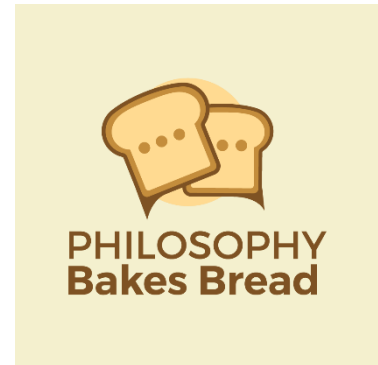


## Teaching Kids About Pessimism

*Transcribed by Drake Boling, September 5, 2017.*

Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Mariana Alessandri, "Teaching Kids About Pessimism," *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, Ep 24, BC 4, Transcribed by Drake Boling, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, May 23, 2017.



### [Intro music]

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### [Theme music]

**Dr. Weber:** We have got one more breadcrumb episode. This is technically episode 24 of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. I hope you enjoy this one further little chat we had with Dr. Alessandri. We couldn't resist. We were enjoying the conversation we had with her so much that we wanted to do one more of these little breadcrumb episodes. One last thing. If you listen to any iTunes stuff, and you enjoy this program, an easy way you can make a big difference to help us out is by going over to iTunes and giving us a great 5-star review on iTunes because that helps raise us up in the search results of the algorithm that runs everything about letting people know about our show. You can help us out by letting more people know about our show by going to review *Philosophy Bakes Bread* on iTunes. We also are on other kinds of distribution for Android and Google Plus and all that. I hope you enjoy *Philosophy Bakes Bread* and WRFL Lexington and that you enjoy this one more breadcrumb with Dr. Mariana Alessandri.

### [Theme music]

**Dr. Weber:** Welcome everyone to a special short edition of *Philosophy Bakes Bread* that we call a breadcrumb.

**Dr. Cashio:** Crumble crumble. I do that, it makes Eric giggle every time. *Philosophy Bakes Bread* is a production of the Society of Philosophers in America. In our breadcrumb episodes we include little snippets, tasty morsels from past episodes that maybe got cut off the loaf, or more substantive responses to the feedback we receive from you on Twitter, @PhilosophyBB. Hey Eric, what does that stand for again?

**Dr. Weber:** PhilosophyBB stands for *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, I believe.

**Dr. Cashio:** I think that's right. @PhilosophyBB. Tweet at us. You can also get us on Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread or by email at [philosophybakesbread@gmail.com](mailto:philosophybakesbread@gmail.com).

**Dr. Weber:** That's right, and we have got one more breadcrumb episode for you with Dr. Mariana Alessandri, who is assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. She was with us on an episode that was about the Little Engine that Couldn't. We had some further conversation with her about the question of whether or not philosophy bakes bread. She had some very interesting things to say about that. We had yet another breadcrumb episode. That is this one right here.

**Dr. Cashio:** It's a breadcrumb on top of a breadcrumb, people. Gone too meta here, possibly.

**Dr. Weber:** We had another opportunity for a little more conversation, so we are making and presenting to you this further breadcrumb, where Dr. Mariana Alessandri is going to tell us a little more about the Little engine that Couldn't, in reference to how we raise our kids. What do you tell your children? Here is goes. I hope you enjoy this little breadcrumb.

**Dr. Weber:** Mariana, we had you on for the episode we called The Little Engine That Couldn't. We were going to have a little conversation for another breadcrumb right here, but before we do that, could you help remind our listeners, or tell our listeners who didn't have a chance to listen to that episode, basically what it was about and what you were telling us in The Little Engine that Couldn't episode?

**Dr. Alessandri:** We were talking about pessimism and optimism, and how if we think optimistically, we are only, "I can do this I can do this. I can succeed if I try hard enough. Try, try again." Then it leads people to give up more easily. I think optimism actually hurts people because it leads them to give up if they don't think they can do it. Whereas something like pessimism, the sort that Don Quixote practiced when he was charging at windmills, was the sort of thing where it didn't matter if he was going to fail, because that wasn't the point. Failing was just something that was going to happen. He fought for lost causes, and that is what I was trying to defend—that actually deciding or being OK with failure, or making failure an option would lead you to be able to do more things that you consider worthwhile. Then the pressure is on you to figure out what you consider to be worthwhile in this world.

**Dr. Cashio:** I do have another question for you, but I feel like we should do another breadcrumb. I was thinking about your son. Is that your oldest, the three-year-old?

**Dr. Alessandri:** No, I have a four-year-old. Then this one is about to turn three.

**Dr. Cashio:** We talked about the Little Engine that Couldn't. Then I started thinking about this quixotic pessimism that we talked about. A lot of the optimism/pessimism, the problems we talked about, are something you teach your children, or you learn from your parents. I wonder how one goes about teaching one's kids to be this hopefully pessimistic.

**Dr. Alessandri:** Once you get past the...society weighs so heavily on the success part that once you drop all the way back to the pessimism part, then you can ignore it. In reality, Quixote ignored it. He wasn't trying to fail. I'm trying to get my kids to do what is worthwhile, what is worth doing. That is the important thing. What do you want to do? Let's do it. But not, "I'm going to do this easy puzzle because I can finish it." There is all kinds of studies about kids who, if offered a reward will only do easy puzzles if they are offered praise, they will only do easy

puzzles. How do I get my kid to choose the hard puzzle? It's about enjoying the doing of it and doing reading. There is this great book called *Punish by Rewards*, which talks about how if you give kids money for reading, then they hate reading. They are just trying to get the goodie at the end.

**Dr. Weber:** Could you say the name of the book again?

**Dr. Alessandri:** *Punished by Rewards*. There is a better one. *Drive* is the more updated one. What motivates us?

**Dr. Cashio:** That makes me feel better about my parenting. The other day, he was looking for a book, and I was like, "Here is *Harry Potter*." He is the perfect age. He's like, "I saw the movie. I don't want to read it." We had this fight, because he read all of these other books that were just like *Harry Potter*. I was just like, "Read this for 30 minutes." I set a timer. "You have to read this for 30 minutes. If you don't want to read it afterwards that's fine."

**Dr. Alessandri:** You needed to read it with him.

**Dr. Weber:** You messed up, Anthony. (laughter)

**Dr. Cashio:** He needed to have time reading on his own. He has to practice. He is old enough to read. He ended up loving the book and couldn't put it down. He actually got in trouble because of the old flashlight in the bed, staying up late reading it. I'm trying to be an angry dad like, "Don't do that. You have to get up in the morning," while secretly being like "I'm so proud of you, son." First of all you defied orders, which you should always do. You should never listen to what I say. Second of all, you did it to read. So it's hard to be that angry with him.

**Dr. Alessandri:** My favorite quote is Lin Manuel-Miranda, he created *Hamilton*. He has got this hoodie that says, "Rehearsal is the best part". That is everything. We think about opening night. We think about the applause. Everyone advises everyone to wait for the applause. "You're going to love it." This whole Olympics thing. I have published a little bit about this. I hate the Olympics. I hate the goal-oriented, "It's gold or bust. It's gold or my life was a waste of time." Rehearsal is the best part. If you don't like swimming, you better not go in for the Olympics. That doesn't make any sense. They hate their lives until they win, and that creates really miserable people. Rehearsal is the best part. That's what I want to teach my kids, if I can teach them anything. It's not about the success that you're going to get. Elizabeth Gilbert is also good on this. She has a book called *Big Magic* about writing, about being creative. She is like, "If you are doing it for the acclaim, or getting famous, just quit right now. You are never going to like it. Unless you like writing, you just have to like what the thing is you're doing."

**Dr. Cashio:** I hope everyone enjoyed this little breadcrumb.

**Dr. Weber:** Remember that you can call us and leave a short, recorded message with a question or a comment that we may be able to play on the show, at 850-257-1849. That number is 859-257-1849. You can also reach us by Twitter, Facebook, or by email. For any of that information again, visit [philosophybakesbread.com](http://philosophybakesbread.com).

**Dr. Cashio:** This has been Dr. Anthony Cashio, Dr. Eric Weber, and Dr. Mariana Alessandri, with *Philosophy Bakes Bread*, food for thought about life and leadership.

[outro music]