. This is Eric Weber along with cohost Anthony Cashio, and we've got two wonderful guests, Dr. Randy Auxier and Dr. John Shook. Thanks everybody for listening. We'll be right back.

Cashio: Welcome back everyone to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber here talking with doctors Randy Auxier and John Shook. In this segment we want to focus on what you two and Dr. Larry Hickman are up to in the founding of the new American Institute for Philosophical and Cultural Thought, the AIPCT.

Auxier: You keep calling us doctor. Those are our medieval titles. Those are the titles that are associated with the very culture of professionalization we just talked about. Indeed, you may leave that off of my title from here on.

Weber: We'll cut 'doctor' out from Auxier...

Shook: You do have to call me Dr. John however.

Auxier: Call him Dr. John. It's really important to him. He feels deflated if you don't.

Weber: I have a first question this segment. In this segment, we are going to hear about the new American Institute for Philosophical and Cultural Thought. That is your big project that you are launching, and it's very exciting. Before that, I want to ask you a question about the last

segment. You were setting up this sort of development of the professions and of credentialing and you know what, it sounded good. I want I want my doctor to be credentialed.

Cashio: I should be wearing my robes.

Shook: You know when you have them I've seen them.

Weber: There is a university in the south where the professors go teach in robes.

Shook: I think it's called the University of the South. Last I heard, they still teach in their robes.

Auxier: I've always wanted to dress like Snape. I would do that every time.

Weber: you know when you don't want to do that? August in the South.

Cashio: I have a colleague, and he's from Jamaica, and his robes don't have sleeves. They are cut off. Brilliant.

Auxier: The Oxford robe is like that. It doesn't have the sleeves. It's open. You can sweat in it.

Weber: Mine is like a sauna. Anyway, I had a question for you about credentialing. The question is, I mean sounds terrific. What's the problem? You guys, as far as I can understand, with your new institute you're addressing a problem, and the problem has to do with credentialing. But it sounded great. What's the problem?

Auxier: Under underfunding.

Shook: As Randy was talking about they go looking where to slash funding, and they see the fruit and don't realize that the fruit comes from a tree. So they slash the trunks of the tree and don't realize that they're eventually going to kill the fruit. This is short-sighted budget cutting. They go after the humanities because nobody understands the intellectual history, and that's a darn shame. What happens is that the humanities have to do what they always do. They were there before the universities, they'll be there after the universities. They don't particularly need necessarily the universities, although universities need the humanities.

The humanities can go where it must. People will always philosophize. People will always be curious about where we came from and what we've been doing. They will always do history. They will always do performance arts. They will always be writing literature and poetry. We must go where we must. It's ok. Philosophy has done this before. We're going off campus. We're going a little bit offshore. We're founding an institute that will preserve philosophical and cultural thought, provide an opportunity for people to study it regardless of their intellectual credentialing although we're optimized for people with at least a bachelor's degree. But we want to be there when people need a place that they feel the humanities and especially philosophy is respected.

Weber: Sounds terrific. Where is the new American Institute for Philosophical and Cultural Thought?

Shook: It is in Murphysboro, Illinois in the sense that a physical location is required for a part of the mission that we're trying to fulfill. I think that maybe John moved so quickly past the problem with funding. I mean we did say that taxpayers are no longer willing to pay for this, but it's not just about [Monday] money...it's Monday too. Can't trust that day. It's not just about

money... Let's not get into a discussion of Monday. But money on the other hand, is just a symbolic representation of the value that a culture places on what you might call its own... I mean John made this point but I want to emphasize it. Our culture came from ideas. These ideas were had by people throughout Western history who gave serious reflective thought to how human beings should live, and what would be the better as opposed to the worse life for us as groups and us as individuals. Many of us lived those benefits on a daily basis that came from the difficult and even dangerous often intellectual work that was put in over, in the case of the Western world, some 3000 years of striving and suffering for the sake of a better world. Now that we have that better world, people don't want to pay for it. It seems terribly shortsighted.

Auxier: It would have amaze the founding fathers. Thomas Jefferson, James Madison. Monroe, on down the line.

Shook: Imagine having this country and not being willing to pay for it.

Auxier: Their undergraduate capstone courses were in philosophy, which encompassed ethics, social theory and political theory. They got a snoot full of Enlightenment ideas in their college classes and went on to write a couple of things you might have heard of like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution the United States.

Shook: They couldn't have imagined a generation that would come along so unable to appreciate the sort of cultivation of the field in which that crop can grow. They're pulling the harvest out and they aren't replanting. That's what's going on here. Pull the harvest out. Of all that effort, all that work, of all that thought, of all that study, of all that reflection. Pull I out, harvest it and don't replant. That's what we're doing.

Cashio: It's cultural suicide.

Auxier: Okay so I'm a little worried, John. John, everything you said is true but you can't move too quickly past this because the undervaluing of the humanistic ideals and the forms of study that give rise to a genuine and deep understanding of those ideals—that is what has been undercut by the defunding of this aspect of the university. For this reason and because we are patriotic Americans and because we do want to see the democratic civilization that grew out of, who would have believed it, American exceptionalism—which we don't necessarily embrace and it's a narrow form, but the alternatives are communism and fascism, then we very much embrace the alternative. This form of life, the democratic form of life, is one that we embrace and that we want to make sure that somebody replants that field. That somebody goes out into the completely neglected field and doesn't let it lie fallow. That's what our institution is designed to help. We are spreading seeds in an otherwise fallow field. If you're waiting for Donald Trump to replant that field don't hold your breath.

Cashio: They might not want you to. Trump wouldn't want you to. You're like the Johnny Appleseed of philosophy.

Auxier: I'm afraid we need lots of little Johnny Appleseeds.

Cashio: So if we were if we were to go down to Murphysboro, Illinois, which is a beautiful town if you've never been there...

Shook: I assure you your listeners have not been there.

Cashio You never know. You never know...and they were to come visit you at the American Institute for philosophical cultural thought, it's like you said earlier, the rubber has to meet the road somewhere. What would we find there? What kind of work are you guys doing?

Shook: Well you see, it's Randy's house.

Auxier: That would be the start.

Shook: Inside, workable space at least 3500 square feet.

Auxier: 4400.

Shook: You guys live in part of it.

Auxier: There is track space of about 3500 square feet.

Shook: It's more than just an archive; it's more than just a library. It's more than just a place where you could put 40 or 50 people in a pinch for cultural activity, maybe a lecture or maybe some music, which has happened.

Auxier: Our living room seats 75. 75 folks. Come on down.

Cashio: Do you have books? Is it a library?

Auxier: We have got 35,000 books. We've got the equivalent of a small college library, focused on North American intellectual history.

Shook: And American scholarship and things like European philosophy and ancient philosophy.

Auxier: We have got all your Brits, we got French existentialism we got German phenomenology. Come on down folks.

Shook: Mostly in the English language.

Auxier: The point is to provide a working space. It may be somebody who's only tangentially interested in what has been going on in America's past, but they're interested in America's future. This isn't just about the past. This is about people who want to try to explore what America should become, what American ideals could be if they are realized, because of course the struggle continues, to borrow a phrase. We have to encourage all sorts of people from any discipline to take an interest and a concern in the future of what these founding ideals could mean into the future.

Shook: This is a lot more than just a collection of books. The collection of books is for the sake of digitization. Go to Americanphilosophy.net and you can begin to see what the project is. We collect these books for the sake of turning, especially the books that were published between 1923 and 2000, ones that are still under copyright protection and that are very difficult to get at this point outside the United States, and even inside the United States are becoming increasingly scarce because libraries are throwing them away... we we're making good faith searches for copyright holders and then putting up on our website the information that is otherwise unavailable on Google Books or archive.org, because the stuff is copyright protected.

We're seriously worried about the loss of tremendous amounts of material that was published between 1923 and 2000 in the English language and especially in North America, because libraries are throwing it away. That's just a tiny piece of what we're doing. On our web site, behind a very minimal paywall, anybody is going to be able to see that stuff. Collecting and holding physical papers of a rare and otherwise inaccessible sort is also part of our mission. You could come to the institute and see the physical copies. That's the idea. Digitization is only one part of a five-part mission.

Weber: What are the other parts? I gotta know.

Auxier: The most important one, in my opinion, is the one that John is heading up which is the educational part. Describe that.

Shook: We're going to take advantage of the Internet. We want to be able to provide online forums. We know that interest in these ideals and just kind of figuring out what America is and what America is up to is now of interest in every corner of the planet. That comes with being an empire. We can help people out who are interested.

Auxier: You sound like you're happy about that empire thing. I know that that's not true.

Shook: Every empire has a price but one advantage is...

Auxier: They're curious about us. They're not they're not admiring us.

Shook: I follow Toynbee. Every empire builds a mode of communication before it demises to provide for the next one. Ours happens to be the Internet era. The point is somebody has or created somebody and somebody in New Zealand or somebody in Bangladesh or somebody in Zaire who is interested in American thought could connect with like-minded people around the world. We want to create opportunities for people to get maybe static pages where self-learning could happen to get themselves up to speed, or dynamic participation in online courses, see videos so it's going to be multimedia.

Weber: Well for what it's worth, people from 67 countries have downloaded episodes of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. You may get some interest from other parts of the world. That can be kind of awesome.

Cashio: *Philosophy Bakes Bread* forum on there.

Weber: There you go. Exactly. That's very exciting. There's there's an archival aspect with the books. There's resource, you're going to have events, you're going to have education what are the remaining aspects?

Auxier: The last one is that we really do want to move in the direction of having a community. The community is understood at two levels. One is what you might call nodes of community, which is to say activities that are a IPCT that can occur anywhere in the world as a result of the mission that we're carrying out. The other is an organic lived community that we aim to set up somewhere some when and if and when that comes to realization... There are people working on this. If and when that comes to reality, then what we do is possibly move the collection there and we take care to hand on to the future that which we cannot be certain will be otherwise preserved and conserved.

Weber Yeah that sounds terrific one more time, what is the website people can visit?

Auxier: Americanphilosophy.net. Americanphilosophy all run together.

Weber: Americanphilosophy.net folks. Write that down. Go visit and check these people out. This has been another segment of *Philosophy Bakes Bread* with Eric Weber, Anthony Cashio, Randy Auxier and Dr. John Shook. (laughter) Thanks everybody for listening. We'll be right back.

Cashio: Welcome back everyone to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric where we're talking with doctors Randy Auxier and John Shook in a yurt in Asheville, North Carolina.

Weber: You're not easy to train. We like our robes and our doctor titles.

Cashio: I like to say that Randy did most of my training. He gets what he gives. For the last segment, we're going to end with some big picture questions, as well as a lighthearted thought, and with a pressing philosophical question for our listeners, as well as info about how to get 'a hold' of us at the end of this segment.

Auxier: Wow are you from Alabama? How to get 'a hold' of us. Are you kidding me?

Weber: What's wrong with that? I think I wrote that.

Auxier: Well you're from the south too. Eric Oh my gosh. John, growing up in Buffalo New York? No you don't get 'a hold' of somebody. I mean what are you going to do, choke them?

Shook: We don't close the light either, we turn off the light.

Auxier: Anyway, you guys are funny. You're southerners.

Cashio: I have never said 'close the light.'

Auxier: I've heard that's a southern-ism too. Get a hold of you. 'Well I hope y'all get a hold of them'. (laughter).

Cashio: Randall and John. We have been talking with about professional philosophy and professionalism in general, about accreditation and their American Institute for Philosophical Cultural Thought in this episode. Eric, you want to ask your question?

Weber: So it's been a bit boisterous in here. It's my first time in a yurt. Over the course of this episode, we have heard the term American exceptionalism. For a lot of people that will be a straightforward term, but for many it may not be. I remember a time when I didn't know what people meant by that. What is American exceptionalism?

Shook: I'll take that one. So it's a couple of strands of ideas, 300 years old a piece that sort of came together. One was: What is the point of the new world? One idea was that it is more natural. We're going to find the natural human being. It was romanticized. We're going to get it at the essence of what it means to be human and get away from the decadence of Europe and

urban civilization. Benjamin Franklin played this up, going to Europe and wearing his Beaver hats and so forth, playing of the American as the natural man, in some sense, perhaps even ethical superiority. The other one comes from the Puritans. The hope of the New World was to get away from the Old World, that God's providence shone upon the Puritans and that religious liberty was going to be in America if America fulfilled the covenant. This is Old Testament stuff. The Puritans were more about Moses than Jesus in many ways. If the shining city on the Hill fulfilled God's expectations for righteousness, then divine blessings would be upon this land and America would be exceptional. You sort of blend the two together and it comes out that the American is naturally divinely directed to be the light of human progress. The city on the hill.

Auxier: Winthrop. 'New Jerusalem', the beacon of light to the world.

Shook: Exactly. That led him to manifest destiny. God wants to have this whole continent. Genocide, transcontinental railroad, all that. We still believe it and we still believe in more mundane secularized forms. One is going back all the way to the beginning of this episode. There's something very American about believing that there is something in us that might yet be redeemable. We have to believe it. It's part of being in America.

Auxier: Thank you, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson said in his speeches, 1917, that an American is not necessarily someone who lives on our shores, but anyone, *anyone* anywhere who embraces our ideals. Now you have a globalized version of American exceptionalism. Ever since the end of the first world war, what American exceptionalism has meant is not whoever happens to make the journey to our shores but rather anyone who agrees with the ideal. This is the ultimate Calvinist who was our president at that point, that there is something redeemable in all of us that embraces democracy and the American way. We can all be Americans. Oh my gosh. Who would have believed that after a century of isolationism we would come out of that head-in-the-sand pose with an alternative to communism and fascism, which was everybody can be an American.

Shook: There was a price to pay. We had to win World War One we had to then go on and win World War Two.

Auxier: We had to intervene late in World War One when all of the other sides were exhausted.

Shook: This is Churchill. Churchill said of America, 'You can count on America do the right thing after they've exhausted all the wrong things.' But nevertheless, we got there fairly quickly but we feel like we're entitled. But it's an entitlement not of you know power or even prestige. Our ideals are entitled.

Auxier: Well what it really means in practice is that we're entitled to be entertained.

Shook: You have to expand on that, Randy.

Auxier: That moves in a different direction.

Cashio: I'm going to jump in and ask a question to y'all...All .y'all.

Shook: Segue that into cultural thought.

Auxier: There are only two of us here say you can't use 'all yall'.

Cashio: 'All yall' is for the whole room.

Weber" It's the whole yurt.

Cashio: The institute is for philosophical and cultural thought. There's a lot of philosophical thought on American exceptionalism. What is the cultural thought?

Auxier: There are two parts of cultural thought. One is culture, and the other is thought.

Weber: Oh, there we go. I got it. That's set. All done.

Auxier: Here's the thing. We chose the word 'thought' quite consciously, quite thoughtfully because philosophy, the word 'philosophy' has come to mean the academic discipline. What we wanted to emphasize is that what would normally be called philosophical thinking goes on in every discipline and it goes on outside the university, and in fact arguably goes on outside the university better than inside the university. People are willing to pay for it. Our point is that we chose the word thought, and we turn philosophy into an adjective—philosophical—in order to emphasize that what we are interested in promoting is thinking. I don't just mean critical thinking, and I'm sure that John would agree. Thinking is something that goes all the way from pre-cognitive, pre-reflective, intuitive activity all the way up to the most abstract logic. It's all thinking. No matter how reflective and no matter how primal, what makes us the human beings we are has to do with the way that we bring our thinking to bear on our action and especially on our relations with others. That includes the earth and it includes the other species.

Weber: I want to make a point related to what you said Randy, and I know this from earlier conversations we've had together, that you're not just looking for people in colleges and universities to reach out to you.

Auxier: The whole idea is to not exactly sever the tie, but to open the door to folks who have found themselves alienated by the way the university is run, in terms of its bureaucratism and its professionalism and its various conventions. In particular its fears. The academy exists for the last, my whole professional career, 30 years, the Academy exists as a fearful institution. They are afraid that the carpet is going to be pulled out from under them by the powerful forces, both corporate and governmental, that make possible this extremely comfortable life for a certain select group of people who are willing to conform to standards that are set partially by themselves, so in other words the inmates are the ones who are watching the other inmates. In addition to that, those standards are set by what anyone is willing to pay for and that includes the corporate structure as well as the governmental structure and the public perception insofar as it is related to both the corporate and governmental structures.

We live in fear in the academy that somehow our comfortable lives will be taken away from us if we don't conform adequately. This situation is chronic, and it is problematic, and our institution must exist outside of that kind of fear. It has to be positive. It has to be constructive. It has to be progressive. It has to dive into the situation that we find ourselves in the present and that which is foreseeable in our future. We have to dive into that, and we have to make a difference in that. We have to do so without fear that somebody is going to pull the rug out from under us or our funding from us. In a way it's sink or swim, but in a way this is our true home as humanists. Humanists are never at their best when they are dependent upon a revenue stream or a funding source or a patron. The Humanists and the artists are at their best when they are following their own bliss and their own vision and they're contributing what they believe they have to contribute to the development of healthy community among humans. In a situation like that, you try to find an institution that is doing that kind of constructive work, in the present, as our willingness to fund the humanities in our public institutions declines.

What we can't do in a IPCT is get ourselves dependent upon a revenue stream from some kind of university source. What we can do is encourage people who are motivated by the very best things inside themselves to reach out to learn, to support, to grasp, to strive, to progress. We do believe in that. We believe that human beings have not achieved everything that they can achieve. We think that human beings are capable of more. I don't know whether democracy is the end of human political evolution, and I certainly believe in democracy. But I'm hoping there's more.

Weber: Alright folks, go visit americanphilosophy.net to learn more about the new American Institute for Philosophical and Cultural Thought. Now gentlemen, we have a couple final short little segments we have in this show and we're going to go quickly through them. They include first of all, the question that was inspired by the name of this show. Would you say that philosophy bakes bread? In one minute. John has been on the show before, we have asked him this question. So Randy, what do you think? If you would say that philosophy bakes bread, what do you say to people who disagree?

Auxier: No I don't think it does break bread. but the reason has to do with baking bread and not with philosophy. Baking involves putting everything in place in advance just right, and in the right proportion. Baking is for chemists. Baking is for people who are willing to follow and conform to extremely tiny variations in an overall scheme that can only be called providential. No philosophy doesn't bake bread. But the problem is with the metaphor, not with philosophy. Philosophers have to be more creative than bread bakers. Philosophers have to toss a little soda in, just to see what's going to happen. They have to toss out an underground seed or two in to see what's going to happen.

Shook: Can I have raisins in mine?

Auxier: You can have raisins in yours. It was a philosopher who put the raisins in to begin with. It was a philosopher who said, 'I wonder what would happen if I put some raisins in this'. Philosophers are not bakers, but they might be just the kind of assistance to bakers that bakers need.

Weber: That's a new one, that's awesome.

Shook: I like raisins. I thought you wanted a joke.

Weber: We're getting there right now.

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(laughter)

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(child's laughter)

Cashio: As you know, Randy and Dr. John, (laughter) we do know both the serious side of philosophy and the lighter side, so our last little segment...

Shook: My favorite joke that I've heard in the last 10 years struck me as a philosophical joke. You've not heard this one.

Cashio: Lay it on us.

Shook: Bartender says, "We don't serve time travelers in this bar". Time Traveler walks into a bar.

(laughter)

Auxier: I have a much better joke.

Shook: It's not awful, it's great! It's the best dude walks into a bar joke ever.

Auxier: I got a philosophical joke. Have you heard the one about the gorilla who walks into a bar? You haven't heard. A gorilla walks into a bar and sits down. Bartender is like, "Woah, a gorilla just walked into my bar. All right." He walks over and he says, "All right buddy, what will you have?" Gorilla says, "Well, I'll have a beer. Bartender pours him a beer, walks back over puts the beer down in front of the gorilla and then starts thinking, 'Well here is a pretty well-trained gorilla. But I'm going to find out how well trained this gorilla is.'" He says to the gorilla, "For that beer, that'll be that'll be 20 bucks." Gorilla pulls out and slaps down a 20. Bartender is chuckling, 'Not a very well-trained gorilla.' Another guy walks into the bar and spots the gorilla, "What the heck? Okay." He walks over, sits down next to the gorilla. Bartender comes over to the new guy says, 'What will you have?' Guy looks over at the gorilla's beer. "I'll have a beer too." While the bartender pours him a beer, the gorilla leans over to the new guy and says, "The beer here is pretty good, but very expensive."

(laughter)

Shook: I don't think it's all that good. A rabbi with a parrot on his shoulder walks into a bar. Bartender says, "Where did you get that?" Parrot says "Brooklyn! There's thousands of them."

Cashio: We have a nice cricket sound we can play. (cricket sound).

Auxier: Mine got more laughs, I think.

Weber: We usually have jokes but I think those are a good number.

Cashio: Perfect. Best guests...for jokes at least.

Weber: You guys were crap otherwise.

(laughter)

Cashio: All right, doctor Dr. Randy...

Weber: Uh-Oh. Don't call him Dr. Randy.

Auxier: Bless you my son. Call me Father Randy.

Cashio: Last but not least, we do want to take advantage of the fact that we have powerful social media that allowed are two way communications, even on programs like radio shows. We want to invite our listeners to send us their thoughts about big questions that we raise on the show.

Weber: That's right. Given that, John and Randy, we want to know if you have a question to raise for our listeners for a segment we call "You tell me!" Have you got a question to pose for our listeners?

Auxier: We've been talking about what it means to try to be part of the American experiment. I'd like readers to send some feedback about what they think we ought to be trying to do to make America better. We've been talking about recipes.

Shook: Make America great again?

Auxier: No, I don't know when we were so great. At any rate. If America is still redeemable, what do we need to be doing that we should be doing but we could do even better? That will require hard work messy work. We might have to try (gasp) something different. What should we try different?

Shook: Well here's the thing I would say. Are you content, our dear listeners? So some of them might be. Are you content to ride the crest of a high civilization and do nothing whatsoever? To pass that wave onto the next generation and the one after that. Frankly, that's about all that's foreseeable. Technological advances are such that if you do what's necessary in this generation to pass that wave that we are all riding, and frankly enjoying it...cowabunga, you bet dude...To pass that wave onto the next generation and the one after that. Those of you who have kids out there, think about it. It's bound to crash at some point. But there are things we can do to delay the crash and maybe who knows. Keep it from crashing indefinitely. Who knows where the shore is. I don't.

Cashio: There you have it. That's beautiful. I like to think our radio show here is one way of helping pass on the wave.

Weber: A little wave. We can get more people listening and passing on word about it.

Cashio: Thank you everyone for listening to this episode of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. Your hosts Dr. Anthony Casher and Dr. Eric Weber are so grateful to be joined this evening by Randy Auxier and Dr. John Shook. Consider sending us your thoughts about anything you've heard today, that you'd like to hear about in the future, or about the specific questions we've raised for you.

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

Cashio: Once again, thank you John and Randy for joining us this evening. We've had a wonderful time. You can of course e-mail us philosophybakesbread@gmail.com, and you can call us and leave us short recorded message with a question or comment that we may be able to play on the show at 859-257-1849, that's 859-257-1849. Join us again next time on *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, food for thought about life and leadership.