

Loving Life



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Weber: Hey, everybody. I am very pleased to be here to play for you a new episode of Philosophy Bakes Bread. It's been a while, I know. If you haven't caught the show in a while, the issue is that my wife and I have a new baby boy, and he came a little early. It's been a lot of work. He's doing well, thank you. Mama's doing well.

Weber: I'm very pleased to say that I've got an episode for you today, Episode #69, with Dr. John Lachs, who's been on the show before on Episode 5. He's back with us today in this episode to talk about his book, *In Love with Life*, which by no coincidence is the text that Anthony and I are going to be talking about on a canoe trip we're organizing with Alejandro Strong of Apeiron Expeditions down a river in Maine at the end of July, beginning of August. It's going to be awesome. If you want to learn more about that, head to apeironexpeditions.com and click on Trip Catalog. That's apeironexpeditions.com.

Weber: Thanks, everybody, for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode #69 with Dr. John Lachs, and the episode is titled Loving Life. I hope you enjoy.

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

Weber: Philosophy Bakes Bread is a production of the Society of Philosophers in America, aka SOPHIA. I'm Dr. Eric Thomas Weber.

Cashio: And I'm Dr. Anthony Cashio. A famous phrase says that philosophy bakes no bread, that it's not practical. Can you believe that? 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, and we hope you'll reach out to us on Twitter @PhilosophyBB, on Facebook @PhilosophyBakesBread, or by email at philosophybakesbread@gmail.com.

<http://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/06/12/073-ep69-loving-life/>

Cashio: Last but not least, you can leave us a short, recorded message with a question or a comment or even bountiful praise if you feel so inclined. It makes Eric's day, I can tell you guys that.

Weber: I just love it.

Cashio: It does. Loves it. We'll be able to play it on the show, and you can reach us at 859-257-1849. That's 859-257-1849. On today's show we're very excited to talk once again with Dr. John Lachs of Vanderbilt University. Welcome back to the show, John. We're really glad you could join us.

Lachs: It's a pleasure. It's a pleasure.

Weber: Wonderful.

Cashio: Yeah. Thanks for joining us. John was last on the show in Episode 5 way back in February 2017 when we talked about Stoic Pragmatism, also a great episode. Before he published that book, the book being Stoic Pragmatism, though, he wrote and published a great and short book titled In Love with Life. He has written a few new chapters for an updated version of the book, and we're going to talk today with John about that earlier and soon to be extended book in this episode we're calling Loving Life.

Weber: That's right. In the late 1990s and early 2000s I had the great honor to take a number of courses with John at Vanderbilt, and he was the most genuinely happy person I'd ever seen. He taught about things that I found most compelling and fascinating, which is how we came to know each other. When I graduated from college, furthermore, I longed to be thinking more about the philosophy that I studied with John, so I went and got my hands on each of his many books. The one that had the most profound impact on my life was this short and beautiful book, In Love with Life.

Weber: As you may have heard, Anthony and I will be talking about the book with a small group of canoers, a group that our listeners can still join if you're interested, this late July and early August on a beautiful river trip in Maine. To learn more about that, head over to apeironexpeditions.com. That's A-P-E-I-R-O-N, apeironexpeditions.com, and click on Trip Catalog to learn more.

Cashio: It's going to be a fantastic trip, a whole lot of fun. We're going to canoe around Maine, and we're going to talk about this book, In Love with Life. To give people a taste of that topic and to tell about what to expect in the new extended version of In Love with Life, we thought we'd invite John on to talk about the book. Now, as you, John, and regular listeners know, we typically start with the first segment called Know Thyself.

Weber: Know Thyself.

Cashio: We've done that in Episode 5 of the show, so go back, listeners, and check that out if you're like, who is this mysterious John, John Lachs. When we have return guests on, we generally change things up in some way. We can ask people about some other aspect of themselves or about new, fun questions about philosophy and so on, but in this case we have a very special opportunity.

Weber: That's right. Listeners may remember that Philosophy Bakes Bread is a production of the Society of Philosophers in America, SOPHIA, which I talked a little bit about in Episode 44 of the show when Anthony interviewed me about philosophy leadership and SOPHIA. Go check out that episode.

Weber: But on top of being an author, a professor and a mentor to many philosophers, John is also the chairman of SOPHIA's Board of Trustees, so given that, we thought it might be a great idea to invite John in this first segment to tell people about what SOPHIA is, where it came from, what it was trying to do early on, and what it's all about today as you see it, John. How does that sound? Is that a reasonable way to introduce you and this episode, John? That sound good?

Lachs: Sure. It's a good way. It's a good way to talk about what philosophy is all about for a couple hours, maybe three.

Weber: All right.

Lachs: But we won't do that. I promise not to do that. Philosophy went through difficult years, difficult decades back in the 1950s, '60s, '70s. The problem was that the field had become unintelligible toward many people. Philosophy was something that philosophers did, and they did it within the university. The more technical it was, the better it suited everybody, everybody who was a philosopher. The result was that philosophy books became rare. They were not printed because they would be sure losers.

Lachs: Unfortunately, this went on for so long, and it made it so difficult for us in the university trying to teach and show the relevance of philosophy to life. It became so difficult that it put us on the defensive. It looked like we weren't precise. It looked like we were not exactly doing what physicists do. The ideal always was look at the results that physicists are able to reach, and philosophers need to be as precise as that and reach results like that. Well, that's a hopeless task because that's not what philosophy is all about.

Lachs: What philosophy is all about is really its ancient purpose, and that is to help people lead better lives. It's not a question of knock-down, drag out truths that we come up with. It's not a matter of what we can prove in any important sense of proof. It has to do with what, if you apply it to your life, it does for you. It's a matter of doing. That was the struggle inside the American Philosophical Association back all the way to 1978. The trouble with the association was that it became an organ of humiliation, because somebody would-

Cashio: How do you mean?

Lachs: Well, let me tell you. Somebody would go ahead and read a paper, and it was always reading a paper and full of logical symbols. An audience would go after him or her and literally savage the person so as to make the individual look like a fool, because this was wrong and that was wrong and this wasn't precise enough and that wasn't right.

Weber: Fun environment, very encouraging.

Lachs: It was really awful. I have seen people, whose name I won't mention, they're distinguished philosophers, leave after their paper and the discussion in tears because they

couldn't defend themselves. With sharp critics, it's impossible to defend yourself. Everything is up for grabs. That was essentially the starting point of SOPHIA.

Weber: John, what kinds of things did people argue about back then? What were the topics of papers that people would give? If you say they were not so obviously applicable to real life, what did people talk about if they were being philosophical in those ways?

Lachs: The attempt was made to state everything in the language of *Principia Mathematica*. This, we don't even know what it is anymore. This is a very elaborate set of volumes actually where everything is propositional, so everything begins with all or some, or some not and all not or none. Everything has to be stated in a proper way that would be acceptable in the language of *Principia Mathematica*.

Weber: So that's what you mean by mathematica. It's got this all or some categorical statement like all mammals are animals and Socrates is a man, or some of these or those. Is that what you're talking about? That's the sense in which it's mathematical?

Lachs: That's right. It was an attempt to ground mathematics by Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, two unquestionably excellent philosophers, but they were mathematicians also. They wanted to be sure that there's a philosophical foundation to mathematics and in the process made available to philosophers a language, and not a very happy language, in which everything had to be, first of all, squeezed into knowledge or something like knowledge. More than that, everything had to be presented in an acceptable fashion. If your language was not translatable into *Principia Mathematica* sort of language, the likelihood was, or at least the supposition was, that it really doesn't say anything.

Weber: So, part of this mathematical language as you framed it is in a sense trying to make philosophy more like physics, more like these other quantitative fields, because people were emphasizing that way of knowing. Is that correct?

Lachs: First of all, people were emphasizing knowing, and secondly, as you say, the knowing had to take a certain form.

Cashio: It didn't count as knowing if it wasn't in that form.

Lachs: It was meaningless unless it could be stated in that language.

Weber: So, what was the effect of using this kind of approach to philosophy?

Lachs: Crushing boredom.

Weber: Why is that?

Lachs: Crushing boredom, believe me. I lived through it. I was trained an analytic philosopher, and there were things I was interested in. I was interested in what makes life better, whether there's a god, questions like that. Those questions were not exactly welcomed.

Weber: In this milieu, SOPHIA seemed necessary?

Lachs: SOPHIA was a salvation because it enabled people to feel justified in dealing with the kinds of philosophical topics in the language that they preferred. That meant that precision was not the highest. That meant that people had to actually say things that were interesting and important.

Weber: What makes that difference?

Lachs: Well, first of all, the subject matter was different. It was not the formalization of metaethics. It was not the formalization of Kant's first critique.

Weber: And what's metaethics?

Lachs: Metaethics is not thinking about any ethical problem but thinking about how one thinks about ethical problems.

Cashio: That is very meta.

Weber: That's pretty meta.

Lachs: It can be interesting. I remember as a young graduate student it was fascinating to me what the nature of a fact was. We argued in graduate school about what is a fact. Our teacher said, "You don't need to know any facts. The important thing is to understand what a fact is if there were such things."

Cashio: Oh, my goodness. Well, philosophy's kind of changed its trajectory quite a bit, at least in some parts, since then.

Lachs: Part of the reason why it's changed is because there was a reaction, and part of the reaction and close to the heart of the reaction was this organization, SOPHIA, the Society of Philosophers in America, and the heaviest emphasis is on philosophers, not people who are logic choppers, not people who had abandoned the ultimate purpose of philosophy but people who actually settled in and were willing to say things that were significant to other people. Those are the people, some of them were philosophers, but many of them were just ordinary people who wanted to appropriate the good things out of philosophy. A lot of people went back to Plato, because there are all kinds of good things in Plato.

Cashio: Always good things in Plato.

Lachs: Always good stuff. Then after a while there was a serious effort made to do what we could to enlighten and contribute to fields of endeavor other than philosophy and kind of an outreach program. The most important outreach was medical ethics, where there were so many difficult moral problems, not metaethical problems but actual immediate moral problems as to what you do with people who had been in a coma for 30 years. By the way, I love to quote the fact that the world's record of being in a coma is 36 years.

Weber: Wow.

Lachs: That is a woman who got hit in the head by an intruder. You ask yourself, what is it that this person is experiencing? Maybe nothing, and what is it that we can do to decide whether to

allow her to die or not? Now, those are serious questions, and they're not storable in metaethical form, or they're not storable in Principia Mathematica form.

Weber: And those are examples of the kinds of things that SOHPIA has been focused upon?

Lachs: Exactly.

Weber: Very nice. Well, unfortunately, we're out of time for this segment, but we can return to these subjects in one of the three following segments that we have with John. Thank you, everybody, for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Eric Weber. My co-host is Anthony Cashio, and we'll be right back.

Cashio: Hey, everybody. Eric and I are joining up with Alejandro Strong and Apeiron Expeditions to lead a philosophical canoe trip on the waterways of Maine from July 29th through August 1st of 2018.

Weber: After comfortable canoeing easy enough for any fitness level, we'll enjoy tasty meals and some tasty philosophy talking about John Lachs's book, In Love with Life.

Cashio: Guys, if you enjoy the podcast, I think you're going to love this trip. Eric, how can people sign up?

Weber: Head over to Apeiron Expeditions' website and click on Trip Catalog.

Cashio: That's apeironexpeditions.com.

Weber: Also, Apeiron has a really cool pay-what-you-will pricing system, so definitely check it out.

Cashio: It's really cool and innovative. I like it. Join us and have a good time thinking about the good life.

Cashio: Welcome back, everyone, to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber here talking today with Dr. John Lachs about loving life. In this second segment we'll ask John about his book, In Love with Life, as it first appeared in its initial release in 1998. Then in the next segment we'll ask John about what more he thought an updated version of the book should cover. I should point out the subtitle for the book In Love with Life is Reflections on the Joy of Living and Why We Hate to Die. That's a very nice subtitle. I like it.

Cashio: Let's start with the big picture, John. What motivated you to write In Love with Life? What purpose did you mean to serve in writing it?

Lachs: The same that we talked about earlier. The idea is to open up the possibility of philosophical reflection on important topics. I remember driving the Pennsylvania turnpike, and it occurred to me as that turnpike turns and twists and beautiful, beautiful land, it occurred to me how wonderful life was and started thinking about it, started taking notes, and eventually produced this book. The point of the book is to celebrate life, but more than celebrate life, enable people to have their attention called to the fact that life is wonderful. It's not that we don't know

it, but there's so much stress and tension, so much unhappiness, so many problems in the world that we forget, and we shouldn't.

Lachs: I have an interesting experience that I want to report. There's an azalea bush that grows in the back of my house. It's a beautiful fuchsia color. It's a huge bush. I have a guy who comes and cuts the grass. He cuts the grass, then I said, "I hope you didn't cut that bush." He said, "What bush?"

Weber: Uh-oh.

Lachs: I said, "The bush that's living pink color." He said, "I didn't see anything like that."

Cashio: Oh no.

Lachs: He didn't see it. He cut around it. This is almost impossible to believe, but it's true. He actually didn't see it. Well, that's how we are with much of life.

Cashio: He really cut around it and didn't pay attention? That's impressive.

Lachs: He never went back. When I said, "Well, it's in the back of the house." He said, "Okay." Just, okay.

Weber: So at least he didn't cut it down, but your point is that he didn't even recognize it. He didn't take a minute to appreciate it.

Lachs: He didn't appreciate it. He didn't recognize it. He actually, I believe, actually did not see it.

Weber: Wow.

Lachs: I don't know how it's possible for a person not to see something that's in plain view, but it obviously is possible because he did it. This is, I'd say, a late-30s kind of guy, very decent, very good, not very perceptive, and not very perceptive is what we are with respect to life.

Lachs: How wonderful is it not to be pain? You only know that when you're in pain, and you wish to God that you weren't. It might sound crazy, but isn't it reason to celebrate that we're not in pain, that we're able to do things? I think that's absolutely wonderful. Now, the objection is that this is simpleminded. Sure, I like it.

Weber: You like what?

Lachs: The simplemindedness of it.

Cashio: So you accept the objection and say, yes, you're right, it is simpleminded.

Lachs: Yes. Simpleminded people are on the whole happier than complex-minded persons. At least in my experience, the more complex your life, the more complex your mind, the less likely it is that you're going to be able to satisfy it.

Weber: Interesting. Well, John, I want to come back to this point, but in the background of what we're hearing, I'm noticing a point about appreciating beauty, what we philosophers call aesthetic appreciation, right?

Lachs: Right.

Weber: We mentioned in Episode 5 of this show that you won an award as a young man for poetry, and you had your poetry published in the book *The Tides of Time*. My question for you about that and about *In Love with Life* is basically, what role did poetry play, if any, in your thinking, in your delivery of *In Love with Life* or both, and to challenge that, didn't Plato call for banning the poets from society? Don't poets create misleading shadows on the wall of Plato's cave?

Lachs: That's what he thought. This is a complicated matter. It needn't be complicated, but it is. In a time that I was writing poetry, I was using poetry to enable me to write the wrongs that were happening, to make it possible for me to objectify my pain. As Goethe used to say, you've got to objectify your pain. That was not the kind of aesthetic appreciation that I managed to or fell into later on in life.

Lachs: Let me try to explain what I have in mind. When I'm able to write about something, it makes me feel better. If I understand something that I didn't understand before, it's a banner day. I used poetry for that purpose, the poetry that came out in the book form. That's not the aesthetic appreciation that I came to love.

Lachs: I'll tell you what the aesthetic appreciation is. I get up in the morning. I live on a hill, and I go immediately to the windows and look over what's happening in the faraway mountains. What's happening in the mountains might be that there's fog enshrouding them. I live with two cats, and the two cats and I stand there in awe. Then I go about my life. It's the immediacy of the aesthetic experience. It's the immediate beauty of it that appeals to me.

Weber: That's beautiful.

Lachs: I'm lucky enough not to be in position where I have to objectify my pain, because I don't live in pain.

Cashio: John, I have a question, and it has to do with the subtitle of your book. *In Love with Life*, it's almost a response to a question. If you get to read the book, for the listeners, he starts out with this, that the question is why do we hate to die?

Lachs: Because we love to do the things that we love to do.

Cashio: You think it's as simple as that?

Lachs: It's as simple as that, in my opinion. There is obviously in some people some worry about what's on the other side, if there is another side, but I think we love what we do, absolutely love what we do. Even people who hate doing things that they have to do, even those people still somehow, strangely enough, come to love their lives.

Lachs: I have another experience that was meaningful to me. I used to take my laundry down when I taught at William & Mary, laundry down to the laundry people on campus. They were there 50 weeks of the year, and for 50 weeks of the year they complained as to how terrible things were. The pay wasn't enough, that it was too hot or it was too cold; the manager was a nasty so-and-so and so on, all the usual complaints that we all get. Well, for two weeks they went off during the summer, and when they came back they were regaling each other with stories about how they missed their work, how they missed the people that they worked with. I couldn't believe it, but they were very serious about it.

Lachs: What is this all about? We hate things, and then we love them. You love them especially after you lose them. They were anxious to come back. Some of them came back after 10 days instead of two weeks.

Cashio: They wouldn't take the whole time?

Lachs: They didn't take the whole time. They were used to doing things, the predictability of it, the value of it, the pride that goes into doing something right. It was a wonderful lesson to me.

Weber: John, in what you've said already, one point you've raised that's an important theme of the book has to do with not being wrapped in worry about the future or feeling guilty about the past but being able to appreciate the present, which may be the problem for this lawnmower man who didn't notice your bush. I wanted to highlight that as one of the themes that I've always enjoyed thinking about from the book.

Weber: There's another very important theme though. We've got a few minutes left in this segment. I want to make sure we ask you about it. Both you and Aristotle highlight the importance of activity in happiness. For those who aren't initiated, what do you mean by activity, and what insights do you have, if any, about how to choose the activities that are most likely to make us happy?

Lachs: That's a difficult set of questions, but I can talk to you about activity. Aristotle drew this remarkable and wonderful distinction between things that we do for their own sake and things that we do for the sake of something else. For instance, I might go walking just because I like walking. On the other hand, I might go walking because my car broke down and I got to get home.

Weber: I like the former a whole lot better than the latter.

Lachs: Exactly, exactly. Much of our existence consists of just that kind of process of having to do this in order to get that, having to do the kinds of things that we wouldn't normally be caught dead doing, but you got to do it because that's your purpose. That is what you have to do in order to eat. That's what you have to do in order to whatever, fill in the blank.

Lachs: That distinction has always stayed with me from Aristotle. I love the idea of doing things for their own sake, absolutely wonderful thing. It's a version of freedom, and I love freedom, where you're not told what to do. Nobody meddles with you in your life. You simply go ahead and do what you want to do and enjoy it.

Lachs: Just one more thought about it, the wonderful thing about it is it makes you lose your sense of time. Eternity is not everlasting long life. Eternity is the enjoyment of the moment, because there is no time when you enjoy that moment.

Cashio: Oh, wow. Wow.

Weber: I've thought about that insight from Aristotle many times for a long time, and I've never quite seen it that way. Interesting.

Lachs: It's one of my favorite more contemporary philosophers, not exactly contemporary, is George Santayana, who was, although Spanish in origin, lived in this country. This is what he thinks life is all about. This is what he thinks spirituality is about.

Weber: Is about getting lost in the ...

Lachs: In the moment.

Weber: In the moment.

Cashio: Getting lost in the moment and finding eternity here in the present.

Weber: That's pretty beautiful. Well, I think that's a fantastic place to say that, unfortunately, we have to stop and take a short break, but we're going to come back with two more segments with John Lachs. This is Eric Weber. My co-host is Anthony Cashio. Thank you, everyone, for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread. We'll be right back.

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Cashio: Welcome back, everyone, to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber talking today with John Lachs about loving life. In the last segment we asked John about his book *In Love with Life* and some of the major themes in it as it originally appeared in 1998. We have a few more questions for John about that, but in this segment we also want to ask him about the new chapters that he has written for an extended version of the book.

Weber: John, what Anthony and I thought we'd do is to just give you an opportunity at the beginning of this segment to tell us the big picture kind of major points in terms of takeaways that are insights about how to live a happy life given the challenges you note in the book. Let's start there and then let that transition into, well, what did you think the 1998 book still needed such that you added new chapters recently? Why don't we start there, so what do you think are major insights that are important for us to consider in order to have a happy life as you describe them in *In Love with Life* in the first version?

Lachs: Well, I think for one, we've got to admit the fact that we love life. We obfuscate, beat about the bush. We love to complain. We absolutely love to complain.

Cashio: It's fun. It's my favorite part of winter is complaining about the weather.

Lachs: It's essentially a way of shifting the burden of misery on somebody else. I know a number of people who are big complainers, and they're so happy to be able to complain. Well, if that's what it takes, that's fine, but it's better to be more positive, to say it's going to work out. I was just discussing this with somebody yesterday, is it an annoying thing to say that it'll work out? The function of this idea of it'll work out, the function of it is not to make a prediction. The function of it is to give encouragement. Because if it seems like it's going to work out, then I better get shoulder to wheel and help it come into existence.

Lachs: I like the idea of taking on a task and helping reality to improve itself, but the best way to do that is simply to be energetic and to admit the fact that you like what you're doing. A lot of people don't like what they're doing, or so they say, but in reality if they're denied whatever their work is, you can't do it anymore, they hate it.

Cashio: You think this applies for everyone? I mean, there's some people who just genuinely don't like their job or parts of their work they do. I've got a pile of papers here that need to be graded. It wouldn't hurt to pass that off.

Lachs: Don't pass it this way.

Cashio: So, you wouldn't take it either.

Lachs: No. Nothing applies to everyone. I've come to believe that. Human nature is multiple. There's so many ways in which we approach reality. There's so many ways in which we suffer. There's so many ways in which we take delight, but suffering we don't mind sharing with others. Delight we don't even share with ourselves.

Cashio: Wow.

Weber: That's interesting. I think one way of saying what you're saying is that if we're really going to appreciate life, we have to realize that we do, that you can't appreciate it if you don't recognize that it ought to be appreciated. Is that part of the message?

Lachs: It's full of azalea bushes, and we don't see them.

Weber: Well-

Lachs: You have to go out of your way not to see them, but boy, we know how to do it.

Weber: Yup. Well, John, so you've written two new chapters for the book. One is called Ambush, and the other one is called Quality of Life. What did you think was needed for the earlier version of the book, and what were you aiming to do with these new chapters?

Lachs: Well, the difficulty with ambush is, as everything that I do in philosophy, it grows out of a personal experience. This is part of the chapter. A woman who's a dear friend of ours somehow comes down with breast cancer, and she struggles to understand it. She wants to know why herself, not somebody else. It's not enough for her to hear from me that there's no answer to that as to why you, because the same question arises if it's anybody else. It's anybody else, it's still why that person. There's just absolutely nothing that I can tell her, absolutely nothing I can tell

you that's enlightening, absolutely nothing that would put you in a position of understanding why you've been selected out for this.

Lachs: Eventually, she dies and what remains is the enigma of life. You go to the cemetery and you see people 35 years old interred. At the same time, you see people 90 years old who are frisky as all get out. There's basically, when you're ambushed by life or you're ambushed by death actually, it's something that just happens. It's awful to admit that it just happens, but that's the truth of it. We don't have an insight into the plan, if there is a plan. That's one chapter, the Ambush chapter.

Lachs: The second chapter is Quality of Life, which is really happiness. I've been struggling with the questions about what it is that makes people happy and what it takes. That's my latest version of that.

Weber: I see.

Lachs: If we have time, I can summarize that very quickly.

Cashio: We have time.

Weber: Sure, we do.

Cashio: I was about to ask you to do just that. What is going on with quality of life?

Lachs: Let's call it quality of life or call it happiness. The upshot of it is this. We are happy when we're successful in doing things and we have the prospect of more things like that that we'll be able to do. It's all doing. It's all doing, and we do all kinds of things, and we love doing those things. When there's the power, the freedom to do, the power to achieve, it's just delicious.

Cashio: And so, you think that the key, at least to a good quality of life, that happiness, is to have that freedom and that power?

Lachs: Yup.

Cashio: All together. As we lose some of those freedoms, do you think the quality of life goes away, that we can lose happiness, or do we need to change and adapt in different ways? For instance, my grandmother is older now, and she can't drive as much as she used to. That is a major loss of freedom and power in her life. She still seems quite happy.

Lachs: Sometimes I think the reason people who are restricted in their freedom are happy is because they tend to forget what it was like when they had full power and full freedom. We focus upon the things that we want to focus on, and it's done subconsciously so many things that we do. A friend of mine said the following. He's getting old. He's having trouble buttoning buttons, and he's reached a stage that he doesn't really remember the time when he did it easily. He puts up with it. It's one of those things.

Weber: Is it a good thing that we adapt in that way to forget easier times and greater powers?

Lachs: If you don't forget, you'll be suffering.

Cashio: So, forgetting in this case is a great gift.

Lachs: It is. It's bemoaning youth, and I would say if you're going to be happy as an older person, don't bemoan your youth because it's not going to come back. Adjust, be sensible, go after achievable things like small victories.

Lachs: My mother before she died would have hopes. My students have hopes for 30, 40, 50 years of life, all kinds of purposes, all kinds of good things. Okay, my mother had small hopes. Hopes come in sizes. Her hopes were it's not going to hurt this morning. "I love the coffee," she said. If we keep in mind that there are sizes of hopes, life becomes easier.

Weber: Interesting, and thus, quality of life better.

Lachs: Much better.

Weber: So, John, I've had the honor to have the chance to read your two new chapters. There's something about the title of the chapter called Ambush which I really loved, and it brought to mind for me the warning that we get from the Stoic, Seneca, that the world is a storm, and it's coming for you. In that sense, if you're not prepared, which he tells you to do, it'll seem like you've been ambushed, but we choose to be ambushed when we don't prepare for our difficulties in life. Is that a right way to see your intentions with that title, or is there a different aim for the chapter than something like Seneca's warning?

Lachs: Well, Seneca's warning is part of the story. I love the Stoics, as you know, but I don't like being stoic or stoical all my life. I subscribe to the idea of making life better through a number of ways. If you make life better, you may have to be ready for the storm that'll take you away, but you don't have to remember that all the time. I like the idea of being able to successfully defeat some of the problems of life. I absolutely love that.

Weber: Yeah. That presents an interesting difference between you and the Stoics that I hadn't thought of before. Because the Stoics might always be telling you to prepare for the future, prepare for the storm, but if you only ever worry about the future, you won't notice the azaleas.

Lachs: Exactly.

Cashio: May cut down the azaleas. They're not practical. May plant something else.

Lachs: Yeah.

Cashio: I like that.

Lachs: No. I was very happy that he didn't see it but didn't cut it.

Weber: Right, the azalea bush.

Lachs: Yeah. Because some idiot might come along and not see it and simply roll over it, cut it down.

Weber: Right.

Cashio: In Episode 5 of the show, John, we talked about Stoic Pragmatism, so this seems like a nice sort of segue into talking about this. In that episode and in that book, you present an outlook about how to balance the optimism of what we call the pragmatist outlook in everyday activities with the accepting stoic attitude in the big picture about the fact that our efforts will always be limited by things beyond our control. Someone we don't know might just come cut down our azalea bush.

Cashio: In Love with Life was published long before Stoic Pragmatism. Would you say there's early influences or threads of Stoic Pragmatism in this earlier book?

Lachs: It's really interesting, the Stoic Pragmatism book begins with the recognition that I've been a stoic pragmatist all my life, but I never focused on it as an attitude, as something that I want to foster. It just was the way I comported myself. It was the way that I saw that life was made better. I was always in the business of trying to make life better, but I'm also in the business of not fighting when the odds are overwhelming.

Weber: Very interesting. Well, that I think is a terrific place to say that we need to take a break yet again before one last segment with John about loving life. This is Eric Weber and Anthony Cashio talking with Dr. John Lachs of Vanderbilt University, and you've been listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread. Thanks, everybody, for listening, and we'll be right back.

Cashio: Welcome back, everyone, to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber, and today we've been having a really wonderful and enlightening conversation with John Lachs about loving life. In the last two segments we talked to John about his book, In Love with Life. In this last segment we're going to end with a big picture question for John, and we're going to break some bread. We're going to have some hopefully lighthearted moment of levity, revel in that, and then we'll end with a question for our listeners to think about as we go about our day's business.

Weber: Indeed. John, there's a common outlook in the United States that people should keep a positive attitude. Some authors like Barbara Ehrenreich in her book Bright-Sided have argued that we take that attitude way too far and that people are worse off for it. When we ask each other, "How you doing," the answer is supposed to be, "Fine," or "Well, thanks." If we launch into our difficulties, people who asked us about how we're doing typically react in a way that lets us know they weren't really interested in hearing about our woes.

Weber: One potential criticism of your outlook would be to say that it's too focused on happiness and positivity. Maybe we're being blissfully ignorant about our problems, as we noted earlier, problems in the world when we follow your advice. What would you say to that line of criticism?

Lachs: Well, life is full of difficulties. From time to time you're able to be victorious, from time to time for a time. I think that supporting each other in that quest is good, is productive. Nobody likes people and the effect of those people on us who say, when you ask them, how are you, you say, "Oh, terrible, absolutely. My kidneys hurt, and my nose is twitching." Who wants to deal with people like that? Now, you also don't want to deal with people who are hail-fellow-well-met, pound you on the back and says, "All right, you're a good guy. Everything is okay."

Lachs: I think a measure, suitable measure, is so much better than overdoing it. I don't think we overdo too much in terms of seeking out the bit of happiness that we can seek and get in life.

When I say there's a bit of happiness, I mean there's so many things that are tragic. There's so many things that are difficult. There's so many reasons in our society for tension and misery.

Lachs: My daughter has just been helping a friend of hers in an effort to make it possible for her to be a judge. The tension that goes into such a set of activities is really astonishing. I didn't realize what it took for somebody, one person to take on all the problems of people whom they want to put on you because you're going to be a judge. It's astonishing to me how much stress was involved in this activity that lasted two months.

Lachs: I would say it's not so much that we make ourselves miserable by taking on a happy attitude. I think that we make ourselves happy by taking on an attitude that is worth taking, that has some sunshine in it; that's what I'm trying to say, some sunshine. I'm a great friend of sun.

Weber: This goes along with what you said earlier about how in a sense you're not predicting that we ought to feel happy or that our lives our easy but saying that when you affirm life, you do those things that are more in line with making yourself happy. Is that right?

Lachs: Exactly, exactly.

Cashio: I really, really like this point. In our first segment of almost every show we have a segment called Know Thyself. Because it's a really important process of philosophy to become more self-aware, and as you become more self-aware, you can live a better life and act upon it. Self-deception is a big difficulty. We lie to ourselves about the problems we have. We lie to ourselves about that.

Cashio: I think really, like what you're pointing out here, is that one of the lies that we tell to ourselves is that we actually like life. If we stop deceiving ourselves by the sort of joy of life and the times we're happy and stop lying to ourselves about that, we can bring a little sunshine in.

Lachs: Yeah. That's exactly right.

Cashio: All right. I like that.

Weber: Very nice.

Cashio: Usually, when you hear people talk about self-deception, you're like, well, you need to be more honest with yourself about your problems, but sometimes you also need to be more honest with yourselves about the good, the bounties of life. I think that's a really important lesson.

Lachs: Yeah. There's much to be grateful for. I enjoy the folks who started up the idea of positive psychology. You can be too positive maybe, I don't know, but certainly some positivity actually is enabling. It puts you in a position where you can reach into a pool of energy because you believe.

Weber: So in a sense, there's a middle ground between being a total naysayer and being this person who sees the sunny side in everything and ignores our problems in life. There's a middle ground, and we should fall in the middle, maybe leaning towards the joyous side.

Lachs: Well put. I like leaning toward the joyous side.

Cashio: That's good. All right. Well, John, this is the part of the show where we usually ask our guest if they think philosophy bakes bread. It is actually the name of the show after all, but we've already asked you this. We had you on for Episode 5, and we already asked you if you think philosophy bakes bread. You gave a wonderfully beautiful answer, so this time maybe we're going to ask you for maybe an example of bread baking as it's related to your book.

Cashio: Is there maybe a part of your book or something about your book or what you're arguing in it that you think is a great example of philosophy baking bread?

Lachs: Well, the best place to start baking bread is in your own oven. A year and a half ago my wife died. We lived together very happily for 49 years, very happily. It was a reasonable question for me as to what attitude to take to this. First, one says denial. She is going to come back. She is not going to be permanently absent. Then after a while you realize that that's bull. That's not adult thinking.

Lachs: So you put yourself in a situation where you act like the person who you claim to be. I claim to be a pragmatist. I claim to be a stoic. As a stoic pragmatist, I have to take a certain attitude to the kind of momentous loss that I experienced. If I were only a stoic, I would probably commit suicide. They were big on that.

Weber: Wow.

Lachs: If I'm only a pragmatist, then I would be a bloody fool smiling along and saying, "Oh, we'll rejoin each other somewhere." Where? You have to face up to the facts and make the best of it. My point is only you have to enact what you believe, and I'm working on it.

Weber: But it's hard, isn't it? Honestly, John, I had the chance to teach stoicism this semester, and there's a very difficult passage in Epictetus, in his handbook, where he says, "Not only do we need to accept things, the real stoic is someone who wants things to happen as they happen." As I've said before, I had a daughter who suffered a stroke on her first day of life. The idea of wanting that to have happened is absurd.

Lachs: Of course.

Weber: But I try to justify it by saying, well, being able to accept, but that's not the same thing as wanting it, right?

Lachs: I think you just had the exactly right distinction to make.

Weber: That's good.

Lachs: It's one thing for us to want something, it's another thing to acquiesce in it. My stoicism is only acquiescence. When it's clear that life has all the weapons and you don't have any defense, as when your loved one dies, is it not stoical to say, "I have to make the best of it because this is how life fell out for us"? That's stoic. I think the idea of wanting it to have happened this way is overdoing it. It's even foolish.

Weber: Yeah. So maybe that was just a passage of overstatement for Epictetus.

Lachs: Epictetus loves to overstate.

Weber: Thank you.

Cashio: It's kind of his mark, isn't it?

Weber: I feel like so much fun to read.

Lachs: Well, he had to overstate. He was a slave, and his life was pretty miserable. He also had all kinds of physical ailments. He was a clubfoot, and he talked to himself, and he said, "This is exactly the way I want." My story about that, let me take a second.

Weber: Sure.

Lachs: My story about that is that I wake up in the middle of the night, which is very rare, and I'm hungry. So I go to the refrigerator and look for some apple pie. Well, there's no apple pie, so okay, I keep on looking because now I have the idea of maybe some muffins. There are no muffins, but I find a half-eaten slice of bread, and I say to myself, "That's what I wanted all along." There's an element of madness here, because you want something that, left alone, you wouldn't have wanted to save your life. I don't want an old piece of bread, half hard.

Cashio: Half pieces of bread are not the same thing as a tasty, warm apple pie.

Weber: No.

Lachs: But Epictetus would say, "Hey, this is the good stuff," and I don't see it.

Weber: Well, good, because that passage always bothered me. Well, actually, that's a pretty good example of a philosophunny story or joke actually, and that's what we were going to transition to, John. As you know, in every episode we want to make sure people see the serious side of philosophy as well as the lighter side, so we have this bit we call Philosofunnies.

Weber: Say filosofunnies.

Sam: Philosofunnies.

Weber: Say Philosofunnies.

Sam: Philosofunnies.

Weber: That was Sam at three years old, and it's amazing that was a year ago now. We want to invite you if you have a funny story or a joke to tell or, honestly, I think that was a pretty good one, John, but do you have a funny joke or a story to tell us about philosophy or about your book or about anything?

Lachs: No, not right now, but I know you do.

Weber: We do, actually. I like your story about Epictetus and the piece of bread. I think that works for me, but as usual, Anthony and I do gather some.

Cashio: Yes, we have. This is our attempt to, how do we put it, lean towards the good.

Weber: Yeah, and lean toward the joy, joyful and sunshine.

Cashio: All right. Do you want to go first, Eric, or you want me to go?

Weber: Sure. My tennis opponent was not happy with my serve. He kept returning it. It's not great, but it's okay.

Lachs: That's good. I like that.

Cashio: This one comes from someone named Max Coffin. We'll give a citation here. I never knew what real happiness was until I got married. By then, it was just too late.

Weber: Ouch. Zing.

Cashio: I love my wife.

Weber: Caveat.

Lachs: Don't go home tonight.

Weber: Right. Be careful. Here's a line from Elbert Hubbard. He said, "Do not take life too seriously, you'll never get out of it alive."

Lachs: I heard that one.

Cashio: It's a great one. Well, guys, my boss told me to have a good day, so I got up and went home.

Weber: Oh, boy.

Cashio: Got a rim shot on that one. All right, well, last but not least, we want to take advantage of the fact that today we have our powerful social media. We can connect to people and communicate with people, and this works even for programs like radio shows. We want to invite our listeners to send us their thoughts about big questions that we've raised on the show.

Weber: That's right. Given that, John, we'd love to hear your thoughts about what question we should ask everyone for the segments that we call You Tell Me! Have you got a question to pose for our listeners?

Lachs: My questions is, do you find it difficult to engage in activity and not in process? What I mean by activity, as you'll recall, is doing something for its own sake, standing there and being able to enjoy the moment, absorbed in the moment. Is that difficult? Some friends of mine told me it was not only difficult but impossible for them.

Weber: Wow. That's kind of sad.

Lachs: I don't find it impossible. Yeah. I don't find it impossible at all. All you got to do is suppress your purposes or focus your purpose in what you're doing.

Weber: Anyone, I think, who plays a musical instrument has a sense of being able to do something for its own sake or could anyway. I don't play guitar for the increase in mathematical aptitude you gain from playing music. That's a good question. Is it hard to do things for their own sake? Very interesting.

Lachs: I think for some people how are totally in love with their purposes, it's very difficult. Maybe the guy who cut my grass was so intent on cutting grass and getting out of there that he just didn't see the color, didn't see the bush.

Weber: I would think cutting the lawn for its own sake, you would appreciate the garden and the environment.

Lachs: Yeah, but I think he was cutting it for the money.

Weber: Right.

Cashio: You get caught up. So, you're trying to get to that yard, so then you can get to the next yard. The more yards you can do in a day, the more money you make.

Weber: Right.

Lachs: Next time I'll remind him that he is to appreciate the bush, and that should be enough payment.

Cashio: Part of your job.

Weber: Smell the flowers.

Cashio: Smell the flowers.

Lachs: That should be enough payment.

Cashio: That should be enough payment. Tell us how that goes.

Weber: Yeah. How will that go over?

Cashio: All right. Well, Eric, let's plug our trip one more time.

Weber: All right.

Cashio: I hope you guys have enjoyed this conversation with John Lachs about In Love with Life. Just a reminder that Eric and I will be talking about the book with a small group of canoers in Maine this summer. It's an easy trip. It's a wonderful trip, and if you've enjoyed what we've been talking about so far, we'll be definitely diving in deeper into some of the themes and

attitudes. It will be late July, early August, and for more information head onto apeironexpeditions.com. That's apeironexpeditions.com. You can click on Trip Catalog there to find a lot more about how to join me and Eric, and I guess John will be there in spirit.

Weber: In spirit.

Cashio: He is definitely our spirit guide on this trip.

Weber: That's right.

Lachs: Yeah.

Weber: Yeah. I hope you all will join us. It's going to be a lot of fun, and don't worry, it doesn't take a significant fitness level. You know that because I'm going to be on the trip.

Cashio: We'll be leaning towards the good the whole time we're there, a lot of sunshine.

Weber: That's right, leaning towards joy.

Cashio: Towards joy. I love it. Well, thanks, everyone, for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread. Your hosts, Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber, are really grateful to have been joined by John Lachs. Thank you, John. This has been a really wonderful conversation.

Weber: Thank you, John.

Cashio: I think you might be one of the most quotable people that we ever have on here. I've got quotes all written down from things you said, so thank you for joining us.

Lachs: Been a pleasure.

Cashio: We hope you listeners will also join us again soon. Consider sending 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: Yeah. Is it hard to do something for its own sake? I love that question. Well, everybody, catch us on Twitter, Facebook or on our website at philosophybakesbread.com, where we've got transcripts for this show thanks to Drake Boling and Steven Barrera, students at the University of Kentucky.

Cashio: Thank you, Steven. Thank you, Drake.

Weber: Also, if you want to support the show and to be more involved in the work of the Society of Philosophers of America, head to philosophersinamerica.com and consider joining the society.

Cashio: If you're enjoying the show, and we hope that you are, maybe take a second to review us on iTunes or wherever you're finding this show. A good review will help us reach more people, bake more bread, and spread the word about SOPHIA-

Weber: That's right.

Cashio: ... and about the show. You can of course email us at philosophybakesbread@gmail.com, and you can also call us and leave a short, recorded message with a question or a comment 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.

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