

Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode Fifty-Two, with Nicholas Tampio

Against the Common Core

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Cashio: Hello 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. 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 net. Listeners can find us online at PhilosophyBakesBread.com and we hope that you'll reach out to us on Twitter at PhilosophyBB; on Facebook at PhilosophyBakesBread; or by email at PhilosophyBakesBread@gmail.com.

Cashio: Last but not least you can leave us a short recorded message with a question or a comment or even bountiful praise.

Weber: We like that.

Cashio: We'll accept praise even if it's not bountiful. Does that sound right Eric? Does that work?

Weber: Yeah, but we prefer bountiful.

Cashio: Prefer bountiful. All right. You can reach us at 859-257-1849. That's 859-257-1849.

On today's show we're very excited to ask Nicholas Tampio about his arguments against National Education Standards. He is the author of the forthcoming 2018 book, Common Core:

<https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/12/09/056-ep-52-against-the-common-core/>

National Education Standards and the Threat to Democracy, coming out with Johns Hopkins University Press. That is awesome, Nick. Congratulations. I'm really excited about this book.

Tampio: Oh wonderful. Thank you.

Cashio: Yeah.

Weber: Nick is Associate Professor of Political Science at Fordham University. In addition to his forthcoming book, Nick also authored: Kantian Courage, Advancing the Enlightenment in Contemporary Political Theory, as well as book titled: DeLeuze's Political Vision.

Cashio: Before coming out with his latest book, Nick has written quite a few pieces on topics like Politics, Religion, and Education for general audiences. He's published pieces in The Huffington Post, for example, and has released a very nice essay called: In Praise of Dewey, among other pieces in Aeon Philosophical online publication. It's been fantastic.

Weber: That's a great piece Nick.

Weber: We start of this show in this first segment with a moment of we call, Know Thy Self. So we ask you to tell us about yourself. Do you know thy self? Tell us about your background? What about your background shaped who you are perhaps? How and why. Let's get to know Nicholas Tampio.

Cashio: Test first and let's see how it goes.

Tampio: Okay great. So my name is Nicholas Tampio. I grew up outside of Washington, D.C. I grew up in a family that was very interested in politics. So my Mom worked in the Senate for some time, my Step-father was a Federal Judge, my Dad worked in Close Up Foundation, a group that brought students to Washington, D.C., to see how the government works, my Step-mother was very interested in politics, so I just grew up talking about politics and in fact I was a Washington Post paperboy, so I grew up reading about National, International news.

Tampio: But then I kept asking, "Why?" Why are things the way that they are? My grandfather once told me a story that, he said, "Nick if you read the newspaper head line from a hundred years ago the stories will be kind of similar, almost the same." And it really stuck with me. I said, "Gosh, what's the reason for that? Why are people debating the same issues?" It's easy to get consumed by the day to day, but sometimes you want to step back and think about the big questions. For years I kept trying to get deeper and deeper and so I would do Political Science and the other Social Sciences and then I realized that there's a deeper level of politics. About things like human nature and the nature of reality and questions about how we know what we know. For Graduate School my studies took me in a very philosophical direction. I read a lot of Kant, Heidegger, Hegel, Nietzsche. But always in the back of my mind I had a promise to myself that someday I'd come back to politics.

Weber: Interesting.

Tampio: Yeah. Thank you. Basically, when my kids were in school they were affected by the Common Core and all of a sudden, training was over. It was now time to have a real political debate and it's been a really excellent opportunity for me to apply some of the big philosophical things that I've been thinking about between College until I got tenure at Fordham. That was

very philosophical but now all of a sudden I have a real test case and it's been exciting and actually very satisfying on some levels.

Weber: Very interesting, Nick. So you explained your interest in sort of the why question. Why are people this way? Why are people thinking that way? Well, some people approach those kinds of questions thinking about psychology. Thinking about the emotions, thinking about stimulus and response and environment and our backgrounds. So what pulled you, what attracted you more to the political and philosophical, rather than something like examining your dreams with Freud or something like that?

Tampio: Yeah, well I think I realized at a pretty early age that my well being is dependent on what's happening in the broader society and so much, much later I learned about C. Wright Mills's phrase, The Sociological Imagination. But I think from a pretty early age I had something like that, where I realized you know what, what the President does matters to me. Who's in Congress matters to me. How we fund elections matters to me. From a very early age I've been doing what I subsequently learned was political theory. Why is society structured the way it is? Why are these certain policies affecting people's capacity to exercise meaningful freedom? For me, I think that ethics and psychology are interesting but I consider those small circles. The fact is that small circles are always embedded within bigger circles which is politics. So that's why I do political philosophy.

Weber: Nice.

Tampio: I'm concerned about the social political conditions that enable individual well being.

Weber: For someone who has never heard of Mills could you give us just a thirty second or one minute explanation of this idea you've introduced?

Tampio: Okay, sure. He was a famous sociologist and in the 1950's he wrote two very important books. One was The Power Elite, which said that there are maybe about five thousand really powerful people in a country and they exercise a lot of power. It's an interesting thesis. Another book he wrote was The Sociological Imagination and what his argument was that the purpose of sociology, but I would really say any social, political philosophy, is to help you see how what's happening in the broader world affects you. Just for example, I meet with a lot of parents and if their unhappy they're like, "My child's teacher is doing a bad job or the Principal is a real jerk or Oh, the Principals not providing a well-rounded education, they're just concerned about test scores." And I say, "Yes, it's totally fine to consider the behavior of the teacher and the principal, but you also need to look at the State Education Department. You also need to look at the laws that Congress is passing. You also need to look at the US Department of Education. Actually, you need to think about what's happening on a global level with International organizations, with the United Nations Education Agenda."

So, for me that's one thing I try to do with a lot of my academic and popular publications, is say, "Listen parents, you and your family are getting hammered from lots of different angles and you don't know where the blows are coming from. You want to punch back against the people who are close to you and actually what you need to do is start thinking about some of these bigger issues, some of these distant threats to your child's well-being at least in school."

Weber: Interesting.

Cashio: Oh, that's quite a challenge.

Tampio: Yeah, well it's really ... I don't know how to say this modestly ... but it really requires a lot of practice. I need good editors to help me figure out how do you explain Legislation to parents. I had one editor, I hope I'm not throwing this person under the bus, I had one editor who said, "Nick could you write and op-ed about Betsy DeVos and talk about her character. No, that's not my style. I don't want to ... for me people are a part of politics but I don't want to go after people I want to go after ideas. I want to go after laws. I want to go after policies. Those are the main things that make a difference not the personalities of the people who come and go.

Weber: Nice. That sounds very civil.

Tampio: The lines not always clear. I've written some pieces that can seem like I'm really attacking people, right? So for example I wrote an article for Al Jazeera America called David Coleman's Plan to Destroy Education. By the way an editor choose that title, but it's fine. Basically what I do, if you read the piece, is that I go after the guy who wrote the Common Core English Language Arts Standards and say, "Listen this is his philosophy of education and it's atrocious." I'm going after a real life person but the thing is, is that in my own mind what I'm doing is going after the best articulation of an idea that I'm challenging and it's an articulation by David Coleman. So I'm not going personal. I'm not doing a cheap shot. I quote the person. I give them a presentation of their view that I think is fair and then I raise problems with it.

Weber: Good.

Cashio: Beautiful. You've kind of given us this nice vision of, I like the circles within circles I really like that illustration, of sort of the powerful relationship between philosophical thinking and political theory and how it comes in, you know, ` next thing you know you're doing homework with your kid and you're like this is driving me crazy. It's really a philosophical problem if we trace it back far enough.

Cashio: This is a question we ask all of our guests: What is philosophy to you? How would you understand it? How would you define it for someone who is curious about why they should be interested?

Tampio: Okay, great. I think of philosophy as the really big questions and one of the ways I talk about things with my students is I use an image of the ocean. I say listen, "The news, news stories are like the waves on top of the ocean. They're just constantly coming in and rolling out." Right? Every day there's going to be a whole new wave of news stories about things the President has done or about movies that are popular or about wars in other parts of the world. Those are the kind of day to day ephemeral news. It's new. So it's new things. Then in the ocean there'll be tides and currents and they're a little bit deeper and I think of these as like the social sciences.

These are things like what a lot of my colleagues do in Political Science here they're trying to figure out, rather than just study a particular president, they study the Presidency. Rather than study a particular piece of legislation they study Congress. I think of Social Science as one layer deeper. But in oceans there's one ... the deepest level is the flows; the ocean's flows. And the ocean flows are what have the water circulate all across the planet or the globe. I thought about this image when I first learned about that boat that sank with all the inflatable duckies.

Cashio: Wait, wait, wait. I don't know this. What, what happened?

Tampio: There was a boat going from America with England filled with inflatable rubber duckies and it sank and all the rubber duckies came to the surface-

Weber: I heard about that.

Tampio: ... one, it's a funny image but two it's actually interesting because you could follow the duckies as they went all around the globe.

Cashio: Wow! This is amazing.

Tampio: Yeah, it takes about six years.

Weber: I shouldn't laugh so much [inaudible 00:12:52] an environmental issue and all. But it's kind of a hilariously looking one, right?

Cashio: So then right now as we're speaking there's some duckies on their journey.

Tampio: Well, yeah, I would love one of those duckies. I'd pay good money for one of those duckies. If any listener wants to give me a good gift That would be wonderful like [crosstalk 00:13:12] one of these duckies.

What I tell students is political philosophy or philosophy is the flows. It's what we study. You can't see the flows directly. You can't see freedom. You can't see justice. You can't see human nature directly with your eyes. Right? For that you have to have a different skill set and philosophy is similar to theology and different other humanities and social sciences have different approaches to get to the big big questions. I love that level of philosophy, but with my current research I'm tried to ascend back to the surface and engage with questions that people right here and now care about.

Cashio: That's a beautiful image.

Weber: It is.

Cashio: Can I borrow that? Can I share that with my students? I really like this.

Weber: We'll quote you.

Cashio: I think it explains nicely the relationship between politics and philosophy.

Weber: While things will seem far under the surface, at the same time there's no doubt that the waters connected. Right? These things are related and influence each other obviously.

Tampio: That's why I like to be in a ... I tell people I do philosophy in a political science department and one of the ... there's down sides. The downside is that I don't teach logic. I don't teach aesthetics. I don't converse with other philosophers. But the plus side is that there's always somebody there whose like, "Nick, what's the meaning of what you're doing? Why does this matter? What's the relevance?" I like that challenge.

Weber: It's a good one and it's an important one and it's very much what this show is about. So I want to thank Nicholas Tampio for being on the show with us today, on Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Eric Weber and my cohost is Anthony Cashio. We're going to come back after a short break and talk about National Education Standards and the Threat to Democracy. We'll be right back.

Cashio: Welcome back everyone to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber and we are having a wonderful conversation today with Nicholas Tampio about National Education Standards and the threat he believes they pose for Democracy. No small threat at all. In the second segment, Nick we'll focus on what has prompted the National Education Standards Movement. So we'll talk about the movement. And in the next segment we'll ask you about why you think it's been a problem and what you think we should do about it.

Cashio: So Nicholas let's just start with the big, easy big picture question. That's always a nice way to start off and get into things. What is the National Education Standards Movement and what prompted it?

Tampio: Excellent.

Let me start off by telling you something that you might not know or your listeners might not know if they don't have kids in public school. Across the country you have lots of kids studying the same things or learning similar skill sets. The famous story about France is that if you know at any one particular time what assignment every single student in the French School System is doing. I don't know if that stories are true or not, but at least in Education Policy Literature that's the one extreme. There's one National Curriculum that everybody uses.

That's not what the Common Core is. The Common Core identifies as a set of performance expectations of what kids are supposed to be able to do by the end of each grade in mathematics and english language arts. But what you're seeing though is that there is much more uniformity in the Country's educational system than there used to be even 20, 30 years ago. Right? So the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, it said that each State had to come up with its own standards and test those standards and have accountability mechanisms to make sure that all the students were learning those particular standards. But at least in theory you could have had lots and lots of different sets of education standards and lots of different aligned curricula. But what the Common Core does, is that it was part of the Race to the Top Program that said that the Federal Government would have this competitive grant program where States could apply for a Race to the Top Grant and there were different pillars to it, or different aspects that would get you points and one of those was that you would adopt the Common Core Standards and aligned assessments.

In 40 some States nearly every State adopted the Common Core. There were a couple of hold outs: Virginia didn't; Minnesota adopted one of standards; Texas did not adopt the standards but had standards that were similar to the Common Core. Even then certain cities within Texas have adopted the Common Core. So really within the last seven, six years you've just seen this incredible convergence of standards across the country and a much narrower range of curricula.

I first learned about the Common Core in 2012 when my older son was in Kindergarten and my son's Kindergarten teacher was trained as Montessori. And Montessori, the notion is, is that you have kids do jobs and then teacher sits back and takes notes and figures out what kids

are doing well and what they're not doing well and then very subtly puts children in situations where they can work on skills that they need develop. So lots of elite private schools use Montessori Method. For the early grades it's the gold standard.

Cashio: Right.

Tampio: But what the Common Core does is it sets performance expectations for Kindergartners so one of them could be that they read Emergent Reader Texts with purpose and understanding. That's very famous, notorious, one of the Common Core Standards. So now what it means is by the end Kindergarten kids need to be able to read Emergent Reader Texts with purpose and understanding. Now all of a sudden there's this incredible pressure on teachers to make sure that every single kid in the class can meet this standard. Now all of a sudden school administrators and districts and leaders are under pressure to get curriculum that are aligned to the standards that make sure that every child is reading Emergent Reader Texts with purpose and understanding. So now there's no longer the same freedom for Kindergarten teachers to use Montessori Methods.

To go back to the first segment, talk about The Sociological Imagination, you could blame this particular teacher, you could blame this particular principal, but I think you need to look at the broader picture and in 2012 I wrote a piece for the Huffington Post explaining my concerns. All of a sudden then I heard from parents all across the country making similar type objections. Right, that now all of a sudden they had to use these aligned curricula that narrowed the curriculum to reading and writing and everything that didn't fit within those categories was being expunged from the system. So that's where we are right now.

I'm one of many, many parents who are just frankly disgusted by what education has become. My hands are wide now and I'm saying this is what the curriculum is at a really good school. This is Sidwell Friends where the Obama's sent their children. This is the Lab School of Chicago where Arnie Duncan, former Secretary of Education, this is where he sends his own children right now. You can keep multiplying examples of powerful people who send their kids to schools that have a really wide curriculum. Now I'm going to put my hands real close together and say, "This is what happens in schools that use the Common Core." So, things that are not aligned to the Common Core are getting excised. And it's even worse than that because kids are not learning math, they're learning Common Core Math. They're not learning English Language Arts, they're learning Common Core English Language Arts.

Weber: Well, so, so Nick, let me be the devil's advocate for a little bit. Standardization-

Tampio: Please.

Weber: ... gets a bad rep partly because of excess testing and I think a lot of people are aware of that. But aren't there some things we need all kids to learn? Is $2 + 2$ irrelevant in some States? Aren't standards tools for ensuring that kids will learn certain basics?

Tampio: Yeah, no it's fine to play Devil's advocate and I'd rather people raise their strongest concerns and so actually my first Chapter of my book lays out the strongest arguments I can find for National Education Standards. What I say in the Chapter is that, "If you don't address the strongest arguments, you're not going to win. You have to find the strongest arguments." Right?

So, the fact is, is that there is a part of the ... where did this National Education Standards Movement come from? On the Republican side it primarily came from business groups and the Business Roundtable, US Chamber of Commerce, a couple of other major type organizations that said, "Listen we need to prepare all workers for the 21st Century and all these humanist Deweyan types have destroyed Public Education. They've made it all about feelings and Arts & Crafts, so we need to get back to basics, literacy, numeracy, hard work ethic."

But then from the Left side one of the main groups was the Civil Rights Organizations and they said, "Listen. Our kids are graduating from Urban High Schools not being able to read or do math. So, let's figure out how to get these standards and make sure that our kids are learning basics and we're going to hold these actually white teacher's feet to the fire and make sure they're teaching our children how to read and do math." Then you know you can also make the argument that children with special needs, need focus too. That school shouldn't be warehousing them that you should be making sure that they can learn to read and write. So hopefully I've presented that side fairly.

I guess the question that I would say is, "It's a one size fits all." What this means is that kids who do not fit ... who it doesn't fit are going to be greatly disserved. Right? Kids who are excellent at math, when you're in grades K through 8 in Common Core Math, it is very, very little differentiation. I mean, I had exchange with a Math Professor who defends the Common Core and they said, "Well, the more gifted students in math can tutor the students who are not so good at math." That is what my son was doing. The teacher would assign my son to tutor the kids who are not good at math. How do you think that worked out? Right? Do you think the kids who are bad at math liked being taught by the other students? I mean it was a terrib-

Cashio: No, they don't like it and your son doesn't get a chance to go and challenge himself and further explore his interests.

Tampio: Right. So that's one side. But then there's the other side because it's saying that like listen the students who are not so good at math or not so good at reading, they're going to be branded as failures from a very early age. Right? People on Social Media share horror stories of kids whose confidence is totally being crushed by this regime. There's a great line from John Dewey in *The Public and its Problems* where it says: You have to ask the person wearing the shoe if it fits or not.

Weber: Right.

Tampio: Part of his point is that if you go to the Common Core Home Page they'll tell you all these great things about preparing all kids for college and careers but my argument is you got to listen to parents who are speaking for their kids and they'll tell you if the shoe fits or pinches. For a lot of parents it pinches.

Cashio: Let's go back to No Child Left Behind just for half a second. It's often attributed to Bush and the Bush Administration but it really was a bipartisan Bill and it included support from the now late Senator Ted Kennedy. These folks were not generally on the same page politically but they were worried about kids who kept getting passed along from grade to grade. You just mentioned people who getting crushed because the Common Core leaves them behind, but what about people who are getting left behind already because of the system. They weren't taking time for the kids who needed extra help coming up.

Tampio: Yes, so I-

Cashio: Was that not a problem or would you propose a different solution in there? How would you approach this? It seems like there was a genuine problem that they were trying address and maybe if we give them the benefit of the doubt, maybe they don't deserve it, but we'll give it to them anyway, maybe if we were to give them the benefit of the doubt maybe they were trying their best and this was the solution they came up with. Would you have proposed a different solution from theirs?

Tampio: Okay, yes. I would have proposed a different solution. I'm very mad at Ted Kennedy for supporting ... and George Miller and George Miller of California he was another one of the major Democrats in Congress who supported No Child Left Behind. Right? Because they brought the Texas miracle to National stage and I don't know why Ted Kennedy thought that George W. Bush would be the right guy to revolutionize American Education System. I think that's crazy.

In education policy debates there's two main paradigms. There's the equity paradigm and the excellence paradigm. The equity paradigm says look at what they're providing kids in good private schools or wealthy suburban public schools and figure out how to make this available to everybody. So something like small class sizes, well trained teachers, field trips, drama programs, sports clubs, debate teams. So that's where I am. I think that John Dewey is one of the patron saints of the equity paradigm.

The other paradigm is the excellence paradigm. I don't love these terms, but that's just the terms they use. The excellence paradigm says we focus too much on inputs now we need to start focusing on outputs. The prime output that people use is test scores. So what they say is alright we're going to come up with these National Education Standards, we're going to come up with these National Tests, and we are going to punish people in schools, in States, in School Districts that do not perform well on these standardized tests. What that does is that it's high stakes testing. Now students in some places can't graduate or go to the next grade level unless they pass these tests. Teachers can get fired if their student don't score either high enough proficiency, where a bit of minium baseline, or if there's not high enough test score growth, which is where your percentage of test score growth from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year, and so what it does is that it incredibly narrows the curriculum.

I'm with John Dewey which says that we need to place the child at the center of the educational apparatus. We need to figure out what each individual needs to get a satisfying education. There's a part of me that's tempted to get rid of the US Department of Education and to scrap the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, but I think that the position I believe in is that original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was categorical grants that said we're going to give money to States to administer their educational programs and at least there was a chance of States using it for equity purposes. There was a chance that they could use it for Deweyan ends of providing more opportunities for children. That's what I want.

What I think our country needs to do is move away from this National Standards, National Testing. Right now it's still a State accountability system, but still structured within a Federal Law that Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. I think we need to scrap this paradigm and try to figure out how to give the grass roots power to tailor education to each individual child.

Weber: Well I sure we both, Anthony and I, have questions about what you just said Nicholas. But we're going to come back and bring those questions to you, rake you over the coals in the next segment of Philosophy Bakes Bread. Thanks everybody for listening. This is Eric Weber. My cohost is Anthony Cashio with Nicholas Tampio and we will be right back.

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Cashio: Welcome back everyone to Philosophy Bakes Bread. This is Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber having an amazing conversation with Nicholas Tampio, author of Common Core: National Education Standards and the Threat to Democracy. In this third segment we will be talking about the threat to Democracy that Nick believes the National Education Standards Movement poses. During the last segment we talked about what it was and kind of how Common Core came about. But it is insidious apparently to Democracy.

Weber: The first question in this segment Nicholas, Nick, I want to ask you about where we ended the last segment and that had to do with this notion where we're worried about what standards do and it's nice to have freedom and I'm a big fan of John Dewey as well. At the same time I and Anthony both have lived in Mississippi and Alabama respectively and those are States which are notorious for having very low standards and even not meeting those. And then when people want to raise standards Mississippi fights to keep it's standards low and then say, "Look we're not failing that badly. See all we had to do was lower are standards." Right?

Lots of people put their kids in private white academies. Thousands of those were created throughout the South after Brown v. Board of Education and then all kinds of people who are in power their kids aren't affected when the schools are crappy. And so they don't try to improve them; they don't fund them enough. Then we have troubled schools and folks have reason to wish that there were higher expectations for their kids because they believe in their kids and that might actually mean we need to fund education properly and so forth. This Standards Movement, you kind of touched on it already, but isn't this really freedom for diversity and education sometimes a tool to lower expectations on disadvantaged kids?

Tampio: Okay great. Yeah, I would have been much more sympathetic to that argument in 2008, before my kids ... At the beginning of the Obama Administration before my kids were in school, I think I would have been sympathetic to that. And I grew up outside of Washington, D.C., my parents worked in Washington, D.C., and I tended to trust the Federal Government. At least since Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 and then with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and there's IDEA which is the Disability Education Act, so we liberal progressive Democrat types tend to view the Federal government as the good guys who are going to save kids from the corrupt and racist and abusive educational authorities in the States.

But part of what I've come to realize is that we need to change our references. It's 1954 anymore and the issues are not the exact same. It's not the Warren Supreme Court or JFK or LBJ versus racist southerners. That's not the dynamic anymore right now. What's basically happened is that the Bill and Melinda Gates, their Foundation, but these two people, they met with David Coleman and Jean Wilhoit in 2008, there was a Washington Post Article about this called: Bill Gates Pulled Off the Swift Common Core Revolution and basically David Coleman said, "Listen I want to write these National Education Standards. I need to it be bank rolled. I

need to be banked rolled for the writing of the standards because there are Federal Laws against the Federal Government making curriculum. So, we need somebody private to pay for the standards. We also need to get the support of a lot of groups to get on board with these standards." So, depending on how you count, a very conservative estimate is two hundred million, but it could easily be over a billion dollars that the Gates Foundation have poured into the Common Core Initiative.

Cashio: Okay. Whoa.

Weber: Wow.

Tampio: David Coleman-

Cashio: I did not know about this.

Tampio: Yeah, well it's a great article you should read it. It's the classic article. If you want to read just one article read this Washington Post article by Lindsay Layden.

Weber: We'll put a link to it in the notes for the Episode when it comes out on the-

Tampio: That would be great. So, David Coleman earned the confidence of Bill and Melinda Gates. He's a confidence man. Right? And he pulled the confidence game. He's a con artist. Well, maybe I'm going too far. So, the point is, is that somebody's coming along and saying, "We've got these brand-new educational standards." They've never been tested. They've never been a trial run. But we want them to all across the country and now it's going to prepare all children for college and careers. I'd want to say, "Listen, could you offer any evidence that this is the case?" Is there any-

Weber: You mean that it's effective or any good?

Tampio: ... or it's any good, yeah. Right? The fact is it's ... this is Diane Ravitch's main point. She said, "We are a Nation guinea pigs. FDA would never approve medicine that had never been given a trial run and now we've adopted National Education Standards." So part of what I do in my popular article's, my academic articles, and my book, is I get to the nitty gritty and I show what the standards are and what kind of assignments they lead to and that's what really shocks people. Then all of a sudden they realize, well wait a minute that's ... this advertising is false. This is not college and career ready standards. These are standards that make possible standardized testing.

Weber: I had never heard about the point about it not having been tested before in experimental small settings. [inaudible 00:36:12]

Cashio: Yes. That's a good point.

Weber: I didn't realize that. That's terrifying actually, now that you tell me that.

Tampio: Yeah, Diane Ravitch has a Huffington Post piece called: The One Fatal Flaw of the Common Core, that really specifies how they basically violated the International Protocol for getting Standards.

Weber: I see the total connection now-

Cashio: Oh wow.

Weber: ... because I remember a great piece she wrote about how we're not thinking about evidence anymore.

Tampio: Yes.

Weber: I didn't know that was about Common Core. That was a great piece she wrote.

Tampio: Yeah, absolutely.

Weber: Okay, wow.

Tampio: But to your question about what do we do about low educational qualities in different parts of the country and I guess the question is: Do you try to empower the people in the communities to make things better or do you think that bureaucrats and the wealthy are the ones who should decide for other people how to educate their children? My view is, make education as local as you possibly can. What I do in my book is I describe different communities that are trying to make that argument because it's ... here's just the politics of the debate, people are often pointing to historically disadvantaged communities and the fact is, is that what my book does is show they're people in Baltimore and Detroit and Chicago who don't want these kind of reforms. So who are Bill and Melinda Gates? What role does the Federal Government have to put this scheme on the entire country?

Cashio: I like something you said earlier. It seems that liberals have their own concern with the Common Core but I've got a lot of relatives and some of them are very conservative and some of us are very liberal and but one thing almost all agree on is a concern for the Common Core. The concern is almost always when we see our children doing their homework and we're like, "Why are they doing it this way or why do we have to do it this way?" But you seem to think it definitely goes beyond just what their learning and how their learning and how their being assigned, but it is a threat to Democracy. Which is sort of a large [inaudible 00:38:18]. When you say "what do you mean by this? How are these National Education Standards a threat to Democracy?"

Tampio: Sure. To the question of how is this a threat to democracy? This is what I would say. I would say that the best way for children to learn about democracy is to grow up in an environment where they have a voice and the adults around them have a voice. This is one of the principles of John Dewey and progressive education, is that the way to learn democracy is to grow up in a democratic environment. When you are a young age all throughout your educational system you're seeing adults negotiate with each other about how to come up with good educational aims for children. You see an educational system that gives children lots of opportunities to have a say about their education. About what their research papers are going to be. About what their internships are going to be. About what their extra curriculars are going to be. So what happens is you grow up to be somebody who says, "Hey listen, my voice matters in this world. My actions matter in this world. That I participate in the system that educates me and that controls a lot of what I do during my waking hours." That's how you learn about Democracy.

What the Common Core does is it says, from Kindergarten to twelfth grade these are the performance expectations that you are to match. If you are advanced, if you're behind, if you're bored, if you've got other ideas, you're not allowed to change the sequencing. And actually, the standards themselves, part of what I do I have a forthcoming article in Democracy in Education, is I actually go straight to the Common Core English Language Arts Anchor Standards. And so the Anchor Standards are the basis for Common Core Close Reading. And what Common Core Close Reading does is that it gives you an assignment of an essay on a sheet of paper and it asks you questions about that reading passage. The first ELA Anchor Standard expects you to cite specific evidence from the text when answering questions about the text. And then Anchor Standards two through nine specify what kinds of evidence they might be looking for as far as the context, the characters, the plot, the main idea. The tenth Anchor Standard is about the Lexile Level the kid should be doing at their particular grade level.

Tampio: But what Common Core Close Reading does is it expects you to use textual specific and textual dependent evidence from the text. Which is a very fancy way of saying regurgitate. Part of what my book does is that I look at SAT that are aligned to the Common Core, I look at the Advanced Placement Curriculum Frame Works that are aligned to the Common Core, I look at all sorts of ... the New York State, Engaged New York Modules that are aligned to the Common Core, so what they do is they say, "You must use the exact words from the text to answer questions about the text." And so what that means is from the time you're in Kindergarten to the time you graduate from High School you do not have many opportunities within the Common Core to say what you think or feel, which is the exact opposite of John Dewey's Copernican Revolution in Pedagogy. Right? There is no allowances made for the particular child, there's no opportunities or few opportunities for originality, creativity, rebellion. No. And the fact is that Close Reading makes possible online standardized testing because you can click the exact word or you can write the exact words to answer the question.

Weber: This is very nice.

Cashio: Very good explanation. Yeah.

Tampio: Thank you. All of of sudden now your saying parents in a community have no say about their children's education, at least on the most important question. They have a choice about what color the flyer is going to be, what kind of cupcakes they're going to serve at the PTA meeting, totally peripheral questions to the main questions of education because the Common Core has a huge effect on the curriculum. Again, it's not a curriculum, but it's a curriculum framework that has profound consequences for the school day. So, parents are disempowered, community members are disempowered, Superintendents, State Officials are disempowered and then also students are learning undemocratic pedagogy. So yes, I don't want to be dramatic, but I do think that the Common Core has incredible anti-democratic consequences.

Weber: That's a very interesting characterization of the matter. Yeah and so I think that it's important for our listeners to get a little bit of background in the Philosophy of Education about something important and at work here because the old school way of thinking and education would think about human beings, kids, persons, whatever as tabula rasas, which means this blank slate or like an empty vessel and you're going to pour education into it. Dewey by contrast was someone who saw that the learner, the person, the individual brings something to the educational experience and therefore what Nick is talking about is the extent to which Dewey would worry about a system in which it's always only pouring into the vessel and not seeing what the child brings to education and thus writing, learning to express yourself, thinking about

what might be your own reasons rather than the text's reason for something. It's very important in this background. Would you say this Educational Philosophy from Dewey is at the heart of what you're saying or am I-

Tampio: Yes, yes I mean let me just back up. I do alliances with conservatives. If they want to have a more traditionalist curriculum where they are, that's okay. Just keep in mind that in New York I would advocate progressive education. I think that States and localities should be given maximum freedom that ironically there could be more democratic benefits of communities arguing and deciding to go a more traditionalist route than a more Deweyan route. So that's that. But part of what I was arguing in my Aeon Essay on John Dewey was his great fear was that you would have a pyramid where the wealthy children would get a liberal arts education that would encourage them to have freedom and you'd have three R's mechanically treated for the masses. That issue is exactly our issue. That the Common Core is the three R's mechanically treated.

Weber: One more time just for everybody who's not so familiar what are the three R's?

Tampio: Reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Weber: That's right.

Cashio: We got to make good workers to go to the factories-

Weber: You have to skip the A in arithmetic.

Cashio: ... and businesses and ...

Weber: To get the third R right.

Tampio: Yeah, it's a lesson in civility. Literally the Common Core is: Do not tell us your thoughts, follow instructions, do what you're told. And that's unacceptable for my kids and it's unacceptable for your kids.

Weber: You heard it folks this is Nicholas Tampio-

Tampio: Oh boy.

Weber: ... telling it like it is on Philosophy Bakes Bread. Thank you so much for yet another segment. We're going to come back with some final hard-hitting questions for this guy. This is me, Eric Weber and my co-host is Anthony Cashio. Thanks everybody for listening. We'll be right back.

Weber: Hey everybody this is Eric Weber here live in the studio and I wanted to make one last point towards the end of that segment I was explaining, in my own moment when I was speaking talking about John Dewey's philosophy, I was explaining something and didn't make clear reference to the fact that what I was talking about was, the words Nick used, the Copernican Revolution in education. And if anyone didn't quite catch that what he was talking

about was something he mentioned earlier about this notion of putting the child at the center of the education because Copernicus in his revolution changed the world's views on, not just on the universe, but really where the place of the earth is in the universe. When Ptolemy thought everything went around the earth, well, Copernicus said, "No, no, no, really everything goes around the sun and our planets move around the sun and that's really the way to think about this."

Well, what John Dewey did in terms of a revolutionary change in thinking was to move from the authority figures of the teacher and so forth to placing at the center of the educational universe the child. That is what I was trying to get out as I was saying a little bit more trying to flesh out... because we always try to make sure we explain the technical lingo we use in an episode and I wanted to just jump into say what Copernican Revolution in Education refers to though I think Nick explained it very well, over the course of this episode, he really covers that material well.

In just a second, we're going to come back for segment four of Philosophy Bakes Bread. Thanks for listening.

Cashio: Welcome back everyone to Philosophy Bakes Bread it's your privilege today to be listening to Anthony Cashio, that would be me and my co-host Eric Thomas Weber and today it is our privilege to be talking with Nicholas Tampio about National Education Standards and problems for Democracy. So in this final segment, as always, we'll wrap up with a final big picture question or two, some light hearted jokes that we hope you enjoy, we enjoy them, and a question for us all to ponder.

Weber: That's right. So Nick, we've heard about the National Education Standards Movement as well as why you think it's a problem for democracy. If you can sum up ... we've heard a little bit about this but if you can sum up tell us what do you think education should look like ideally if not standardized.

Tampio: Well I think that schools should come up with aims and aims are plans about what you're going to learn and study. But I would like aims to be as close to the local level as possible. I want to make sure that the people who are impacted by the educational aims have a chance to speak about the educational aims and I also want them to be flexible as communities change or as historical circumstances change. Right? So, if there is an election going on I think you can make the Social Studies curriculum to address what's going on with the election. I live in a school district that's right next to the John Jay Estate. I think it would be perfectly fine to dedicate some historical lessons to the founding father's including or the founding generation including John Jay. But if you live in California and you live next to other historical monuments you should be able to adopt your curriculum to these other types of places. I would like to see teachers and schools empowered to have much more of a say over what students are learning. I believe in local control as much as possible.

To go back to one of the questions from the first segment Eric, is that you say, "Can't we just set minimum standards in English or Math?" The fact of the matter is, is that there are very heated debates about how kids learn to read and do math. And actually, there are very heated debates about what a good English curriculum looks like or what a good Math curriculum looks like. And so, part of what my book does is show that they're actually really heated debates about what's the best way for kids to read. A lot of people say that the Common Core's expectations of when kids start to read is ... there's no scientific basis for it. There's no research basis. Right? It's

David Coleman writing these English Standards without having any scholarly knowledge or practitioner background.

The fact is, is that let's let communities where parents and teachers and community members have a voice in what their education looks like. I'm nervous about saying specifics for different places. Like if a school in Detroit wants to have a certain view of education let's give them freedom to decide. Let's really figure out a way to give them ... let's empower parents to advocate for their children to get a good education, rather than sayings lets trust Washington, D.C., and letting people in Detroit, Baltimore, New York just sit back and be consumers or passive witnesses to how their kids are being educated. That's not democracy.

Weber: Interesting. Interesting.

Cashio: Right. Oh, that's good.

Weber: Just one little comment about that. Just earlier when you answered that we're not in the Civil Rights Movement anymore kind of thing, we just had a school in Mississippi, I say we I'm to there anymore, but there's school in Mississippi that just changed it's name from something about Nathan Bedford Forrest to Barack Obama. Right? Part of that of course does have to do with local control but at the same time sometimes local control can be oppressive to certain communities and how to prepare your kid for the potential to be a doctor when your community doesn't have any doctors you may foreclose opportunities for some people is one of the attitudes people have expressed I've seen.

Tampio: It's a question of Federalism. The bread and butter question of Political Science. Do we put all of our eggs in one basket and what if it's a bad basket?

Cashio: Yeah, yeah.

Tampio: One of the exercises I do with my students is say imagine all these different States have different levels of educational quality or education standards where should we draw the line for the country?

Cashio: Yeah.

Tampio: People are assuming that we're going to set high educational standards and all of this miracle is going to happen now, that Mississippi's going to rise to New York because they've adopted these new standards.

Cashio: Yeah, no.

Tampio: No. That's not how it works.

Cashio: No.

Tampio: I don't know why parents should accept a second-rate education for their children. You know? Let's empower parents to be good advocates for their community schools.

Cashio: All right. Nicholas, I have a question and it's going to kind of, I hope I don't take us too far off topic and I'm worried it might be too big, so standardized test is big business.

Tampio: Right.

Cashio: Not just the production of the test but you get all the study materials for the test and you've got all the stuff for the Common Core and then you have the computer programs to run it, and I'm sure you've probably thought about it so it's just not a political wheel to change the system, but there's going to be economic pushback from the lobbyist in this group. Have you thought about ways or do you have any suggestions about how to grapple with these difficulties? So moving forward say you want to decentralize or get rid of standardized testing, or move away from standardized testing. Is there any thought about the economic push backs going to be?

Tampio: Yes, there's two parts to the question: economics and the politics. The economics is that the Nation had an article a couple year ago and they said that America spends about 780 billion dollars a year educating children between the ages of 5 and 18. It's a huge market. So very powerful people want a bigger slice of that pie, right?

Cashio: Right.

Tampio: So Pearson, McGraw-Hill, College Board, all of these very powerful economic agents want a bigger slice of the pie and politicians want to have more control and teachers sometimes can be more liberal, so if you can dedicate money to testing rather than teachers well powerful people like that type of arrangement. Yeah, it's the fight of our lives and I had no idea that I'd be committing to this battle when I started to protest the Common Core.

The plus is that I'm meeting wonderful people all around the country who are working as hard as they can to advocate for sensible education policies. One of the actually really wonderful experiences has been is how different, how diverse this movement is. Right? There a lot of conservatives, there are a lot of Republicans, there are a lot of liberals, there are a lot of Democrats, there's every hue, religion, ethnicity, we're all trying to say hey listen this Common Core shoe does not fit our children. We have got to take this shoe off of our children. It pinches. It's been an exciting moment; it's democracy. Right? Its been this democratic movement, the test refusal movement in New York has been wonderful to be a part of, it's been this very diverse constituency that's saying nobody asked us in New York about the Common Core, nobody asked us about the tests, nobody asked us about the accountability mechanisms. We're fighting because we're defending our children and let's figure out a way to work together to stop this madness.

Weber: Wow, that's powerful and I like how you came back to refrain of the shoe pinching. That's a great metaphor that Dewey brought up and it came from Aristotle originally. Anyway very nice.

Weber: Well, we ask everybody in this last segment Nick, we ask everybody who comes on this show whether you would say, as the old saying goes, that philosophy bakes no bread? Or would you say that it does? Explain. Show your work. We're talking about school here so show your work.

Tampio: Yeah, no I think philosophy does bake bread and actually one point John Dewey used to say it that he was not an educator that he was a philosopher grappling with real questions in

the classroom. As somebody who's trained in philosophy I hesitate to describe myself as a philosopher. I think people should generally be careful to describing themselves as a philosopher by title.

Cashio: Why's that?

Tampio: Well because it's a kind of honorific title and maybe be a little bit-

Cashio: Can you name yourself a philosopher or does someone have to do it?

Tampio: Yeah, I don't know.

Cashio: That was the question.

Tampio: So any how I had a professor who did that and I thought that seemed like a good attitude. But the fact is that there's all sorts of interesting questions about standards. There's this platonic notion of the one good form, this one good blueprint, this one good idea of what in this instance education looks like and John Dewey spent a lot of his career trying to challenge this Platonism and saying that actually standards are important but they have to be this organic process that evolves for the circumstances. So that after Darwin you can't have the same notion of standards that you have to look at them as provisional road maps that human beings create to survive in their environment.

Cashio: Nice.

Tampio: Now you and I could have that conversation or all three of us could have this conversation about the philosophical nature of standards and we could get a couple dozen hundred, a couple hundred people to be interested. But then we say we're going to talk about the standards that educate children, all of sudden you're going to have millions. Literally millions, hundreds of thousands, of people saying listen I'm going to participate in this conversation. I might not have the philosophical training, I might not have the background, but I want to talk with you. So this has been for me a very satisfying occasion. It's dissatisfying in that I don't like to see my children hurt. But it's satisfying in that I'm saying listen actually now I can speak to a big audience about philosophical concerns.

Weber: That's right and where the rubber meets the road you're not ... on this show we try and make sure people know what philosophy is but in the real world you're getting people to think about the issues and their concreteness and how and why it matters and really dealing with these issues together. But at the same time, for our purposes of this show, it's a great illustration of what philosophy means when it's put to use.

Tampio: Absolutely.

Weber: Very nice.

Cashio: Beautiful. I like it.

Cashio: Well as you know Nicholas we want people to know both the serious side of philosophy and the lighter side of philosophy. I have a short little segment here we like to call Philosophunnies.

Weber: Say: Philosophunnies.

3-year-old Sam: Philosophunnies.

Weber: Say: Philosophunnies.

3-year-old Sam: Philosophunnies.

Cashio: Eric's son is stupid cute. So Nicholas, we'd love to hear if you have a favorite joke or a funniest fact or a story about philosophy or politics or anything [inaudible 00:58:34]. A nice dessert at the end of meal.

Tampio: When I got involved in the Common Core dispute, I contacted parents at my kids school and they all sent me their stories about what they were seeing happen as a result of the Common Core. I wrote a letter to the principal saying, "We understand your piloting this new program. Here's some of our concerns. Please stop." And then anyhow I got called into the principal's office. And so yeah that was a like a very funny moment early in this fight because I was sitting there and I was thinking, "My gosh I'm a grown man and here I am in the principal's office in trouble."

Weber: That's pretty funny. Well that's a pretty good example. Well, Anthony and I always make sure to gather a few jokes partly just in case our guest doesn't want to tell any story or joke or whatever. But also because it's fun to add a few anyway. So we have a few just educational related jokes.

Cashio: Education related.

Cashio: What can you tell about teacher's who take attendance?

Tampio: I don't know.

Cashio: They're absent minded.

I got the cricket on that one.

Tampio: I got the rib shot that' funny.

Weber: When is an English teacher like a judge?

Tampio: I don't know. When?

Weber: When she hands out long sentences.

Tampio: Oh, my gosh.

Weber: I think we got crickets twice in a row. I promise these next ones are better.

All right so these are test questions where students answered quite literally and cleverly. You've got this one Anthony?

Cashio: These would not pass the Common Core standards.

What ended in 1896?

Weber: I don't know. What ended in 1896?

Cashio: Obviously 1895.

Tampio: Oh my goodness.

Weber: I like that one.

Weber: Question: How do you change centimeters to meters?

Cashio: I don't know. How?

Weber: You take out centi.

Tampio: Oh my goodness.

Weber: We have a low batting average this time. The last one is good though.

Cashio: All right. All right, a math problem. You ready?

John has 32 candy bars. He eats 28. What does he have now?

Weber: I don't know.

Tampio: A stomach ache, a stomach ache. I can get this one.

Cashio: Diabetes.

Weber: I think that one might deserve the rim shot.

Cashio: Last but not least we do 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 like to keep it democratic here, right? Nice. Talk to us, we'll talk to you, or work things out. So we want to invite our listeners to send their thoughts about big questions that we raise on the show.

Weber: That's right. Given that Nicholas we'd love to hear your thoughts about what question we should ask everyone whose listening for a segment that we call: You tell me. Have you got a question to pose our listeners?

Tampio: Yes. So my question is: Should America have National Education Standards?

Cashio: Should we add-

Weber: Sweet. To the point.

Cashio: ... and why or why not?

Tampio: Yeah. We could ask why or why not.

Weber: All right.

Cashio: Well thank you everyone for listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread, Food for Thought about Life and Leadership. Your host Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber are really grateful to have been joined today by Nicholas Tampio. Thanks again Nicholas for joining us. This has been an awesome conversation. Maybe we can have you back on when your book comes back out and have some more conversation.

Weber: Real fun. Really fun.

Cashio: I think this is a talk we're going to Nationally keep having for hopefully maybe not too much longer.

Weber: Well, everybody you can pre-order Nicks' book now and it will be out in the Spring, I believe of 2018.

Tampio: Yes.

Weber: But you can pre-order it now.

Tampio: Oh, there are so many more topics. So yeah, no, we could have other ones. So let's stay in touch.

Weber: I think that would be delightful.

Cashio: Awesome. Let's do that. I hope the listeners will consider sending us your thoughts about anything you've heard today, that you'd like to hear about in the future, or about this specific question that we raised for you. Should we have National Education Standards and if so why? What would they look like? What is your vision here?

Weber: Or if not, why not. Right?

Cashio: Yeah, indeed.

Weber: So remember everyone you can catch us on Twitter, Facebook, and on our website at philosophybakesbread.com and there you'll find transcripts for our many episodes, thanks to Drake Bowling, an undergraduate philosophy student at the University of Kentucky. Thank you Drake!

Cashio: Yes, thanks Dra ... these are really great. Helpful tools

Tampio: Indeed.

Cashio: I started using them. It's nice.

Weber: Awesome.

Cashio: I did say that. I sounded smart.

Weber: One more thing folks, if you want to support the show and be more involved in the work of the Society of Philosophers in America, SOPHIA, the easiest thing to do is to go learn about us and consider joining as member at philosophersinamerica.com.

Cashio: And if you're enjoying the show we hope you'll take a quick second to rate us and review us on iTunes or wherever you get our podcast or are listening to us. Good reviews help us on the algorithm and help us reach more people and help us bake more bread.

Weber: That's right.

Cashio: And as always if you want to reach to us you can email us at PhilosophyBakesBread@gmail.com and you can also call us and leave a short recorded message with a question or a comment that we may be able to play on the show. We'll probably play it on the show guys.

Weber: Probably.

Cashio: You can reach us 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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