

EVALUATING PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: LESSONS LEARNED BAKING PHILOSOPHICAL BREAD

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In the last decade, there has been a resurgence of public philosophy. Many institutional structures and challenges impede or impose heavy costs on philosophers interested in public engagement. The American Philosophical Association has called for the development of tools for recognizing, evaluating, supporting, and rewarding public philosophy. This essay offers a proposal including four concepts that could be useful for the fruitful evaluation of public philosophy in higher education: substance, accessibility, invitingness, and community-building. These concepts have arisen out of the authors' experience with engaged public philosophy by means of the syndicated and award-winning Philosophy Bakes Bread radio show and podcast that launched in January of 2017. The four concepts we propose for evaluating public philosophy arise centrally in the work that we do and could offer a valuable starting point for the recognition and much needed support for public philosophical work in higher education.



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In 2017, the American Philosophical Association released a statement drafted by its Committee on Public Philosophy calling for members of the profession to encourage and reward quality work in public philosophy and to develop tools for evaluating such work professionally.¹ The need for evaluating public philosophical work calls for systematic thinking about the value of public philosophy and remains one of the movement's challenges. While there are many nuanced forms of public philosophy and some useful considerations

¹ APA Communications, "APA Statement on Valuing Public Philosophy," *The Blog of the APA*, May 18, 2017, <https://blog.apaonline.org/2017/05/18/apa-statement-on-valuing-public-philosophy/>. Full text of the APA statement:

"The following statement was proposed by the committee on public philosophy (Lynne Tirrell, chair) and the committee on the status and future of the profession (Sally Scholz, chair) in March 2017 and approved by the board of officers at its meeting in May 2017.

"The American Philosophical Association values philosophers' participation in the public arena. This includes work that engages with contemporary issues as well as work that brings traditional philosophies to non-traditional settings. Public philosophy may also bring the discipline into dialogue with other humanities, the arts, natural sciences, social sciences, and interested people outside of academia. Public philosophy is done in a variety of traditional and non-traditional media. Public philosophy can be especially valuable when it reaches populations that tend not to have access to philosophy and philosophers. Further, the APA notes that public philosophy raises the profile of the discipline, the scholar, and the home institution.

"The APA encourages departments, colleges, and universities to recognize public philosophy as a growing site of scholarly involvement. To that end, the APA encourages institutions to develop standards for evaluating and practices for rewarding public philosophy in decisions regarding promotion, tenure, and salary, so that faculty members who are interested in this work may, if they choose, pursue it with appropriate recognition and without professional discouragement or penalty. Although peer-reviewed scholarly publications remain central to the profession, the APA applauds philosophers' contributions to public policy, to consultation with government, medical, business, and civil society institutions, and to public opinion in general. Public philosophy presented or published outside of standard academic venues has evident value as external service to the profession and/or community. But we also urge institutions to consider broadening their standards for evidence of excellence in research and teaching and to consider whether their faculty's work in public philosophy is more properly counted as contributing to these latter categories of faculty evaluation."

about its value available,² in this paper we propose what we believe are broadly applicable general criteria for evaluating public philosophy, in terms of a) substance, b) accessibility, c) invitingness, and d) community building. Specifically, we will argue that opportunities like radio shows and podcasts open powerful avenues for public philosophical engagement and continuing education, which demonstrate that, with the right recipe, philosophy can be substantive, conversational, inviting, and community-building.

We begin by explaining further the need for criteria for public philosophy, our list of which is neither complete nor exclusive. Next, we introduce the nature and purposes of the Philosophy Bakes Bread radio show and podcast that we launched in January of 2017. We then examine the concept of philosophical substance and our approach to embodying it in a conversational style. After that, we consider how philosophy can be made accessible for the general public, followed by a section on how to bring difficult ideas into reach and to make philosophy inviting. Then, we present our experiences and plans for taking advantage of the power such programming offers and promises for philosophical community building. Finally, we explain the heavy commitment and work involved in creating such programming, typical of public philosophical work in general, which we believe to be worthwhile for the future of philosophy despite its challenges.

1. The Need for Criteria for Public Philosophy

The academy is an inherently conservative institution in many ways. Given the great value of many of our time-tested practices and traditions, colleges and universities change slowly. In well-run

² See for example Robert Frodeman and Adam Briggie, *Socrates Tenured: The Institutions of 21st Century Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016), and Christopher Meyers, "Public Philosophy and Tenure/Promotion: Rethinking Teaching, Scholarship and Service," *Essays in Philosophy* 15, Issue 1 (2014): 58-76. See also a substantial list of 56 "indicators of impact" for research, as found in J. Britt Holbrook, Kelli R. Barr, and Keith Wayne Brown, "Research Impact: We Need Negative Metrics Too," *Nature* 497 (23 May 2013): 439, <https://www.nature.com/articles/497439a>.

institutions, this both allows and is due to attention, care, and thoughtfulness in decision-making. Scholars in philosophy have been conditioned over the years to embody the norms of other fields, and are typically evaluated on the basis of research, teaching, and service. These categories also are generally calcified into norms directing scholars' work. As scholars are busy people, we tend typically to engage most in those activities on which we are evaluated, according to the traditional norms for evaluation.

Academic journals and scholarly book monographs are generally the avenue for advancement and recognition for most research expectations. Teaching criteria usually have to do with classroom teaching and the mentorship of students, though the latter is only narrowly measured, if it is measured at all. Service in some institutions concerns simple or basic activities, such as serving on various committees, and in some others it can mean the running of one's institution. Activities that are called "public philosophy" often do not fit neatly in any of these categories. Some scholars and administrators consider it a form of service, thinking that public philosophy is the public presentation of ivory tower insights, such as in the form of public lectures or writings shared with the community. This outlook does not see public philosophy as research because the discovery of truth is thought to happen first, and then the activity in question is more a matter of dumbing down and delivering wisdom from on high to the masses.

Other outlooks see public philosophy as teaching, especially when in appearance it shares attributes with classroom activities, such as in teaching philosophy in extra-institutional settings. This outlook similarly sees public philosophy as a matter of delivering wisdom to the lucky recipients beyond the academy. Rarely, but occasionally, public philosophy is understood as research. When it is, however, it is often weighted fractionally in comparison with *real* scholarly research. A few op-eds in newspapers might, in generous departments, be thought to add weight to a weak journal publication record. This is often how such work is perceived, with the exception of extraordinary cases in which a public philosophical project both garners large sales or visibility and awards, like a Pulitzer prize or a major book award.

Some tenure and promotion guidelines specify that for a book to be counted as research it must be published by a university press. That would separate projects like Alexander Nehamas's 2016 book on *Friendship*³ or Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*⁴ from \$150 hardbacks from major university presses⁵ because they were not published with the right "pedigree."⁶

When one is already a tenured full professor at an elite university, such distinctions matter less, yet they affect scholars everywhere. In cases of book publications that sometimes garner broad, general audiences, we are still talking about philosophical works that are typically one-directional, not considering the research potential and meaning of community-building and transactional scholarship. Scholars can and do often learn from and in communities. Public engagement in philosophy can be revelatory in remarkable ways, yet it is often discouraged. Such trends can push scholars to be less relevant, less intelligible for the general public, and thus less apparently worthy of public support. If and when scholars wish to overcome these challenges, or when administrators appreciate these forces and want to counteract them, mechanisms are and will be needed for differentiating valuable work to be encouraged and supported from wanton or idle, careless proclamations or attention-getting yet publicly or institutionally harmful behavior. For these reasons, we offer a set of basic categories for evaluative criteria. We present a simple approach for evaluation criteria because, at least for early experiments, starting simply makes the process more accessible to all involved and, in time, problems can inform refinements to the

³ Alexander Nehamas, *On Friendship* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

⁴ Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002).

⁵ Such as Bruce Kuklick's excellent book, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/a-history-of-philosophy-in-america-1720-2000-9780198250319>.

⁶ Of course, Menand's book won a Pulitzer Prize in 2002 for History and Nehamas is already established beyond any need for promotion. Yet in some institutions, evaluation criteria would count against works of these kinds for people seeking advancement.

categories that we propose.

2. What Is Philosophy Bakes Bread?

In January of 2017, we, the authors, launched a public philosophical project in the form of a radio show and podcast. Philosophy Bakes Bread is a talk radio show that airs on WRFL Lexington, 88.1 FM in Lexington, KY, and syndicates on KBLU LP Logan, 92.3 FM in Logan, Utah. The show is a production of the Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA). After airing, our episodes come out as a podcast.⁷ The program began as a weekly show and centers on an interview format. Regular episodes are approximately one hour long, and are occasionally accompanied by “Breadcrumb” episodes, which run eight to twenty minutes in length. Regular episodes invite a guest onto the show, often a professional philosopher or someone from beyond philosophy who thinks philosophically or about philosophical issues. Our aim is to showcase the practical value of philosophy for everyday life and leadership. The show gets its name from the poet Novalis, who in reply to the quip that philosophy bakes no bread, wrote that “Philosophy can bake no bread, but she can procure for us God, Freedom, and Immortality. Which, then, is more practical, Philosophy or Economy?”⁸ We reply to the line that says that philosophy bakes no bread, talking to philosophers who exemplify great metaphorical bread baking. So far, our guests have included Dr. John Lachs of Vanderbilt University, Dr. Martha Nussbaum, as well as the authors Danny Klein and Tom Cathcart of *The New York Times* bestseller, *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar*.⁹ At the time of writing, we have aired 73 episodes on the radio and released 67 in the

⁷ Available on SOPHIA’s Web site, on PhilosophersInAmerica.com, or directly at PhilosophyBakesBread.com

⁸ A less embellished version is available in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Novalis. See Kristin Gjesdal, “Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg [Novalis],” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 11, 2014, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/novalis/>.

⁹ Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein, *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

podcast.¹⁰

There are many philosophy podcasts these days. It is reasonable to wonder how Philosophy Bakes Bread is different. Many shows introduce listeners to the history of philosophy. Or, they talk about some particular philosophical issue. These are typically aimed at the introductory to advanced student of philosophy, or to specialists. Some target general listeners, but even among those, most are either topical or survey-style shows. Our show targets general audiences, first via the radio in Lexington, KY, and then around the world via our podcast. In addition, our focus is on how and why philosophy matters, how it makes a difference for our lives, thus filling a niche in the genre of philosophy podcasts. It takes a great deal of work to put on this show, and so it simply is not the case that anyone can put such a show on. A lot of time and some resources, such as a podcast recording service like Zencastr, and a distribution service, like Libsyn.com, not to mention transcription work, such as in the help we get from a paid undergraduate philosophy student, are needed to produce the show. The reasons to do this are many; however: it advances SOPHIA's mission of building communities of philosophical conversation. It also pursues pragmatic public philosophers' goals of public engagement and emphasis on the relevance of philosophy to life. It yields rich responses and interactions with listeners. It offers materials for discussions for SOPHIA's local chapters, and promotes the value of philosophy for the public. Some podcasters have developed a significant audience, to the point of generating a great deal of support on sites like Patreon.com.¹¹

¹⁰ There is a process for the various steps of releases, hence the delay in podcast releases.

¹¹ At the time of writing, Stephen West is receiving \$7,376 per episode he releases in the Philosophize This podcast, via his Patreon page: <https://www.patreon.com/philosophizethis>. Given the many costs, in terms of services and time, generating support makes such work more feasible and perhaps profitable for exceptional cases.

3. Substantive Philosophy in Conversational Style

We do not believe in drawing strict lines for what is and is not philosophy, for that has long been a way of exercising unwarranted exclusion and bias. Nevertheless, we recognize that it is possible that not everything a philosopher does is necessarily philosophical just because a philosopher is doing it. Public philosophers are, furthermore, often criticized for either “dumbing down” philosophy or for not really doing serious philosophy. We reject that attitude. It takes great mastery to understand ideas well enough to render difficult or complex thoughts simple and clear. When we invite people on Philosophy Bakes Bread to engage in substantive philosophical conversation, we often welcome professional philosophers, but not only. We have had guests from the legal field on the show, such as the host of *The Cross Examined Life* podcast.¹² Cathcart and Klein, authors of *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar*, earned bachelors degrees in philosophy, but have had careers in hospice management and in writing.¹³ Some of our guests have run outdoor expeditions companies,¹⁴ high school classrooms,¹⁵ university assessment

¹² Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Chris Tatem, “Is the Cross-Examined Life Worth Living?” Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 20, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, May 16, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/06/22/024-ep20-is-the-cross-examined-life-worth-living/>.

¹³ Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, Tom Cathcart, and Daniel Klein, “The Wisdom in Humor,” Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 17, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, April 24, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/05/31/021-ep17-the-wisdom-in-humor/>.

¹⁴ See for example Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Andrea Christelle, “Philosophy in Nature,” Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 28, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, June 13, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/07/18/032-ep28-philosophy-in-nature/>; and Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Alejandro Strong, “Philosophy Outdoors,” Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 57, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, December 4, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/01/26/061-ep57-philosophy-outdoors/>.

¹⁵ Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Nick Caltagirone, “Philosophy in

efforts,¹⁶ YouTube businesses and consultancies,¹⁷ educational and training companies,¹⁸ productive writing careers as independent scholars,¹⁹ as well as high powered political commentary news venues, such as *Vox.com*.²⁰ In the future, we envision more guests who are not academically trained philosophers, but who care about and showcase the value of philosophical ideas in their work. SOPHIA's mission, after all, is to engage people beyond the field of philosophy and beyond the academy in philosophical conversation. We want our conversations to be meaningful and substantive philosophical dialogues. So, it is important to reflect on what it means for such dialogues to be substantive. In fact, the statement from the American Philosophical Association about public philosophy hinted at the need for some new thinking about the nature and value of public philosophical work, such

High School," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 37, Transcribed by Laura M. of Rev.com, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, August 8, 2018, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/08/30/041-ep37-philosophy-in-high-school/>.

¹⁶ Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Annie Davis Weber, "Assessing Assessment," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 25, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, May 30, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/07/05/029-ep25-assessing-assessment/>.

¹⁷ Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Gregory Brian Sadler, "The YouTube Philosopher," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 38, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, August 15, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/09/05/042-ep38-the-youtube-philosopher/>.

¹⁸ Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Amy Leask, "Philosophy at Home," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 46, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, September 25, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/10/21/050-ep46-philosophy-at-home/>.

¹⁹ Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and John Altmann (LeGore), "Disability and Popular Culture," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 66, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, April 2, 2018, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/06/26/070-ep66-disability-and-popular-culture/>.

²⁰ See Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Matthew Yglesias, "Public Philosophy and Polarization," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 49, October 9, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/11/02/053-ep49-public-philosophy-and-polarization/>.

that it can be evaluated and counted among a scholar's contributions towards tenure and promotion.

So, what is substantive philosophy? One thing it need not necessarily be is jargon-filled. Jargon can prove helpful for short-hand references, but technical terms are not a defining feature of philosophical substance. On our account, a substantive philosophical conversation is either about issues that are decidedly philosophical, such as issues about knowledge, the nature of things, or values. Or, it is about apparently mundane matters or topics not typically considered philosophical, but addressed with philosophical methods, such as of questioning, creative hypothetical speculation, assumption testing, and so on. Public engagement is wonderful, but mere showmanship, getting attention by means of sensationalism, name-calling, hurtful acts, or other tricks, is not the modeling of philosophical virtues. As Dewey argued in the "Supreme Intellectual Obligation,"²¹ our aim is similarly to develop in ourselves and in our listeners the scientific attitudes and intellectual habits of mind necessary to appreciate wisdom and to put it to use. The scientific attitude is skeptical, yet adaptable in the face of evidence. The intellectual habits of mind are those which ask for clarification of terms and assumptions, the testing of beliefs for consistency and coherence, and the evaluation of our moral claims and beliefs.

We began our interview-styled episodes with Anthony as our first guest on the show. Prior to airing on WRFL, the show had been a pilot podcast that Eric began in 2015. Given that, we introduced Anthony by talking about a key and wonderful opening text of great relevance still today, Plato's *Republic*.²² Shows like that one cover material that is considered decidedly philosophical. Episode 3, by

²¹ John Dewey, "The Supreme Intellectual Obligation," *Science Education* 18 (February 1934): 1-4. Republished in *The Later Works of John Dewey, Volume 9, 1925-1953: 1933-1934*, Edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), LW: 9.96-101.

²² Eric Thomas Weber and Anthony Cashio, "The Molemen and Plato's Cave Today," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 1, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, January 9, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/01/19/ep1-the-molemen-and-platos-cave-today/>.

contrast, focused on modern history and social science about generation theory, approached with a philosopher's eye and our questions for Dr. John Shook about an outlook that some consider to be deterministic.²³

Some of our episodes will be *about* philosophy, its context and presentation in education, more than about a particular philosophical text or issue. One example is our two episode set on teaching philosophy to first-generation college students.²⁴ Issues like that one are approached philosophically, more than being specially about this or that narrow philosophical issue. For example, in making assumptions about student's needs, one may fail to consider economically disadvantaged students, revealing the potential for philosophy professors' injustice in the classroom. One example is that first-generation college students with financial needs may not have their books for a class until a month into a semester, because of delays in financial aid distribution to buy their textbooks. To judge such students as irresponsible for not having their books earlier adds insult to the significant inconvenience of poorly timed funding.²⁵

²³ Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and John Shook, "All Shook Up about World War III," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 3, Transcribed by Rebekah K. at Rev.com, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, February 1, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/02/01/007-ep3-all-shook-up-about-world-war-iii/>.

²⁴ Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, Daniel Brunson, and Seth Vannatta, "Teaching Philosophy to First-Generation College Students: Part I of II," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 6, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, February 16, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/02/16/010-ep6-pt1of2-on-teaching-philosophy-to-first-gen-college-students/>; and Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, Bertha Alvarez Manninen, and Jackie Kegley, "Teaching Philosophy to First-Generation College Students, Part 2 of 2," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 15, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, April 10, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/04/26/019-ep15-pt2of2-on-teaching-philosophy-to-first-gen-college-students/>.

²⁵ For that discussion see Weber, Cashio, Brunson, and Vannatta, "Teaching Philosophy to First-Generation College Students: Part I of II," Transcript page 11, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/PBB-6-BrunsonAndVannatta-Transcript-Boling-051017.pdf>.

At bottom, whatever the topic of our episodes, we aim to keep our conversations philosophically substantive by a) not letting guests get away with unquestioned assumptions or beliefs; b) holding them accountable for their arguments; and c) differentiating substance from “rigor.” These expectations can be guiding criteria for judging the substance in an individual scholar’s public lecture, writing, or engagement. The first two of these practices may seem straightforward, but the latter bears some explanation. There are many scholars who think that “rigor” is what matters, that ideas must be new and must be presented with the utmost of precision, even if such description makes the material unintelligible to listeners. Here we see a clash of ideals of public philosophy, for if rigor requires inaccessibility, it is incompatible with good public philosophy aimed to engage the wider public. We do not believe that such rigor is a necessity for substance. While experts may never succeed at ensuring that the lay public understands all the subtleties of a specialist’s theories and refined beliefs, the test, according to Dewey is whether humanity can benefit from wisdom maximally, while diminishing the harms that come from scientific innovations, broadly understood. We believe that “rigor” as a term and concept is often employed in elitist and exclusionary ways, as a kind of wrongheaded bit of jargon. As Einstein is often attributed for having said, “If you can’t say it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.”²⁶ We believe that substance does not have to be inaccessible. When rigor calls fundamentally for accessible precision, we favor that, but whatever else people might mean by it worries us. Inaccessibility of wisdom undermines its value for humanity, which conflicts with the idea that it is a virtue, particularly when more people need to understand or otherwise benefit from relevant insights that could improve life for our fellow men and women.

²⁶ A good example of our point is that this idea is useful even if Einstein never quite said exactly this. The attribution is not the point.

4. Making Philosophy Accessible

When one aims to engage in accessible public philosophy, it is important to ask: “accessible for whom?” One’s audience matters. There are those philosophers who worry about the term or concept of “audience,” since it summons the idea that the philosopher is some great expert who delivers his or her wisdom to the uninformed masses. The first worry, about assumptions of expertise, is of concern if philosophers assume that they do not have anything to learn from those whom they are engaging. “Audiences” today, however, can respond to and communicate with content creators. Social media are largely responsible for that great change. When we put out our podcasts and requests for feedback, people have responded by email, Twitter, Facebook, and voicemail. We call for and welcome people’s feedback, wishing to learn from it, without denying that philosophers can have valuable substance to contribute as well.

The second worry about the language of “audience” is the one-way street connotation that might be involved. But, that too is undercut by social media. Our “breadcrumb” episodes have followed up on listener feedback, resulting in having past guests on again. We also ask for listener comments, questions, and answers to our questions for segments or dedicated “breadcrumb” episodes that we call “You Tell Me!”

That said, we will continue to use the word “audience,” understanding that we do not mean to imply a limitation of insight to our expertise, nor that public engagement should mean just one-way communication. Audience matters because it informs us on what “accessibility” can mean. Wonks in the public policy world can benefit tremendously, such as in the foreign policy sphere, by language from Martha Nussbaum on the capabilities approach to development. Amartya Sen’s formal writing style won’t win him awards for poetry,²⁷

²⁷ See this biting critique of his writing style if targeted to general audiences: Wes Alwan, “How Not to Be a Public Intellectual: Amartya Sen’s Terrible Piece in the New Republic,” *The Partially Examined Life: A Philosophy Podcast and Philosophy Blog*, August 24, 2014, <https://partiallyexaminedlife.com/2014/08/24/how-not-to-be-a-public-intellectual-amartya-sens-terrible-piece-in-the-new-republic/>,

yet his work has been highly influential for many in humanitarian aid. Philosophers of education who study philosophical psychology may have a great deal to contribute to debates about self-concept and other educational phenomena. Using traditional scholarship and jargon can be useful and perhaps even standard for policy wonks who design new policies for education, the environment, or foreign aid. At the same time, that is but one kind of audience and there can be many others. As such, accessibility as a criterion will vary in form depending up on the relevant audience, something which the author alone does not control entirely. As such, one must take care to imagine the potential breadth of one's audience. For that reason, we lean towards imagining a broad audience.

In our case, we aim to engage in philosophical conversation that can be understood even by people who only have a 10th grade education.²⁸ This means that we either avoid jargon altogether, or we insist that our guests use simpler terms to explain more complex phrases and language. We have had people on our program who have used terms like “orality,” “sublimation,” “otherizing,” “normativity,” philosophical “pragmatism,” and “Hegelian dialectic.” Terms like these yield a request from us to explain them immediately and briefly. We make it a fun challenge to ask seasoned experts to explain a very complex term like one of these within about 1 minute.²⁹ It seems

which refers to Amartya Sen, “Global Warming Is Just One of Many Environmental Threats That Demand Our Attention,” *The New Republic*, August 22, 2014, <https://newrepublic.com/article/118969/>.

²⁸ According to a report on figures relevant to the year 2000, roughly 84% of Americans 25 years or older had completed at least a 10th grade education, and 80% had at least a high school diploma. Trudy Suchan, M. J. Perry, J. D. Fitzsimmons, A. E. Juhn, A. M Tait, and C. A. Brewer, “Education,” in *Census Atlas of the United States: Census 2000 Special Reports*, 157-173, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C., 2007, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/censusatlas/>, 158-159.

²⁹ Dr. Larry A. Hickman, Weber's former dissertation director, took on the task of explaining Hegel's concepts of “thesis,” “antithesis,” and “synthesis” in a minute or less in Episode 40. See Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Larry A. Hickman, “Democracy and Education Today,” *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 40, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, August 28, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/09/17/044-ep40-democracy-and-education-today/>. In fairness, we warn guests of our expectations, so to avoid such

funny at the time, but if a general listener tuned into 88.1 FM in Central Kentucky cannot understand a necessary term in under a minute, it is likely that we should avoid its use, given our chosen audience. Of course, our audience also includes scholars and intellectuals from over 100 countries, who listen via the podcast, but we must not ignore less experienced listeners just because explaining concepts is challenging or just because we are unaccustomed to talking to people who have never heard of concepts like the Marxist understanding of the alienation of labor. Or, on occasion, when we realize a difficult word slipped through without explanation, we sometimes introduce a word or two in a break before a segment in which it comes up.

Philosophy can be inaccessible. The term “alienation” may seem obvious to the initiated philosopher, but not to the general public. A simple explanation can render terms like this easier to understand. If we want people to benefit from what we are doing, we need to put our ideas in terms that people can easily grasp, and that need not undermine the value or substance of what we are talking about. It is important to note that just having a philosophy podcast does not mean that it will be accessible. Philosophy is hard, especially for people who are new to it. Thus, our sequence - airing on the radio first - presents a strong cause for rendering our language simple, clear, and intelligible, as well as our ideas understandable in bite sized steps that we hope all can follow. We find that this challenge requires us to understand our subject matter better. It takes more preparation, not less, to strive for accessibility.

Last but not least, we find it is important to consider the way our show can be physically accessible to the largest audience possible. Radio shows and podcasts are great at reaching large audiences but may alienate some listeners, especially those with hearing impairments. In order to make the format of the show accessible to a larger audience we have been working hard to fulfill the goal of providing a transcript for every episode on the show’s website. While

quizzes, one need only resist the urge to use language that our listeners might find challenging. Given academic culture, however, it is considerably more difficult than most scholars expect.

not every episode has a transcript yet, due to costs and processing time, we remain committed to getting every episode transcribed so as to be more accessible to a larger audience.

The transcription process offers many more benefits beyond accessibility for persons with hearing impairments. For two examples, texts of our shows offer a kind of academic archiving that can be cited and quoted from with pagination, as we have done in the present paper. Transcripts can be shared and are quite popular on Academia.edu. They are also very useful pedagogical tools for those who have chosen to assign podcast episodes as course texts for philosophy classes. Along with the podcast episodes, our transcripts have been assigned in courses in Introductory Philosophy, Ethics, Business Ethics, American Philosophy, and the Philosophy of Religion, according to listener reports. Searching for quotes and passages is also easier. This renders what might have seemed more like a service product, in a conversational interview, more akin to a research product, which has technical, referenceable text with pagination and formal formatting. Accessibility, therefore, bears many far-reaching benefits in its various forms.

5. Making Philosophy Inviting

We intend by the category of “invitingness” the general idea that philosophical conversations or arguments should be presented in such a way that the intended audience would *want* to engage with it. This category sometimes has less to do with content and more with overall presentation, but not entirely. Esoteric puzzles about the logic of counterfactual conditionals concerning the theory of possible worlds may be a very difficult topic to make interesting to non-specialists. Perhaps there can be a manner of delivery that would make it work, but some topics connect far more easily with people’s interests, such as ethics in life and death decision-making. This does not mean that topics must always be ethical or about every life issues. They can be about art, science, epistemology (though the word is likely to be better avoided for general audiences), and more, but the preparation for public engagement of whatever topic must be prepared for with

careful consideration of what will make it inviting. This dimension of public philosophy can be quite demanding, and involves a skill set not often taught nor traditionally celebrated in the academy. There is admittedly a bit of “salesmanship” that may seem crude to many academic philosophers,³⁰ but that concern is ill-considered. Thinking of making philosophy inviting involves many of the same considerations one has when presenting difficult ideas in the classroom or writing for the general public as established scholars do when they write for *The Stone* at *The New York Times* or other such venues.

While there are many ways of doing philosophy in an inviting and engaging manner. The goal is to strike the right combination of substance and accessibility as determined by the target audience. When it comes to Philosophy Bakes Bread (PBB), we want the audience to understand how valuable philosophy can be for their lives. We are constantly working to find the right blend of relaxed casualness of conversation and rich content. If the conversation is overly casual it runs the risk of being flippant. Yet, too much formality and it risks becoming boring to the general public and thus becoming less accessible. A good deal of preparation for each show involves developing the questions that we think will lead to just this recipe. We find that some of the best questions are lighthearted in delivery but can only really be answered with thoughtful, insightful responses.

One of the best ways of making public philosophy inviting is by making it personal. This is the heart of our show. We want people to connect with personalities, to get to know something about the persons speaking and how their experiences illustrate the richness of philosophy for them and for others. It’s vital for us, therefore, that we start with the maxim “Know Thyself”. Rather than thinking of philosophy as “the book” or “the text” or even “the argument,” people need to see that there’s a person - or several people - there with histories not too unlike ours, but with experiences of viewpoints that make them unique and special to learn from. That helps us either to

³⁰ Jeffery J. Williams, “The Rise of the Promotional Intellectual,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 5, 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Rise-of-the-Promotional/244135>.

identify with them or at least to understand them better. It helps us to connect with why someone may think and feel very differently from how we do.

The best show is revealing. It shows us something personal and practical. After all, that philosophy has broad practical application is the thesis of the show. We strive to demonstrate that philosophical problems arise from personal concerns and the interests of members of the community. For just this reason their philosophical work has tremendous practical impact. For instance, Jana Mohr Lone, Director of University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children, told us how her interest in finding a way to connect philosophy with her own children's education marked the beginning of her important work in doing philosophy for children.³¹ By making philosophy personal we seek to dispel the aura of the esoteric that often surrounds the public conception of philosophy.

One of the motivations behind this show, and our desire to engage in public philosophy generally, is that we both find great joy in philosophical thought and conversation and we want to share this joy with our guests and listeners. We also find consolation in difficult times.³² There is a style of philosophy, common among many academics and stereotypically expected among young white men in coffee shops, that is decidedly confrontational. Our simple and playful

³¹ Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Jana Mohr Lone, "Philosophy for Children," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 13, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, April 3, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/04/12/017-ep13-philosophy-for-children/>.

³² See Eric Thomas Weber, "Acceptance and Happiness with Stoicism," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Pilot Episode 0.1, March 14, 2015, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2015/03/14/0-1-ep0-1-acceptance-happiness-with-stoicism-pilot/>; Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and John Lachs, "Stoic Pragmatism," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 5, Transcribed by Kevin Dotson, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, February 9, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/02/09/009-ep5-john-lachs-on-stoic-pragmatism/>; and Eric Thomas Weber, Anthony Cashio, and Annie Davis Weber, "Finding Peace," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Episode 59, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, December 18, 2017, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/02/16/063-ep59-finding-peace/>.

advice for those who want to engage in public philosophy that is inviting is: don't be a jerk. This is an important stylistic concern. While there is a place for a combative or confrontational style, we find this style is uninviting to most members of the public. We want to encourage interest in philosophy, the ideas of our guests, and the growth of the philosophical community. We want more people to be thoughtful and to be able to be civil as they entertain others' ideas without necessarily adopting them. The Socratic method is tried and true, but when weaponized, it can work against the purposes of the way we are approaching public philosophy. One can be critically engaged with the public and other thinkers without also undermining the sense of community with acrimonious questions or tone.

The topics of our shows are often quite serious, but we want to show that there is a lighter side to philosophers and to philosophy as well. Philosophers can seem so serious, to the point of grumpiness. At the same time, we know that philosophy and philosophers can be fun and funny. To this end we include a segment at the end of the show called "Philosophunnies." The idea is that it's important for people to see that philosophers know how to laugh – we can laugh at ourselves, and we can laugh about the things we write and talk about. Even difficult subjects have been useful for us to laugh about. We have found that humor often disarms people. It warms listeners up to material, furthermore, or helps us to see a sunnier side to cloudy or darker topics. The key is to use that kind of device for the right reasons, and to put it at the end, as a reward for paying attention to the meat, potatoes, and the vegetables of the episode. Like a good meal, philosophy can be nourishing and fun. The idea that "A serious and good philosophical work could be written consisting entirely of jokes" is often attributed to Wittgenstein, but even stranger, Charles Peirce evidently said that "I seriously believe that a bit of fun helps thought and tends to keep it pragmatic."³³ We do too.

³³ Charles Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Volume 5, CP 5.71. We are grateful to Daniel Brunson for bringing this quote to our attention.

6. Community-Building — Philosophy Breaks Bread

Another reason for including humor in our material is that humor has tremendous power both to humanize and build community. For our show, it is part of our effort to weave together an inviting style with the final dimension of public philosophy we would like to highlight – community building. There is much that philosophy excels at, but we have found, to our delight, that one of the great strengths of public philosophy, one that is often not touted, is its ability to create, expand, and enrich communities. Community building depends on success in the other categories, i.e. substance, accessibility, and invitingness. Insofar as public philosophy exhibits these characteristics well, it may well lead to community development and engagement.

Community building can also be an intentional part of public philosophy. When we began planning for the show we knew we wanted to find ways to encourage and build community. In fact, Philosophy Bakes Bread is a production of the Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA), whose mission is to build communities of philosophical conversation. As such, the radio show and podcast were meant in part to serve as tools for offering conversational topics for communities to get together and talk about. In fact, we have begun creating prototype one-sheet documents about select episodes that local groups, SOPHIA chapters, can use to facilitate rich, meaningful conversations.³⁴

Since the show's planning stages for radio delivery in the fall of 2016, we wanted to find ways to engage with our listeners and encourage conversations outside of the show. We have always included the "You Tell Me!" segment. We had originally planned to

³⁴ See for example James William Lincoln, "Episode 1: The Molemen and Plato's Cave Today – A Slice of Philosophically Baked Bread," The Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA), March 16, 2018, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/03/16/the-molemen-platos-cave-today/>; and James William Lincoln, "Episode 53: Kneeing and Civil Protest – A Slice of Philosophically Baked Bread," The Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA), July 18, 2018, <https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/07/18/kneeling-and-civil-protest/>.

respond to comments and questions at the beginning of every show, but we have now found that putting out smaller episodes, “Breadcrumbs”, is a more effective and fun way of responding. We also try to utilize many of the tools available for modern dialogue – Facebook, Twitter, email, and voicemail. We treat our show as an invitation to the listeners to think about the issues and questions we raise and to join in larger community discussions.

Community-building is always a mix between the intentional and the organic and we have been delighted by the ways our show has been able to create community. At the time of this writing, the show has had over 44,000 downloads from over 100 countries, not counting listeners to the radio show in Kentucky and Utah, nor to any livestream listeners who tune in to the radio stations via the internet. The work we put into this show reaches a much larger audience than the average traditional academic paper or book. The vast majority of our podcast listeners are in the United States, the U.K., Australia, and Canada, but we have had downloads from Austria to Zambia and from Thailand to Turkey. The podcast format allows for and encourages community beyond normal international boundaries and has yielded rich friendships with inmates in federal prison in Lexington, KY as well as university professors in Venezuela, dealing with governmental collapse.

Because Philosophy Bakes Bread is both a podcast and a radio show we have found that it can have global appeal while also encouraging community and conversation at a more intimate level. The biggest surprise is probably that our most regularly responsive listeners are in prison. A group of inmates in a federal prison in Lexington, KY have written us many times, have sent us letters, paintings they have made, as well as questions and responses to our prompts. The group listens each week, talks about the show, and sends us their thoughts. They have told us that they deeply value the show and hope that we can help them start a SOPHIA chapter in the prison. This type of community connection and outreach demonstrates the power of public philosophy generally, reaching even people whom most people do not see or hear from. Also at the local level, we have felt incredible warmth and encouragement from our home station,

WRFL Lexington. In our first year, 2017, the station named Philosophy Bakes Bread “Favorite Talk Show” for the year. Then, in May of 2018, we were awarded “Overall Favorite Show” of the many programs that air on the station. It is not just scholars and students of philosophy, nor people far away, who have been welcoming and found our inviting, community-building worthwhile. Philosophy can reach people and be a tool for building genuine communities right in our own hometowns. We have achieved our start in community-building with a radio show and podcast, but other groups that are like SOPHIA can also gain from this kind of local and global outreach to communities, prisons, and other interested groups, either for its own sake, or for the countless benefits that come from enriching community engagement and interaction, or both.

7. Conclusion: A Lot of Work, but Worth Our While

We have presented some possible criteria by which public philosophy may be assessed in institutions of higher education, though they could easily apply to other educational levels if and when pre-college philosophy were to grow. Our criteria value philosophy engaged with the public in terms of substance, accessibility, invitingness, and community building. These categories are also suggestions for philosophers to consider when they think about presenting their ideas to the public for other reasons, such as in pursuing grant support or publication agreements. In our experience, they are what have emerged as some of the most salient and important factors to consider when engaging in public philosophy. This list is not exhaustive, nor do we think that all public philosophy must include all of these criteria – though all do require substance at least. If philosophy is to have a future both within and outside of the academy, we need to develop guidelines such as these for the assessment of the quality of public philosophy. Here we have attempted to show that this is a task that can be to the benefit of all, including the scholars. Given the current political climate and the growth of new forms of communal spaces, philosophers need to consider seriously the ways that philosophy can be effective outside of the academy. To this end, philosophers need to

be prepared to engage with the general public. This means the training of skills and techniques that are alien and even seemingly antithetical to philosophy as it is widely practiced in the academy.

The work of public philosophy can require a retraining of our academic habits. It also takes a great deal of time and resources.³⁵ As it stands, those who care to pursue public philosophical engagement must take risks in straying from some entrenched academic norms. Such work is riskier so long as our institutional structures still fail to recognize, evaluate, or reward public philosophical work. Traditionalists will be dismissive and belittling. But the more people practice public philosophy, the faster the culture will shift. We must take risks, invest the time and resources, and believe in the work enough until others come around and think it was their idea all along. We do philosophy in public not for attention, but because it is, as Dewey insisted, among our supreme intellectual obligations as scholars and philosophers. We offer *Philosophy Bakes Bread* as an example of what philosophy can look like in the future, when it is freed from the historical limitation of academic traditions of thinking and communicating. It is our best effort to put public philosophy into practice and to showcase the ways in which the profession can grow in substantive, accessible, and inviting community-building.

³⁵ Recording our podcast takes time to plan and invite guests, plan for interview content, record interviews, edit episodes, air episodes on radio, master aired episodes for the podcast, prepare show notes, prepare social media promotional language and photos, and then request, review, and format transcripts, released on our Web site. Costs include money for our recording platform, our podcast dissemination platform, our Web site, our editing, our transcription, and help with production as well as promotion of the podcast's platforms and special releases. These are some of the investments in time and money that depend on donations to SOPHIA now and that motivate forthcoming fundraising efforts on Patreon.com and Facebook.