

Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode Thirty-Seven, with Nick Caltagiarone

## Philosophy in High School

S O P H I A  
SOCIETY OF PHILOSOPHERS IN AMERICA

*Transcribed by Laura M. of Rev.com, June 21, 2018.*

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

Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Nick Caltagiarone, "Philosophy in High School," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 37, Transcribed by Laura M. of Rev.com, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, August 8, 2018.



**Radio announcer:** This podcast is brought to you by WRFL, Radio Free Lexington. Find us online at wrfl.fm. Catch us on your FM radio. While you're in Central Kentucky at 88.1 FM, all the way to the left. Thank you for listening and please be sure to subscribe.

**Weber:** Thanks for listening to WRFL Lexington, 88.1 FM, all the way to the left on your radio dial. This is Dr. Eric Weber here and I'm with you on August 8th, at least live in the studio here. You're going to hear a pre-recorded episode in a little bit of Philosophy Bakes Bread, which is what I'm here to play for you for the next hour. I have Episode 37 here for you today with Nick Caltagiarone, who's telling us about philosophy in high school. I hope you all enjoy and do reach out to us. We'll tell you in the show about how you can get ahold of us. Thanks everybody for listening to WRFL Lexington. 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.

**Cashio:** I'm Dr. Anthony Cashio. A famous phrase says that philosophy bakes no bread, that it's not practical, but we in SOPHIA and on this show aim to correct that misperception.

**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) and we hope you reach out to us on Twitter at Philosophybb, on Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread or by e-mail at [philosophybakesbread@gmail.com](mailto:philosophybakesbread@gmail.com).

**Cashio:** Last but not least you can leave us a short, recorded message with a question or a comment or bountiful praise. We always enjoy that, that we may be able to play on the show at 859-257-1849, that's 859-257-1849. We're looking forward to hearing from you guys.

**Weber:** That's right.

**Cashio:** On today's show we're very fortunate to be joined by Nick Caltagiarone, who's here to talk to us about high school philosophy. Helping students to become less susceptible to nonsense, which is a nice way of putting it. How are you doing today Nick?

<https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/08/30/041-ep37-philosophy-in-high-school/>

**Caltagiaronne:** I'm very well. How are you?

**Weber:** We're doing great. Doing great, yes. Nick has taught social studies at the West Chicago Community High School in Illinois for 16 years. His favorite area of study is Ancient Greek Literature and according to his profile at the high school, Nick became a teacher to "help students become less susceptible to nonsense." I'm noticing a theme for today's show, which is nicely philosophical.

**Cashio:** I had the pleasure of meeting Nick at the 2017 conference of the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization, which nicely abbreviates as PLATO. Nick teaches World Studies, AP World History and Introduction to Philosophy. I was fascinated to hear that he successfully pitched a philosophy course to the public school in Chicago where he teaches and the proposal was welcomed enthusiastically. He also has a legion of devoted students who love the course. We can't wait to hear more about that Nick so thanks for being on the show.

**Caltagiaronne:** Thank you, it's a great pleasure to be here.

**Cashio:** All right Nick are you ready?

**Caltagiaronne:** Yes, let's do it.

**Cashio:** We call this first segment on the show, Know Thyself, so we like to build community in SOPHIA to get to know people. To make sure our listeners get to know philosophers as persons. Where their ideas come from, what motivates philosophers and thinkers and people acting in the community and so on. In our Know Thyself segment we want sort of three parts. We want to know about you, so we're going to ask you to tell us about yourself. Do you know thyself and then we'll go into philosophy and we'll also like to ask you about what you think philosophy is. Let's start at the top. Do you know thyself? Tell us about yourself Nick.

**Caltagiaronne:** Well, I'm a high school teacher and as you mentioned I've been at West Chicago Community High School for the past 16 years. We're an average sized public high school about 40 miles west of Chicago, so we're our own suburb. About 2000 students, mixed income, mixed ethnicity, so very common normal run of the mill, everyday, suburban, Chicago high school. It's the only teaching job I've ever had. I student taught there and was asked to join their staff immediately upon finishing my student teaching.

**Weber:** Nice.

**Caltagiaronne:** I've been there every since.

**Weber:** Very cool.

**Cashio:** Teaching has always been your goal?

**Caltagiaronne:** No not at all. Actually when I went to college I majored in philosophy for my first degree. I graduated and I discovered quickly that I wasn't going to be able to find anything that resembled a real job, so I was a bartender for a few years and upon being asked if I wanted to be considered for my boss's job at the hotel I was at, I had a moment of epiphany and realized that I didn't want to spend the next 20 years worrying about how someone's steak came out or if

I had to comp desserts that night. I quickly actually gave my notice as well and got myself back into school and picked up a history degree and my teacher certification and went that route instead. I came to teaching a little bit later than most. I was already in my mid 20's when I got my initial teaching job.

**Weber:** Nick, you have some background in philosophy don't you? You must have studied some and what is your background in that?

**Caltagiarone:** Well, I always had an interest even though I wouldn't have known it when I was much younger. I grew up in a very open minded and non-religious household where the big questions were always asked and never really answered, but we had on the bookshelves everything from Houston Smith's book on world religions to a lot of the primary texts for all the great wisdom traditions down to some basic philosophy. That type of inquiry was always encouraged in my house and when I went to college the first time I started as a pre-business major which I just kind of picked, because I thought that was what somebody was supposed to do. Then after about a year and a half I was dreading going to my business classes and I was hanging out at my philosophy classes before and after and I realized that maybe I picked the wrong major. Halfway through my sophomore year I changed my major, started studying philosophy. The phone call that went home was gladly received and immediately followed by a Mortimer Adler book in the mail.

**Cashio:** No kidding.

**Caltagiarone:** The next day, yeah.

**Cashio:** Well that's good. That's nice positive feedback. My dad on the other hand was kind of like are you sure you don't want to do business?

**Weber:** You ended up with a major in history, right?

**Caltagiarone:** Well actually I did my first degree in philosophy. I graduated with a Bachelors in philosophy and then went out and worked for a couple of years as a bartender and when I realized that that wasn't the path I wanted to go, then I started all over and went back to the university and did a whole other degree in history with my teacher cert.

**Weber:** Oh I see, I see. I got you now, okay.

**Caltagiarone:** Yes, so my first degree is in philosophy, so I did kind of the standard bachelors degree course work and all of that.

**Cashio:** I see, because I heard you mention history, but I had remembered your background as well, so you have a background in both.

**Caltagiarone:** Correct.

**Cashio:** Thus now when you're teaching in high school, you're teaching history as well as philosophy, right?

**Caltagiarone:** Correct. In fact for the first few years I was teaching only history until I pestered the district I worked for long enough to let them allow me to create a philosophy course.

**Cashio:** We're definitely going to come back to that subject, because that's important for our interview today, but while I want to hold off and just learn more about you. Tell us about your experience in philosophy, because you mentioned sort of your background from early time, but you obviously when you studied it, you good hooked on something. Something about the study of philosophy when you went to college the first time around was especially attractive to you and you had set aside the idea of some sort of business degree. What pulled you over to philosophy? What was it that made you love that?

**Caltagiarone:** You know it seemed like, it seemed like the natural choice. It was all the questions and conversations and way of thinking I had been doing just on my own in my house and all of that. Then realized that there's a whole academic discipline devoted to it and that you can start then obtaining the vocabulary of it more properly. I was just fascinated by all of these wonderful thoughts that had been articulated for a couple of thousand years and that all the interesting attempts at answering some of those questions or maybe even better put the way of rephrasing those questions without answers. It was just something I naturally gravitated towards. It was a very easy decision to switch to philosophy. Starting of course with reading Plato for the first time.

**Weber:** Right.

**Caltagiarone:** Slugging my way through The Republic and just realizing that pretty much everything somebody needs to know is probably in there someplace.

**Cashio:** What were some of those questions that you had been asking yourself.

**Caltagiarone:** Right.

**Cashio:** That you'd been thinking about.

**Caltagiarone:** Well, I guess like most of us when we're younger and religion tends to provide a lot of the answers to the big questions. The questions of meaning and the questions of the why are we here and what's the purpose and all of that. I never had any of that religious upbringing. I didn't have any religious instructions, so we were basically nihilists in our house, so it was well, we're not sure if there is an inherent meaning. Go out and see what you can find, so I was always just fascinated by those questions and being usually a minority of one when it came to not having a theistic outlook on things with my peers. That always amped up my inquiries into those big questions, without accepting the easy answers that seemed to work for most of my peers.

**Weber:** Interesting.

**Cashio:** Well since you've kind of told us about yourself and how you got interested in philosophy, maybe you could turn to sort of the last part of this question, this segment. What is philosophy, Nick? What do you take it to be?

**Caltagiarone:** Oh goodness, I'm not sure.

**Cashio:** But you teach it.

**Caltagiarone:** I do, I do. Actually this is . . .

**Cashio:** In all fairness I would hate to be asked this question.

**Caltagiarone:** This is a lesson that I do with the kids too. We read some excerpts on what other professional philosophers have said and then I see if they can come up with anything and most of the time we're just left scratching our heads. It's about asking questions. It's about asking genuine important questions and asked in a genuine way. That's probably the best I can come up with.

**Cashio:** I like that actually, but I do want to follow-up. I mean if it's about . . .

**Weber:** Genuine questions asked in a genuine way, that's good.

**Cashio:** If it's about asking genuine questions in a genuine way, what does it mean to be genuine?

**Caltagiarone:** To ask the important questions in a way that leads to a plausible discourse. In other words I guess this is my experience working with teenagers in philosophy. Not just saying things that are so far out there and then trying to pass them off as something philosophical. What I try to stress is to what philosophy is, it's asking those big questions, but in a way that seems like a genuine answer. Something that you could legitimately get behind and try to defend without just trying to push the envelopes of standard thought.

**Cashio:** No unnecessary BS huh?

**Caltagiarone:** Correct.

**Weber:** That's funny because my wife has this line, I don't know where she got it, but it always stuck with me, this idea that just because you're saying something people don't understand, doesn't mean it's deep.

**Caltagiarone:** Right.

**Weber:** That's absolutely it. Just because ideas sound muddled and confusing and unattainable doesn't make them profound actually.

**Caltagiarone:** Doesn't make them worthwhile.

**Cashio:** Well that's awesome. Well here's sort of a big picture question we like to follow-up with and the question is, if you're introducing people to philosophy for the first time as you have done and others have done, what is a really great text that is sort of a nice, very accessible thing to read to get an in road to learning about philosophy? What is something you think is just a gem or a jewel that is a great text for the initiated to give a look at to get to know philosophy better?

**Caltagiarone:** Oh I think Sophie's World by Jostein Gaarder is a great, great intro text. Written in the early 1990's by a Scandinavian author who my understanding is wanted to write a

philosophy textbook that would be accessible for his own teenage children. It is a novel, but it's really a history of philosophy hidden in a novel and it is written for the late adolescent reader in mind. I had great success for the past bunch of years using that as the anchor text when trying to introduce people to philosophers for the first time.

**Weber:** It's an excellent book. I totally agree. I will warn listeners that it's a long book.

**Caltagiarone:** It's a classic.

**Weber:** It's totally worth it, very accessible, fun and great suggestion, Sophie's World. We'll put that in the show notes when this comes out as a podcast. Well thank you so much everybody for listening. This has been our first segment of Philosophy Baked Bread that we call Know Thyself and we're starting to get to know Nick and we'll be right back with Nick Caltagiarone and with my co-host Anthony Cashio and this is me Eric Weber. We'll be right back after a short break.

**Cashio:** Welcome back everyone to Philosophy Baked Bread. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber here talking today with Nick Caltagiarone about high school philosophy. Helping students to become less susceptible to nonsense. If you've ever been a high school student or spent time with them you know they need all the help they can get. In this second segment Nick, we're going to start by asking you big picture questions about how and why to do philosophy in high schools and in the next segment we'll talk more specifically about your experiences in Chicago's Public Schools.

**Caltagiarone:** Okay, I have to give credit where credit's due. My whole phrasing of making students less susceptible to nonsense is stolen from John Searle. I had an opportunity to talk to him a number of years ago.

**Weber:** Nice.

**Caltagiarone:** Just as I was about to start teaching this philosophy course in high school and I had asked him if there's one, one thing he wants his intro students to walk away with, what is it and he gave me that phrase. I've kind of adopted it as my own ever since, but that's a John Searle line.

**Weber:** That's awesome, that's a good line.

**Cashio:** We like it. Why don't we start at the top? Why philosophy in high school? Aren't students busy studying other subjects? Getting ready for standardized tests and so on?

**Caltagiarone:** Yes, they are. That's why they need philosophy more than ever.

**Weber:** I like it.

**Caltagiarone:** The kids are jammed with all of that and I have found that the philosophy curriculum is a place where the really, really academically minded kids can let their intellect be a little bit more creative and not have to worry about how they're going to do on the AP Literature Exam, or how they're going to do with Advanced Calculus and I've also found for the kids who are a little less traditionally academically successful, philosophy for a lot of those kids has been a

way to maybe even spark a little intellectualism with them and give them the feeling that they're thoughts are valid as well and they just need to hone, how to articulate those thoughts.

**Caltagiarone:** In the big picture I think for a heterogeneous grouping philosophy and again I'm going to be biased on this, but I think it's absolutely essential for high school kids at that stage to be exposed to the big thinkers and the big ideas. Because they are ideas that these kids have had. They lay awake at night thinking about these things and they have questions and their other classes for the most part because of the way the curricula is designed, there's no room for those big questions in their other classes. A good English class, a good Social Studies class I think can address those on the periphery, but a standalone philosophy course, that's the heart of it. I think the kids desperately need that.

**Cashio:** Nick, what are some of the examples of questions that students have mentioned to you that they've thought about and they finally have a chance to talk about. You mentioned that students lie awake at night you hear, thinking about certain questions and this study allows people to think about them, what are some of those questions that just plague some of them? Or that just grasp their interest?

**Caltagiarone:** You know they're all the big questions that all of us who've studied philosophy tend to, but the big ones that I have found that the kids really seem to gravitate towards, ethics. What makes something the right thing to do? They really delve into ethics and they'll get a little bit of that in a good literature course as well. The what does it mean to live a meaningful life question? They really, really gravitate towards that, because especially, most of these kids are seniors that I have in class and not all of them, but a good percentage of them that are in my philosophy class are college bound. They're ready to make a big decision. They're ready to decide where they're going to go and what they're going to study.

**Caltagiarone:** Sometimes that jives with what their parents want and sometimes it doesn't. They're on the cusp of making really big decisions and those decisions evolve around what does it mean to be successful?

**Cashio:** Nice.

**Caltagiarone:** What does it mean to live purposefully, so they really, really get into that question. The God question is big and that generally doesn't come up in any of their other classes.

**Weber:** Interesting.

**Caltagiarone:** We'll spend, we'll spend a good deal of time on that and that's always a big one.

**Weber:** Well I have one more question and then I'm going to kick it to Anthony, but building on things that you've said you were talking about how students who might be typically sort of less academically inclined or focused perhaps. Somehow there's something for them that they find in philosophy that makes them feel as though their views are worthwhile. Tell us about that? What do you mean by that and how do they usually feel and how is philosophy different?

**Caltagiarone:** Well I think a lot of public school rewards academic behavior. I mean by the time my students have gotten to my philosophy course, again this is Juniors and Seniors, they've already been sorted into whatever categories, they're going to be in for the most part.

**Weber:** Wow.

**Caltagiarone:** The kids who've been successful and they've got the GPAs and the test scores and are going off to college there, they're in one category and then there's kids who haven't been as traditionally successful. Unfortunately, the way the system is designed, so much of their success has been based on being on time, doing work, regardless if they understand it or not. Turning that work in on time. It's a model that rewards behavior as much as it does learning and critical thinking and so when they can get in a philosophy class where our goals are a little bit different. I try to design it a little bit more like a college course.

**Caltagiarone:** I'm not there to stand over their shoulder and make sure they're doing nightly homework. We're going to read and we're going to engage in conversation and we're going to be a little bit of writing, but for the most part it's an opportunity that's a little bit different than what they've experienced as far as what it means to be successful in a more traditional high school classroom, so they're able to maybe flourish a little bit more.

**Cashio:** Cool, very good. Well Nick it sounds like the way that you're approaching philosophy in your classroom and the way you're teaching it is really trying to educate students in and sort of a sense that they've never been educated before, but they're sort of thirsty for it. They want to engage in this way. Do you think philosophy is something that should be taught in all high schools?

**Caltagiarone:** I don't know. That's a great question and it's one that I think about a lot and have a discussion frequently with colleagues. There's a handful of us in the Chicago Land area that teach stand-alone philosophy courses. There's not many of us, but there's debate about if this were part of like a required course sequence, would it lose, would it lose some of the nature of it in terms of how the kids are thirsty for that? Does it attract a certain type of student that regardless of past academic success or not, but the type of student that's thirsty for that type of learning? I don't know. I see it from both sides.

**Caltagiarone:** Part of my thinks that it's probably best as an elective and once it becomes mandated you're dealing with students who don't want to be there and students that would rather be doing anything else and that the elective nature of it is what's so attractive. Then there's another part of me that thinks if it's done properly, how could not get kids engaged in that type of thinking and it should be mandated and it should be part of required coursework. I do think to answer your question. It should be made more readily available as opposed to the 10 or 12 or 14 high schools that offer the standalone courses in the Chicago Land area.

**Caltagiarone:** There's some of us that would like to see that greatly expanded, if not made part of graduation requirements, certainly be made available as an elective to kids who are thirsty for that kind of learning.

**Weber:** Interesting Nick, yes so, I mean just, this may be obvious to most every listener I don't know, but just for people who just haven't thought about this stuff in a while, elective means it's a course you get to pick versus something like English that everybody has to take, right? The mandated courses and so one approach would be to mandate something like philosophy so that everyone has to take it. Another approach would be as you say, to make it elective, but the problem is when something is elective it isn't always available in all the schools.

**Caltagiarone:** Right.



**Weber:** If it were all available at all the schools, what if it were an elective at all the schools, that sounds pretty attractive anyway. I think the one thing about philosophy is it tends to be this sort of you can bring the horse to water, but you can't make it drink. Maybe you can offer philosophy, but requiring everybody to think philosophically it makes for some difficulty perhaps.

**Caltagiaronne:** Absolutely.

**Weber:** I believe in France they require philosophy classes. Well in any event I want to come to sort of a big picture question Nick, Senator Marco Rubio while running for president said that "we need less philosophers and more welders." First of all let me be pedantic for a second and say the word should have been fewer Senator Rubio, not less, but anyway . . .

**Cashio:** That's so pedantic.

**Weber:** Fewer philosophers.

**Cashio:** I think it's right we need more jobs.

**Weber:** Well anyway the point is that the sentiment of Senator Rubio's comment is something worth thinking about. What do you say to people who think, what we really need is more vocational training, more job training rather than more subjects like philosophy to be taught. What do you say to that kind of challenge?

**Caltagiaronne:** Well, I think that in some ways that's a false dilemma. They should all be available. The kids that are taking a vocational track need to be able to critically evaluate their situations just as much as those students who are going to take a higher education route. To go back to my stolen phrase, to help the students become less susceptible to nonsense is just as important for the kids who are not going to be going to college.

**Cashio:** Nice.

**Caltagiaronne:** Easy prey once they leave our building for people who are going to take advantage of their labor. Take advantage of them as consumers. Take advantage of them as voters, so if anything the philosophy is absolutely essential to help them build those critical thinking skills to now allow themselves to become tools.

**Cashio:** Nice. Now these are fairly everyday words, false and dilemma, but the way philosophers use them we use them as an everyday language for us, but could you spell out what formally a false dilemma is when you teach a logic class or you're teaching someone about reasoning? What do you mean it's a false dilemma?

**Caltagiaronne:** Sure. What I mean is that when Senator Rubio says we need less, less philosophers and more welders, I would say that's a false either/or choice. You can be both.

**Cashio:** Right.

**Caltagiaronne:** You could be a welder who can think philosophically. It's not a one or the other.

**Cashio:** Excellent, that's right and a good illustration.

**Weber:** I know some philosophers who like to weld.

**Cashio:** That's right, that's right. Why not?

**Caltagiarone:** Exactly.

**Cashio:** Why not? Nick you mentioned something a little bit earlier and I think this is a point I want to come back to, but you said if we were to have philosophy required in all the high schools, it would have to be taught correctly and so what does that look like? I guess this is kind of the how question, how to teach philosophy to high schoolers. Are there certain special considerations that someone should keep in mind when teaching high school philosophy even if they've already taught at the college level? Is there some difference or is it just basically the same approach?

**Caltagiarone:** Oh goodness I don't know. I think for it to be successful in a high school an instructor has to be passionate about the big picture nature of the questions and less concerned with some of the minutia associated with professional philosophy, because at the end of the day, one has to remember their dealing with 16, 17, 18-year-old kids, some of whom aren't going to go to the university. That's just not the path for them and that it's about those ideas that engage all of us in making those ideas accessible and helping the students develop the vocabulary to better articulate those ideas as opposed to how well they can slug their way through college or whatever.

**Cashio:** Nice, right, right. Are there certain topics that you've found that you probably should just completely stay away from in high school that might be more easily tackled at the college level?

**Caltagiarone:** Yes, formal logic.

**Cashio:** Not abortion stuff, but it's the formal logic stuff that's the problem.

**Caltagiarone:** Oh yes, no controversial stuff is great. Kids love it and there's ways you remain professional and I can deal with the God question. I can deal with when does life start? I can do all that stuff. Following premised arguments and doing symbolic logic though, that's not happening.

**Cashio:** That's funny as somebody who teaches symbolic logic to freshmen. You know I could probably teach this at the seventh grade level easy, but maybe not. There's the glassy look in their eyes.

**Weber:** Well thanks so much Nick for another segment speaking with us here on Philosophy Baked Bread. Everyone we're going to come back after a short break with Nick Caltagiarone and my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio and I'm Dr. Eric Weber. We'll be right back with more Philosophy Baked Bread.

**Cashio:** Welcome back everyone to Philosophy Baked Bread. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber and this fine morning we're having a meeting of the beards. We're all rocking sweet

beards with Nick Caltagiarone and we're talking about high school philosophy, helping students become less susceptible to nonsense.

**Caltagiarone:** Nice.

**Cashio:** Yes, so in the second segment we were talking about why and how to do philosophy in high school Nick and in this segment were going to ask you about your particular experiences. I think we heard a little bit about his, but I'm going to go ahead and ask it anyway. Was philosophy already being taught at your school when you began and if not what was the response when you proposed it?

**Caltagiarone:** It was not being offered at our school and I proposed it very, very like probably before my first year teaching was over and I think the response was basically, that sounds like a nice idea. Why don't you try to survive your first year and then we'll talk.

**Cashio:** That's cute.

**Caltagiarone:** The second year, kind of the same thing. Hey this is a great job. I love this. Hey, we should do a philosophy class. All right, well we'll consider it and then I think they just got tired of me asking, so after my third year they finally gave it the okay and then it became be careful of what you wish for scenario. Because they said okay we're going to run it next year and the first year they offered it we had enough students sign up for four sections of it.

**Weber:** Wow, oh my goodness.

**Caltagiarone:** Two sections each semester and there was no curriculum to draw from, so it was basically that summer.

**Cashio:** Cool.

**Caltagiarone:** Create the course, it runs in the fall, so I got to create it from scratch and because it's not like teaching US History or World History there's not a lot to draw from at the high school level, so it was literally from a brick by brick from the ground up.

**Weber:** Very cool.

**Cashio:** That's one of those that can be super annoying, but also really fun, everything going to, I think that's how it should be so I'm going to do it.

**Caltagiarone:** Yes, yes.

**Cashio:** No one else in front of me.

**Caltagiarone:** To the credit of my school district they gave me full autonomy to create it start to finish and it's been like that now for the past 13 years.

**Weber:** Wow.

**Cashio:** The administrators gave in and the students seem really happy with it. Did you have any pushback from parents or even your colleagues, were they kind of skeptical or?

**Caltagiaronne:** No, no.

**Cashio:** Was everyone on board?

**Caltagiaronne:** I would say, again maybe I hear things that other people hear other things, but at least the way it's presented to me it's been very positive, particularly with my colleagues in the English Department, especially at the AP level, because there is a good deal of crossover. In fact I remember after one particular years AP Literature Exam, the kids were sprinting to my room telling me that that years prompt was on Sartre and so all the kids that also had Philosophy that semester nailed the AP Exam, so they were pretty happy about that.

**Cashio:** AP English is how I got into philosophy

**Caltagiaronne:** Yes.

**Cashio:** Sartre, that's who I found out about it.

**Weber:** All right, so imagine you've got a bunch of high school teachers out there listening to this and thinking you know what, that's be awesome to teach a philosophy class. The natural question is then okay, so what did you and what do you actually teach them? What's your class like?

**Caltagiaronne:** Yes, so I guess structure, content and materials are like any course. You have to think of, for me the structure was pretty easy as you mentioned earlier. Sophie's World naturally provided the structure for my course. As you mentioned it's a pretty long book but we take all semester to read it and so the course is structured chronologically. We start with the Pre-Socratic and we go all the way through the 20th Century. I call it Socrates to Sartre in a semester, so does the ultimate survey. The idea is to expose the kids to these ideas and the canon of thinkers with the full understanding that we can't go completely in-depth into every idea, but at least hopefully expose them to it. For those that want to pursue it further on they've got the background to at least continue on with it. What I do specifically in the course is for each chronological period or thinker I attach a weekly question to that, so for instance with Socrates we'll look at the idea of absolute versus relative ethics.

**Caltagiaronne:** I'll present that question at the beginning of the week. We'll do a little introductory activity or introductory reading or a thought experiment related to that. We'll then do a little historical background on that part of the chronological approach and then the rest of the week will be spent doing supplementary readings. Not necessarily related to the chronological aspect but more to the thematic idea, in this case relative ethics. Readings, secondary sources, not as heavy on primary sources. We'll use video clips. We'll use discussions, simulations and all sorts of varied up activities and methods. Then by the end of the week the students respond using an online forum. Their answer to that particular week's question and we spend one day at the end of that period, hearing their thoughts. They have to engage with each other on their thoughts about that question.

**Weber:** Nice.

**Caltagiarone:** Then we move on to the next piece of chronology.

**Cashio:** Wow. You know I can think of a podcast that might be pretty good supplementary material.

**Weber:** Now Nick you used a term that at least to folks who aren't very familiar, it may seem a little foreign. You used the word Pre-Socratic.

**Caltagiarone:** Yes.

**Weber:** What is a Pre-Socratic to someone who doesn't know.

**Caltagiarone:** The philosophers who came before Socrates and I use that term synonymously with the natural philosophers, the philosophers starting with Thales and going all the way up to Democritus, even though he's technically a contemporary of Socrates, but the questions he was asking were more similar to the Pre-Socratics, basically what is the stuff of reality and how do we account for change that we see before us. With that group of thinkers I team up the question of what is nothing and that's one of the very first things we did with the semester and we just kind of watch . . .

**Cashio:** Minds explode.

**Caltagiarone:** Minds explode.

**Cashio:** I still find that a hard one.

**Weber:** It's kind of like BC is before Christ and we've kind of got PS which is Pre-Socrates, right?

**Caltagiarone:** Right.

**Weber:** Good, good. Thank you for clearing that up.

**Cashio:** I've always been a sucker for the Pre-Socratics myself.

**Weber:** Right on.

**Cashio:** The Pericles fan.

**Caltagiarone:** Yes, [inaudible 00:35:42] versus Pericles tend to be the two big ones that the kids gravitate towards.

**Weber:** Nice.

**Cashio:** Nice, who do they like in your experience?

**Caltagiarone:** Overall?

**Cashio:** Yes.

**Caltagiarone:** They like the Hellenistic Schools. They like the Epicureans and the Stoics.

**Weber:** We've talked a bunch about stoics on the program over time. The folks who want us to focus on the things in our control and to accept things out of our control. What are the Hellenistic philosophers? What do they . . .

**Caltagiarone:** The time distinction, so after Alexander the Great and 4th Century BC spreads the ideas of classical Greece throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and the intermixing of ideas that resulted in the schools like the Stoics and the Epicureans as bound in Greek thought as their ideas are, they're still some of those Eastern influences as well due to the traveling of Greek culture. I just lump them all together as the Hellenistic schools, but specifically the kids really get into the Stoics and the Epicureans.

**Weber:** We haven't talked much about Epicureans on this program, what are some basic big picture Epicurean ideas?

**Caltagiarone:** The idea to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, but not to be mistaken in a hedonistic way. That it's more measured pleasures and pleasures of the mind. To not be worried about societal concerns. Almost to remove oneself from that and just focus on pleasures of the mind and the intellectual life?

**Weber:** Would that include drug use?

**Caltagiarone:** I don't think for Epicurus no.

**Weber:** Okay.

**Cashio:** No, it's like water and bread and occasionally they have a party with some cheese.

**Caltagiarone:** A very simple lifestyle. The term obviously got co-opted and turned into an idea of Hedonism, but not for the Epicureans.

**Weber:** Right on, good explanation.

**Caltagiarone:** Other than that the kids moving forward it's almost like shooting fish in a barrel but high school students and Existentialism always a big favorite. To tell the students that despite what their parents may have said, they may in fact may be the center of the Universe.

**Cashio:** A match made in existence.

**Caltagiarone:** Yes.

**Cashio:** A high schooler who thinks they're the center of the universe.

**Caltagiarone:** Yes, it's great.

**Cashio:** Do you point out to them everyone here thinks it.

**Weber:** Yes, and you're all correct.

**Caltagiarone:** The ideas of absolute freedom and really being in charge of your so called destiny. They really latch onto the ideas of the existentialist as well.

**Weber:** Nice.

**Caltagiarone:** I find they like Marx as well.

**Cashio:** Not Groucho.

**Caltagiarone:** No, not Groucho. We do a Marxist interpretation of a public school that the students seem to gravitate too.

**Weber:** Oh, what is that like? What does that mean?

**Cashio:** Yes, that's . . .

**Caltagiarone:** Okay, I won't let my Marxism hang out too much here. When I try to explain the difference between the base of a society, the economic relations of a society and the super structure of a society, the ideas, the philosophy, the religious thoughts and even the education of the society. All those things wrapped into the super structure. I try to explain to them that their education reflects the base, the economic relations. We kind of brainstorm what are they actually learning in school. I don't mean math and English and all of that, but they learn the rules of school. They learn to listen to authority. Be timely. Do your work and it doesn't take too much prodding to get the kids to realize that by that looking at public school from that lens, and because public schooling hasn't changed in about 100 years, they're basically being trained for factory work.

**Cashio:** Yes.

**Caltagiarone:** Their education reflects the skills that will make them successful factory workers.

**Weber:** Interesting.

**Cashio:** Keep on journeying on. If my calculations are right. You've been doing this for, teaching philosophy for 14 years, is that right? Is that about right?

**Caltagiarone:** Yes, 13 or 14 years.

**Cashio:** 13 or 14 years. Do you have any sort of favorite moments from teaching philosophy to high school students, any like oh yes that was a particularly wonderful class moment?

**Caltagiarone:** Class moment. I had an interesting experience, the local theater group was putting on a production of No Exit, one particular semester. This was probably about ten years ago and my class all wanted to go see it.

**Weber:** This is Sartre?

**Caltagiarone:** Yes, yes this is . . .

**Cashio:** Hell Is Other People.

**Weber:** Hell Is Other People.

**Cashio:** The lesson of that play.

**Caltagiarone:** We had just finished with the Existentialist and the students were like we should all go see that play together. I was like okay.

**Cashio:** Awesome.

**Caltagiarone:** I guess we could do that. We all went to go see an Existentialist play together outside of school hours, so I didn't have to worry about field trips or anything like that. Obviously, it wasn't mandatory and every kid in the class showed up and people brought their friends as well.

**Cashio:** No way.

**Caltagiarone:** It was . . .

**Weber:** Yes, that is awesome.

**Caltagiarone:** It was the class plus probably about nother half dozen, eight kids.

**Weber:** Well, for what it's worth everybody, John Paul Sartre was the great French philosopher who what I understand is he had 50,000 people at his funeral.

**Cashio:** Yes.

**Weber:** There's a philosopher and a country that embraced philosophy in the public and Sartre's plays are really engaging and fun actually. He wrote therefore both pretty formal technical philosophy as well as engaging plays. Yes, that's a nice example. Something also for people, we'll mention that. We'll put that in the show notes also as something to encourage people to read. No Exit, excellent. Well what did you take away from their interest in going to see the play?

**Caltagiarone:** What was nice from that experience was that the kids were applying their classroom learning outside the classroom and they were embracing what we were doing in class, not just as an exercise and not just as something to regurgitate on an exam, but something to really think about and to share with others. Share with people that weren't in the class, so take those conversations back home to their parents and to their friends. The fact that they wanted to spend a couple of hours on a Friday night with their high school teacher sitting in a local theater watching an Existentialist play I thought that was pretty cool.

**Weber:** Yes, so this isn't something they did to get extra credit, this is something they did because they wanted to?

**Caltagiarone:** No, I didn't even offer extra credit.



**Weber:** That is pretty impressive. To get all of them to go is actually really striking.

**Cashio:** Yes, that is good. That's really fantastic.

**Weber:** Well we're going to come back with one more segment with Nick Caltagiarone. This is Eric Weber and my co-host is Anthony Cashio. Thanks everybody for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread. We'll be right back.

**Cashio:** Welcome back to Philosophy Bakes Bread. I'm Anthony Cashio, here with Eric Weber and today it our privilege to be having an awesome conversation with Nick Caltagiarone and now we have some final big picture questions as well as lighthearted thoughts. We'll end with a pressing philosophical question for our listeners, as well as info about how to get ahold of us with your comments, questions, criticisms, praise, etc. Be good.

**Weber:** That's right. Nick in this last segment we'd like to start off by sort of asking for your final big picture thoughts, but as a first question in that vein I want to ask, have you had parents object to your Philosophy class in any way in the high school there? If not, so what do you, if so or what would you do about people who don't want their kids to take it or who object to something about your class? What's been your experience and what do you or would you do?

**Caltagiarone:** Well I guess I've been lucky, because most of the students who take my Philosophy class have had me in class already. I teach sophomore History and a good percentage of the students who take Philosophy as juniors or seniors are coming from my AP sophomore class or my World Studies sophomore class. Most of the kids who sign up for it kind of already know what they're in for. I try to sneak in a lot of philosophy in my regular history classes as well. By the time they're in Philosophy, there's usually no surprises on that. I have had some parents not want their kids to take it after going through sophomore year, because they think it might be, I don't know if it's too radical is the idea. Maybe they don't want their students exploring all of those ideas. More often than not I've had really positive interaction with parents.

**Caltagiarone:** I even had years ago a student from a very, very devoutly Christian family and when we deal with the God question we do it in a very even-handed way. We look at theist arguments. We look at atheist arguments and I remember at Parent Teacher Conferences, the parents of this student thanking me for exposing their student to an alternate viewpoint that he would have never seen at home and that its made him a stronger thinker and strengthened his faith by being able to explore the other side.

**Cashio:** That's good.

**Weber:** Nice, that's awesome.

**Caltagiarone:** For the most part the parent reactions have been very positive.

**Weber:** I imagine to the parents who object you say okay. They don't have to take it.

**Caltagiarone:** Yes, that's the bottom line. It's an elective and like I said most of the kids and parents already know me before they have to sign up for the course. If they think they might have an issue with it they generally aren't going to be in the class.

**Cashio:** They know what they're getting into.

**Caltagiaronne:** Right.

**Weber:** Have you heard any details about the kinds of reasons? You kind of touched on it, but when they say I'm not sure this is right for Joe or something like that. Do you hear any more detail than that, or is that about it?

**Caltagiaronne:** That's pretty much about it. Sometimes they talk about well the readings would be too difficult. I don't know if that's smoke screen or not, but that's generally all I hear.

**Weber:** Okay, all right. Right on.

**Cashio:** Cowards.

**Weber:** Oh, oh.

**Cashio:** That's what I say.

**Weber:** Oh.

**Cashio:** I know, I know. Nick, I have a question.

**Caltagiaronne:** Yes.

**Cashio:** What do students tell you about philosophy in high school, right if anything? Have you learned anything from your students?

**Caltagiaronne:** I have learned especially dealing with students who are being exposed to this for the first time. I've learned to retain the wonder that is studying philosophy and resisting the urge to get mired in minutia and when kids get super excited about their exposure to Plato or their first exposure to how a Socratic argument works or when we first deal with Hume or Descartes. I re-learned how exciting it was when I was 17, 18-years-old being exposed to that to the first time. In some ways I think it keeps me really fresh with it and encourages me to get more in-depth and to try to learn more, not again for the minutia but more for that keeping that wonder, that wonder going.

**Weber:** Nice. Now Nick . . .

**Cashio:** Really.

**Weber:** There are a lot of teachers out there who've either majored in Philosophy or who you know what they did really love this or that, one or two or three, whatever Philosophy courses that they took in college. Let's say they've been listening to this episode thinking about, you know what maybe I should? Should I teach Philosophy too? That's kind of awesome you know. What would you say as kind of final big picture thoughts about what we've been talking about to people out there who have had some exposure to Philosophy or majored in it, also in teaching high school. What would you say to them as sort of big picture thoughts about either your experience or about what you think you'd encourage them to do or think about and so forth?

**Caltagiarone:** I would answer that in two ways. The first way is do it. At the high school level it's a lot of fun and if you have a willing district it's not that hard. It might seem daunting, because curriculum doesn't necessarily exist. It's not like you come into a pre-existing curriculum team and you know make your changes and put your own spin on things. It's a lot more work than that, but it's not that hard. It's a lot of fun and with a willing district it's very, very doable. I would encourage folks that if they have an interest and a background or just the interest really. They can develop the background as they go.

**Weber:** Right.

**Caltagiarone:** Kids will love it and kids will be better off for it. I would add to that if the district isn't willing there are all sorts of ways to include philosophical instruction in pre-existing curricula within particularly the Humanities, Social Studies and English. That can be as direct as inclusion of content or teaching ancient Greeks and well we're going to deal with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. There's also more subtle and maybe even more meaningful ways to do it. If you're teaching a US History class, how do you teach the Mexican American War without talking about the ethics of power? How do you talk about Civil Rights without talking about what a just society looks like?

**Cashio:** Nice.

**Caltagiarone:** Even if a district isn't willing to let a stand-alone class be created, there are ways to do it and there's ways to work it in in a meaningful way that will engage kids and it goes beyond getting ready for those tests. It goes beyond putting a number in a grade book and it's something that kids can walk away from and have a legitimately meaningful experience.

**Weber:** That sounds awesome.

**Cashio:** I think I would have . . .

**Weber:** That's really nice.

**Cashio:** I think I would have absolutely loved to have been in your class when I was in high school

**Weber:** Yes, I was just thinking the same thing. It's like I missed out. That was fantastic. All right Nick, we're going to have to go to one of our final questions that we ask everyone who comes on the show.

**Caltagiarone:** Okay.

**Weber:** It comes from the inspiration for our show, so hopefully you see it coming. Would you Nick say that Philosophy Bakes No Bread as the famous saying goes, or that it does and why and how, you know, show your work.

**Caltagiarone:** Well, I want to make sure I understand the question right, so here's where I may stumble a little bit. If we're talking about the practicality of Philosophy, I will reiterate what we talked about earlier and say that the ability to critically evaluate one's situation and to navigate through whatever mess one finds oneself in is absolutely essential and being able to construct

argument is obviously very important, but having the type of habits of mind that allow our students to be able to go out and be successful human-beings is a project worthy unto itself. Regardless of what economic benefits it may have. Regardless of what type of job it might get them, it is perhaps more important than that by helping them become competent human-beings.

**Weber:** Nice.

**Cashio:** Excellent. I really like that a lot.

**Weber:** Right on, exactly. Well Nick as you know we want to make sure people both see the serious side of Philosophy as well as the lighter side, so in one of our last bits we do on the show we call it Philoso-Funnies.

**Caltagiarone:** Okay.

**Weber:** Say Philoso-Funnies.

**Child:** Philoso-Funnies.

**Weber:** Say Philoso-Funnies.

**Child:** Philoso-Funnies.

**Weber:** Nick, we'd love to hear if you've got a favorite joke or a funniest fact or story, either about teaching Philosophy to high school students or about Philosophy in general. What's something funny in your experience? Do you have a joke or a story to tell us?

**Caltagiarone:** I could tell you, I'll try to briefly tell you a funny story, or at least I think it's a funny story. It was that very first year I was teaching Philosophy. The very first semester in fact and it was a first hour class. I had a student. This poor person, she was a senior. She had me for sophomore World History. She had me for junior American History and then she signed up for my Philosophy course her senior year, so three years in a row she had me as a teacher. She was a great kid. She came in every morning with a 20 oz Dunkin Donuts coffee and one particular morning she set it down on her desk and just knocked it over, so there's 20 oz of coffee spilling throughout my classroom. Kids were really great though. A couple of kids jumped up, we'll go get a towel. Somebody was like I'll go to the Teacher's Lounge and grab napkins. It was a collective effort to clean this up.

**Caltagiarone:** Once it's cleaned up the kids say, well we can't possibly have class now, we're too distracted. I said come on. That's distracted. That's nothing. It's not like there's a bee in the classroom and we've all had that experience where there's a bee in the classroom and everybody's eyes go to the ceiling and follow it with rapt attention. Well, as I'm pantomiming what it's like to have a bee in the classroom, another student, the one sitting next, closest to the door. Big kid. A senior boy. Probably about 6'2, 200 lbs jumps out of this desk. Says Holy Smokes there's somebody dressed as a bee in the hallway and sprints out of my room. About 15 seconds later he comes back with a kid, probably a freshman over his shoulder. This kid's legs are kicking and the kid is dressed head to toe in a bee outfit. He sets the kid down today.

**Weber:** Oh I hope you gave him the day off.

**Caltagiarone:** He sets the kid down in the middle of the room. I'm just, why are you dressed as a bee? He's like I'm doing a project for Botany, can I go now? We let him go and the kids of course again say, well now there's no way we can possibly have class. I said, no we're going to have class one way or another and in a very overly exaggerated way I grabbed my lectern from the side of the room and dragged it very forcibly to the middle of the room, forgetting that my coffee was on the lectern. It spilled. The girl who initially spilled her coffee raised her hand and said I'll go get the towels and I threw the towel in on class for that day.

**Cashio:** Was it a Monday too?

**Caltagiarone:** I don't remember, but it might as well have been.

**Weber:** That's a great story. I love it. Oh man. While Anthony and I grab a couple of short ones real quick. This is about sort of teachers and students and so forth. You want to tell the first one Anthony?

**Cashio:** People says I don't think I deserve a zero on this test and the teacher says, I agree that's the lowest mark I could give you. Rrr, rrr. I like this one. The student says what's it like being drunk and teachers replies well, you see those six desks. I drunk person would see 12 and the student replies. There are only three desks sir. Oh yes. I like that they clapped too. 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 the questions that we raise on the show.

**Weber:** That's right. Given that Nick, we'd love to hear your thoughts about what question we should ask everyone for our segment that we call, You Tell Me. Have you got a question you propose we ask our listeners?

**Caltagiarone:** I do, actually. Given the fact that stand along high school Philosophy courses aren't the norm and probably has not been part of the experience of most of your listeners. I would be really curious to know what your listeners, how they would answer if they could go back to the 17-year-old versions of themselves, what would they want to learn in a high school Philosophy class? Who would they want to study? How would they want to study that?

**Weber:** Nice, that's a really good question.

**Caltagiarone:** Probably not formal logic.

**Cashio:** That is, that's really.

**Weber:** Probably not formal logic. I don't know I was pretty nerdy. I might have enjoyed that.

**Cashio:** All right I want to thank everyone for listening to this episode of Philosophy Bakes Bread, Food For Thought About Life and Leadership. We, your host Dr. Anthony Cashio, that'd be me and Dr. Eric Weber are really grateful to have been joined this time around with Nick Caltagiarone and we hope our listeners will join us again. Thank you, Nick, for joining us today.

**Caltagiaronne:** Yes, thank you very much for having me. It was fun, awesome.

**Cashio:** It's been, what a great conversation. I hope that everyone listening will 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 question that Nick just raised for you. I think it was a great question, right? Do you go back in time, your 17-year-old self, you're taking a Philosophy class. What would you really like to learn? That'll be fun. That'll be fun.

**Caltagiaronne:** I would love to hear what people think about that. That'd be fun.

**Weber:** I'd love to hear what people think about that. That's right. Once again everybody you can reach us in a number of ways. We're on Twitter at PhilosophyBB which stands for I believe, Philosophy Bakes Bread. We're also on Facebook of course at Philosophy Bakes Bread and check out SOPHIA's Facebook page while you're there at Philosophers In America.

**Cashio:** If you're enjoying the show and we hope that you are, it would mean a lot to me and Eric if you would take just a second to head over to iTunes or your favorite podcasting service and take a second to rate and review us. The algorithms there, good rate, good review really helps us reach more people who you think . . .

**Weber:** That's right.

**Cashio:** Might enjoy Philosophy Bakes Bread. You can of course e-mail us comments, questions, praise at philosophybakesbread@gmail.com and then you can also call us and leave a 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. Give us a call. We want to know what you sound like. You have to listen to us.

**Weber:** That's right.

**Cashio:** We want to listen to you.

**Weber:** That's right.

**Cashio:** Turn-around is fair play. Join us again next time on Philosophy Bakes Bread. Food For Thought About Life And Leadership.

**Radio announcer:** Hey there, if you're enjoying this podcast from WRFL, Lexington, you may enjoy our live radio stream at WRFL.FM and of course via radio at 88.1 FM in the Central Kentucky area. We have a wide variety of programs you're sure to enjoy. Just go to WRFL.FM/schedule and see what programs appeal most to you. Thanks again for listening to this podcast from WRFL Lexington.