**Learning in the Wild Final Report**

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**Table of contents**

**Part 1: Site, Questions, and Methods**

**Introduction**

Philosophy enthusiasts who join The Philosophy Café on Discord receive the following welcome message of which keywords include: sharing, community, respect, group project, and cooperation. Each of these notions was echoed throughout our research for the Learning in the Wild project.

> Welcome to The Philosophy Café! This server is dedicated to engaging in philosophical discourse and exploring ideas in the history of philosophy. Our goal is to come together as a community to benefit one another by sharing and critically examining knowledge and experience in a way that respects everyone's safety and autonomy. We are not a debate server. Argument is a method used by philosophy, but this isn't to be confused with debate. The latter is competitive in nature, whereas the former is a cooperative endeavor. Philosophy is a group project that aims to determine what is true, and TPC is a place for this activity. To that end, we are proud to host over a dozen community-organized reading groups in a variety of areas of philosophy! (Discord Inc., 2020)
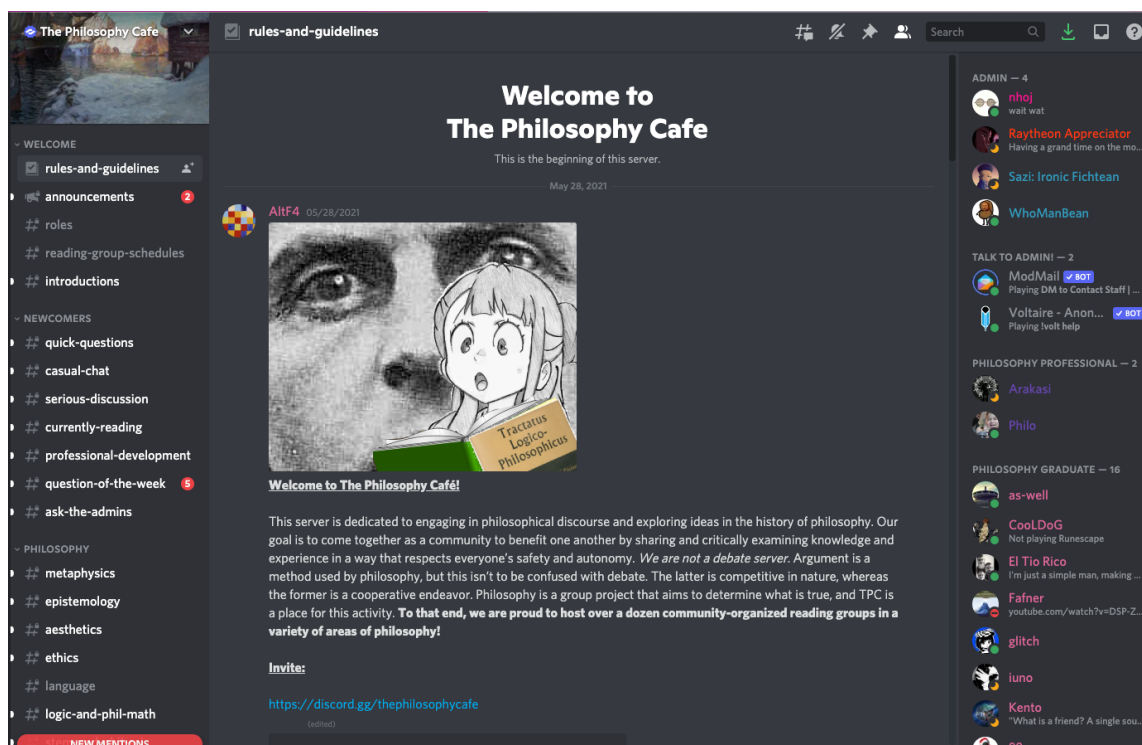


Discord is a digital communal environment that allows users to interact with other users via specific chat-based servers. The versatility of Discord includes its cloud-based server that exists as a desktop app, website, or mobile app. You are able to access Discord and talk to others wherever you go. When loading the mobile app of Discord, the first thing your eyes are drawn to

on the left-hand side is a weekly rotating image of the server that sets the mood and tone for how one might feel upon entry. At the moment, The Philosophy Café exhibits a painting of a harbor, blanketed in snow, possibly distinguishing December. From there, one is able to access the server's emoji dictionary, a scaled-down visual representation of the type of interactions that present itself within the online forum. Each server in Discord has the functionality to add a visual image to be included as part of their server's "emoji dictionary."

Not only can server emojis be the reaction icons users use to make quick expressions, they can also provide us a snapshot of common server engagement and user interactions before diving into the text-based discussions. Emojis in the Philosophy Café range from heads of famous philosophers to emotions affiliated with philosophical thinking to animals. Philosophers include but are not limited to: Aristotle, Plato, Nietzsche, Camus, Spinoza, Marx, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks, Fanon, Zizek, and more showcasing the variety of academic disciplines evaluated and discussed within the platform. Emotions vary from linguistic_confusion, analysis, stress, thinking_inverted, thinking_ultra, thinking_smug, thinking_spin, thinking_laser, sleep_cry, superlol, laugh2, laugh3, blobcrying, and more perhaps indicating the variety of feelings that are typically affiliated with deep analytical work. Animals range from comfypossum, panda_heart, panda_read, panda_content, panda_hug, panda_aww, cat_emoji, weasel, and more, in the end, depicting the type of warmth individuals might feel when engaging with one another. The different sets of emojis lend well to how they've curated communicating with one another in a visual manner.
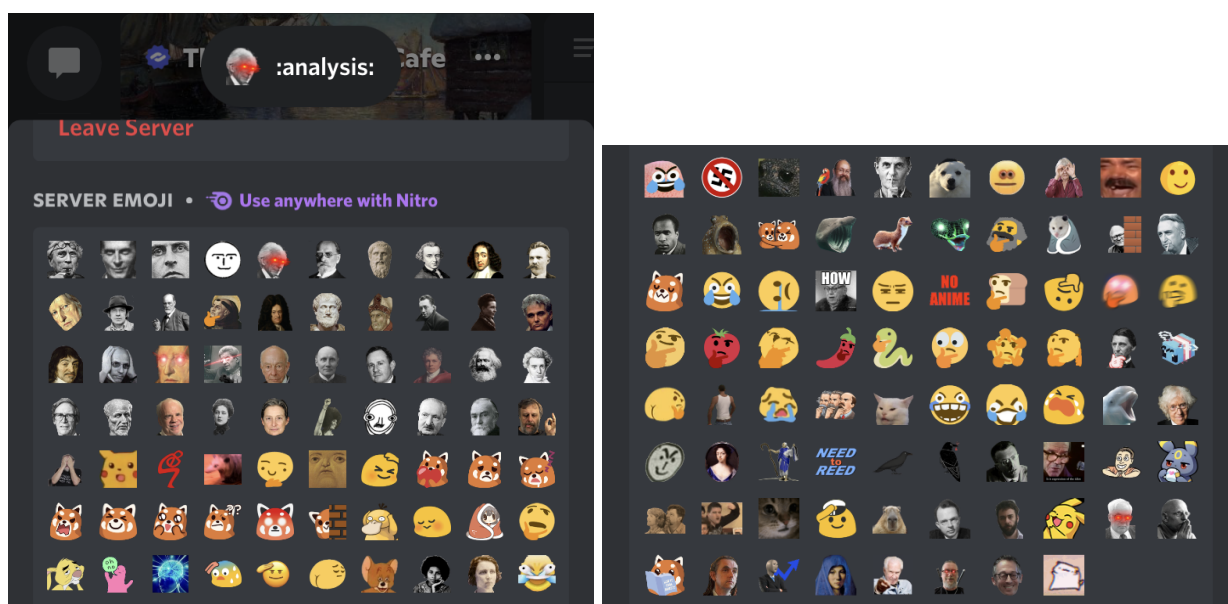


**Rationale of Research Site**

We chose Discord as our research site because Discord, via the server functionality, enables users to create virtual spaces for their friends or communities, whether for local sports clubs, study groups, or professional communities, providing ample opportunities to observe various learning activities. Users can create a new server or join the existing servers based on

their interests and needs and can chat with one another or participate in a virtual communal activity via typing, speaking (through audio), or video conferencing (Discord Inc., 2020). Discord was established in 2015 and by word-of-mouth, it is most notable with the gaming community ("Discord (software) - Wikipedia", 2021).

Specifically, we will be observing the Philosophy Café (TPC) server on Discord, as we believe this server could provide deeper quality content and more concentrated conversations to analyze despite its small group size and a limited number of channels. We believe that TPC attracts people who value a sense of community, have a good level of digital literacy, and are interested in studying different topics of philosophy in an open but inclusive environment. In using TPC as an observation site, it would be interesting to see how members of this site leverage a shared interest in building community and friendships and how members enhance their understanding of philosophy via interactions with others.

Additionally, we would like to explore how a non-gaming server on Discord has adapted the chat-like forum that was initially intended for gamers for their own needs. Discord also strikes some similarities with Slack, initially intended for work, leading to new insights into how the channel setup facilitates learning. It would also be interesting to observe emergent learning strategies specific to this environment and strategies that are commonly seen in other learning environments. Moving forward, we acknowledge that some of our preconceptions going into observing Discord regardless of the server choice include:

- There is more community-building happening, even for a learning server.
- There will be distinct roles or types for learners, e.g., active discussion leaders vs. passive information takers.
- Different learning patterns might emerge within different channels.

**Motivations and Guiding Questions**

Drawing on the social constructivism theory, main guiding questions included to see if there is a structured way of learning during this process and how these meetings begin and end or if it is a free discussion forum. Other questions to mull over while conducting research included: what is the level of formality in discussing dense topics? What types of questions about the shared readings are being posed? Is deep knowledge being formed? Are they sharing annotative texts? How do individuals describe philosophy to the other aspects of their lives? How do they bring visual imagery to the foreground? What are the different textures of the environment, and if annotations are made, are they via a text tool or drawn on the text?

From the situativity theoretical lens, the main motivation is to understand the discourse for this community and how one learns it. Acquiring more insights about TPC discourse can help us further apprehend the characteristics of the community and cultural environment it cultivates, which is critical to draw relevant and situated conclusions about learning. Given that there are also different types of channels within TPC, such as topic-orientated channels, reading groups, and newcomer-specific channels, my initial guiding questions when starting the project aimed to see whether each type of channel created a specific context and environment for learning, despite all being under the umbrella of TPC. Also, how might one transfer their knowledge from one

channel (i.e., context) to another? However, with a closer look at the structure of TPC, I realized that a focus on the context without first delineating user identity would lead to oversimplified conclusions - the learning environment can be very different for newcomers and experienced members even though they conduct learning behaviors in the same channel (i.e., physical environment) of the site. Thus, I shifted my research question to focus on the differences between newcomers and more experienced members of the site - how their situation and context vary and how the variations affect their learning or shape their identities given the linkage between learning and one's identity (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Answering the above questions and examining learning from both the social constructivism and situativity lenses can help construct a holistic picture of learning. From our research we were able to generalize localized learning theories that are specific to the community which later informed us of any potential re-design needed within the informal learning environment.
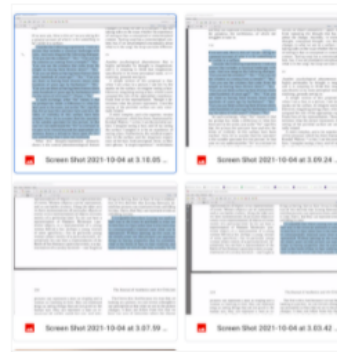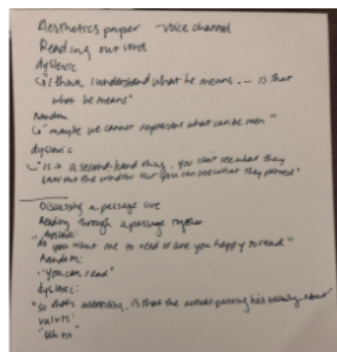
**Data Collection and Analysis**

Once we confirmed our research interests and established a number of guiding questions, remote participant observations were carried out for a time span of two months, from the end of September to the end of November 2021. We decided to conduct observations separately in our own time as it allowed us to cover a wider range of data and allowed for a more flexible schedule. In total, we conducted 15 hours of observation (BN: 5.25h; YS:9:75h; see Table 1 for a detailed data collection log).

**Table 1.** Data collection log

| Date (mm/dd/yy) | Researcher | Observation duration | Observation activity and/or channels visited on TPC |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 09/27/21 | YS | 30 min | Introduction to the server<br>Server structure and environment |
| 10/04/21 | BN | 20 min | Reading Group/Voice Channel: Aesthetics |
| 10/14/21 | BN | 60 min | Channels: #SeriousDiscussion and #Aesthetics |
| 10/15/21 | BN | 60 min | Sever Rules and #PoliticsChat |
| 10/16/21 | BN | 60 min | Search thread "Hasan Piker" (socialism) |
| 10/18/21 | BN | 60 min | Channels: #SeriousDiscussion and #Aesthetics |
| 10/23/21 | YS | 30 min | Reading Groups: #buddhism |
| 10/24/21 | YS | 120 min | Reading Groups: #Analytic-tradition |

| Date (mm/dd/yy) | Researcher | Observation duration | Observation activity and/or channels visited on TPC |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10/25/21 | YS | 75 min | Newcomers: #question-of-the-week<br>Tracking a newcomer |
| 11/13/21 | BN | 60 min | Search "Nietzsche" |
| 11/15/21 | YS | 60 min | Newcomers: #question-of-the-week<br>Reading group: #feminism |
| 11/16/21 | YS | 120 min | Multiple newcomer-specific channels<br>Search "Newcomer" |
| 12/06/21 | YS | 150 min | Search "whitename"<br>#ask-the-admins channel |

For each observation, Bebe would jot down brief notes by hand and uploaded them to the shared folder alongside the screenshot artifacts and Yuli would record her field notes in a pre-prepared template in which she was able to serapte objective observations from her subject interpretations and reflections.



We pooled our field notes together in the shared folder so that both of us can have prompt access. For clear tracking, we included identifiers of dates and main observation activity in the file name and organized all of our field notes in chronological order. We would also communicate on a frequent basis to moderate progress, share preliminary findings, and exchange

thoughts on each other's observations. Specifically, our communication was through quick monthly team debriefs, ongoing slack messaging, and collaboration in Google docs using the chat and comment function.

To gain access to TPC, we first needed to read and agree to the server rules and we would then choose our roles for further engagement within the server. For example, we could choose the reading groups that we were interested in to receive their meeting schedules to attend synchronous meetings. Regarding our observation stance, we positioned ourselves primarily as complete observers (Kawulich, 2005), acting through the "fly-on-wall" technique, keeping a distance and observing. Our general approach of conducting an observation would follow a sequence of reading through conversation threads in multiple channels, identifying a particular conversation thread that we would want to further examine, scrolling further up to determine when the conversation began, and recording observations of the part of this conversation that we found meaningful. One challenge that emerged in this process was that oftentimes, a variety of conversations would happen in between these longer conversation threads, causing a meaningful conversation to span either the course of several days or several months. This challenge could propose limitations in our later interpretations of the learning phenomenon at TPC since we might not be able to trace the full length of those interrupted conversations. However, with communication between the two of us sharing thoughts on observed activities as well as using multiple examples to support our conclusions, we believe that the triangulation helped us mitigate the negative impact of this challenge. In addition to our general approach for observations, when a conversation had the ability to resurface, we would use the "search" function to look for all relevant threads regarding the keywords to deepen our understanding of a particular theme.

We analyzed our data separately but we both adopted coding methods as the first step in making sense of the data. Mainly, we used descriptive coding (assigning summative labels to observations) and In Vivo (using TPC members' own words as codes) coding methods (Miles et al., 2014). We also adopted different methods to further disentangle the data. Particularly, Yuli created journey maps to help her organize insights that were relevant to a user's growth at TPC (more details can be found in Part 2: Situativity). Bebe would categorize and classify content based on recurrent motifs or repetitive themes she would notice within the engagement of different channels. She created a list akin to an outline to better organize patterns distinctly. Additionally, both of us produced analytic memos in which we presented our data with our thinking processes and reflections drawn from the assigned readings on the two theories. We then provided feedback on each other's analytic memos to help deepen our understanding by proposing reflective questions to reveal latent themes that we might not have thought of on our own. We believe our conclusions are evidence-based as we continued to refer to scholarly pieces within the Learning Sciences field to support us. We turned specifically to Sara J. Tracy's (2010) seminal piece *Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research,* to ensure our process was grounded and thorough within our data collection, observations, and analysis.

**Part 2: Knowledge Claims and Conceptual Framework**

**BN - Social Constructivism**

*Introduction*

There are multiple ways to access the cloud-based server Discord, for this particular investigation, I focused on deriving material from the desktop application. The background color of the cloud-based webpage, The Philosophy Café has a grey tint, and is easy on the eyes for scrolling and reading through an extensive amount of small white text. The server's image icon is a set of autumnal browned, orange, and yellowed trees, warm and inviting. On the other hand, the top left corner houses an image that frequently rotates. On this particular day, it is a black and white image of what appears to be the Hollywood hills sign behind a fire, perhaps indicating the dichotomy and nature of philosophical thinking: a seemingly cozy, peaceful environment made for neighborly discussion, an exchange of thoughts, that also, contrastingly, houses disparate modes of thinking, where disagreements maybe a few arguments occur, but ultimately, has the power to spark knowledge.
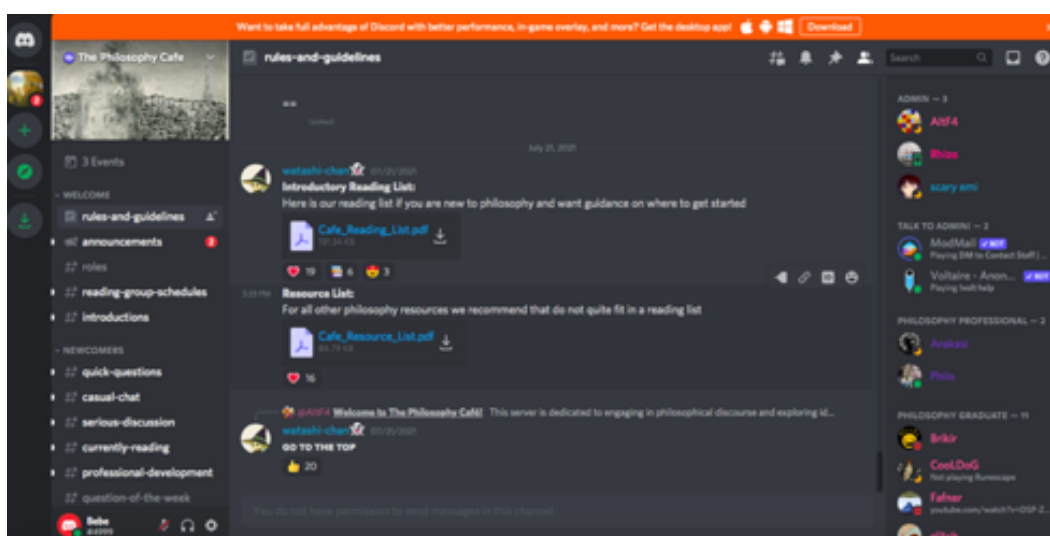


Fig 1. The layout for Discord's The Philosophy Cafe

On the left-hand side of the navigation panel there is a list of links to upcoming events which include synchronous reading discussion sessions (e.g. "On Narcissism: An Introduction Session 1 Freud Reading Group"), server rules-and-guidelines, voice groups, as well as different channels such as #serious-discussion, #question-of-the-week, #aesthetics, #political-philosophy, #social-philosophy, along with "Misc" channels which include #politics-chat and more. Once you click each tab, the center navigation panel will open the ongoing and unfolding thread of discussions in chronological order (most recent commentary at the bottom) for the corresponding topic. Finally, on the right-hand side, users are categorized by their educational levels in

philosophy, that better helps to delineate the status of novice learners versus more experienced learners.

While sifting through the digital archive, I gravitated towards conversations on select topics that aligned with my own personal interests. I made a deliberate choice to pick specific strands of discussions that I would be able to vaguely understand from prior knowledge, versus philosophical topics I had no former exposure to. This allowed me to gauge the levels and types of learning that were unfolding and to better discern the variety of engagement and interaction between users. Selfishly too, as an individual who formerly minored in philosophy and sociology in my undergraduate studies I chose these conversations because I am invested in the content and found myself more engaged in the dialogue. Regarding my analysis, I have attempted to stay unbiased in my own opinions of the topics at hand.

In conducting my research and crystalizing my findings, I want to outline and elaborate on four patterns of engagement I noted through a social constructive lens to further explain how individuals belonging to the Philosophy Café community construct knowledge together.

While these findings are preliminary, and based upon a handful of threads, I believe as I continue my field-work, my research will, hopefully, endure and point towards these claims. Since these are my initial findings, when working to compile more research, I aim towards seeking for specific examples of these key points, to solidify my evidence. Primarily, I focused on how the co-construction of knowledge was formed, taking into consideration the linguistics of threads, level of overall engagement within conversations, as well as how conversations were regulated.

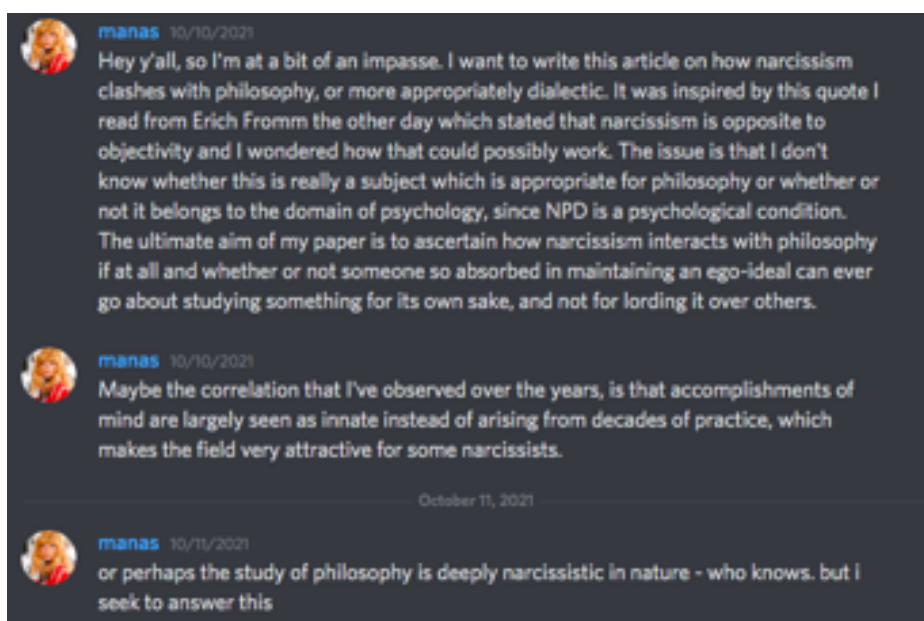### Claim 1: Discussion leads to the co-construction of philosophical knowledge

**Example 1**

There is a channel labeled as "#serious-discussion" which users are encouraged to answer weekly-posed questions written in: #question-of-the-week. Although participants do not always engage with the weekly questions proposed. Instead, they pose their own, which go on to maintain in-depth levels of thinking and interactivity, attempting to get at the bottom of philosophizing concepts such as "narcissism." In this example, user manas has posed a question about narcissism in which fellow users respond to. She is proposing a paper topic she is planning on pursuing but does not know how to approach her essay. Inspired by a quote from Erich Fromm that described narcissism as the opposite of objectivity, she plans on questioning how "narcissism" as a concept fits into the framework of philosophy or philosophical thinking. Manas thinks critically about the correlation of the mind and philosophy going on to state, "perhaps the study of philosophy is deeply narcissistic in nature – who knows. But I seek to answer this." User Raining Outside provides an elongated explanation of his understanding of narcissism. He deepens the definition of narcissism but further separates how a "philosophical narcissist" acts, stating:

> The philosophical narcissist methodologically prevents anything from
> coming into view which does not conform to their presuppositions in

advance. This means that they stand external to shared objectivity and can only maintain this externality by negating whatsoever could appear in terms outside of their presumptive framing… The philosophical narcissist systematically undermines the possibility not only of teaching an other by engaging their position imminently, but also of ever being taught by an other as they already negate the possibility of the other knowing better in advance.

His conclusion refutes manas' initial hypothesis, "The philosophical narcissist is in this way intrinsically anti-philosophical." He claims that philosophical thinking requires teaching and engagement from others, something the "narcissist" would not seek. As the open dialogue about narcissism continues, here too, the users go on to make sense of how to best define narcissism collaboratively and come to a shared understanding of the concept. Manas believes that "[the narcissist in all of us] pushes us to trust our judgement and opinions more than that of others." Another user Zanithus replies, "It takes effort to change your mind." AdHawk chimes in, "perhaps it's that the narcissist is aiming at their own ego, while the philosopher's proper aim is towards the truth instead." There is an enduring negotiation on how the narcissist acts, and an attempt at finding one shared definition between all parties, but moreover, they build on one another's theories, adding their own ingredient to the pot of knowledge brewing. Here, I can assume that philosophical thinking closely mimics Vygotsky's social constructivist theory of collaborative learning, "people learn, thrive, and grow in relation with others" (Ackerman, 2004, p. 18). Each individual's singular thought on narcissism adds to the group's greater knowledge on narcissism. Manas' self-doubts are curtailed from seeing another individual's point-of-view on the philosophical topic.
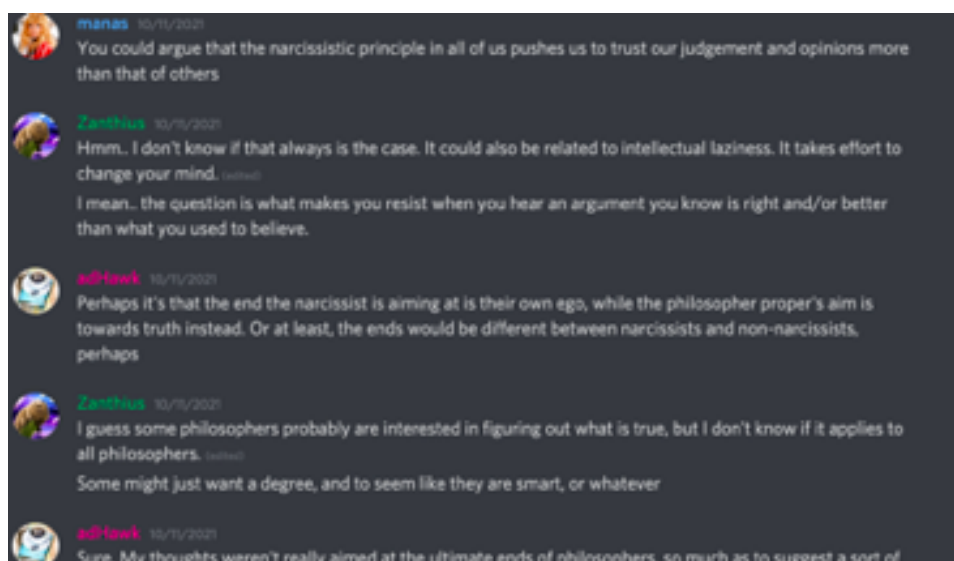


manas 10/10/2021
Hey y'all, so I'm at a bit of an impasse. I want to write this article on how narcissism clashes with philosophy, or more appropriately dialectic. It was inspired by this quote I read from Erich Fromm the other day which stated that narcissism is opposite to objectivity and I wondered how that could possibly work. The issue is that I don't know whether this is really a subject which is appropriate for philosophy or whether or not it belongs to the domain of psychology, since NPD is a psychological condition. The ultimate aim of my paper is to ascertain how narcissism interacts with philosophy if at all and whether or not someone so absorbed in maintaining an ego-ideal can ever go about studying something for its own sake, and not for lording it over others.

manas 10/10/2021
Maybe the correlation that I've observed over the years, is that accomplishments of mind are largely seen as innate instead of arising from decades of practice, which makes the field very attractive for some narcissists.

October 11, 2021

manas 10/11/2021
or perhaps the study of philosophy is deeply narcissistic in nature - who knows. but i seek to answer this

Fig 2, Fig 3, and Fig 4. An ongoing thread on narcissism

**Example 2**

There is an even more pointed level of conversation when individuals present screenshots of readings they are working on through their studies. The example below has one participant introducing a screenshot of an intellectually dense piece of writing from Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Historicism.* She synthesizes and analyzes the fragment and asks for confirmation, while another participant further outlines his analysis of the reading in an attempt to assist the joint understanding of the Jameson excerpt. Livingnew asks, "Maybe I should just paraphrase this back, and someone can just tell me if this makes sense at all." She proposes her claim upon the excerpt regarding historicism and YungYorbis validates her thoughts, "seems like you got it, so what's the question?" Livingnew reconsiders, "I suppose the thing that I find strange is how identity is to be thought of here." YungYorbis then shares another excerpt from *Marxism and*

*Historicism* through a screenshot, "The radical Difference of the alien object from ourselves, then at once the doors of comprehension begin to swing closed and we find ourselves separated by the whole density of our own culture from objects or cultures thus initially defined as Other from ourselves and thus as irremediably inaccessible." He explains Jameson from his understanding, "The big idea I think is that when you approach history from the historicists point of view, you are locked into these two positions. Either the past is just like the present or it's really different. And Jameson wants to say both are worse." Livingnew thanks him for his explanation and the conversation closes.

Here, philosophy acts as an example to look at through a social constructivist lens, as most learners are questioning what philosophers have noted, reiterating it with their own digestible terms, feeding it back into the community for validation, seeking others' interpretation of selected texts or concepts. Usually, another learner adds to what was initially discussed, a back-and-forth exchange happens, an agreement of understanding is settled upon. Each learner adds his or her reflection and rendering of the selected text or concept to add to another learner's understanding of the topic. Carol K. K. Chan and Jan van Aalst note that Scardamlia and Bereiter understand knowledge building as "advancing the state of community knowledge, while participants also learn" (2018, p. 296). The support in dissecting a reading or topic adds to advance the community's shared knowledge of philosophy.
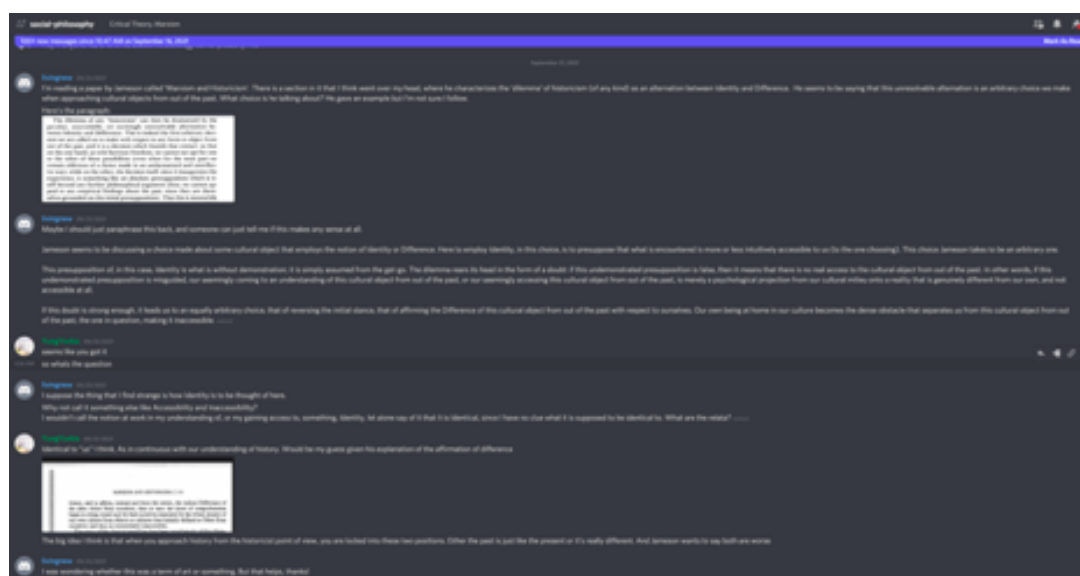


Fig. 5 Screenshots of Jameson's *Marxism and Historicism*

**Example 3**

Perhaps most intriguing, is the distinction of roles and hierarchy the server has methodologically planned out, for users to introduce themselves upon joining the community and noting his or her level of engagement in philosophy as well as level of education. Members are a

diverse age group dispersed from the high school, undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels. This points to an embedded sense of status for more knowledgeable users and acts as an example of the zone of proximal development at work, "a range of tasks that are outside of the learners' current ability but are achievable with appropriate help" (Reiser & Tabak, 2014, p. 46). A more experienced and avid learner of philosophy can assist novice learners, but moreover, strikingly, the novice learner seeks this assistance from the more educated, looking up to him or her, granting respect towards a potential tutor, as the figure below elaborates the tutee, Arche stating to a potential tutor, The Reading Dragon, "as a phil graduate in the Aristotle reading group id imagine you could help make things clear for me."



Fig 6. Looking up to a potential tutor

***Claim 2: Debate leads to higher levels of interaction***

**Example 1**

Initially I was curious about how individuals would describe philosophy and relate it to other aspects of their lives. Delving into a long ongoing multi-thread account in #politics-chat of the Hasan Piker house debacle, I could see that users have a comprehensive understanding of Marxist and socialist theories that they are able to synthesize and apply towards debating and unwrapping an issue some find problematic and capitalistic.

To summarize, Hasan Piker, a notable Twitch far-left social activist was noted purchasing a multi-million-dollar home. User Ivan the Kino Enjoyer forcefully begins, "I don't get how buying a house is against Marxism. Marx wasn't against that too. People know that right?" Another user, The "We Live in a Society" Guy boldly retorts, "The fact that he didn't buy a more reasonable home is questionable. He is a public figure with socialist values, so instead of spending money on a 3 million dollar home, why not something cheaper." Ivan the Kino Enjoyer points out housing costs, "LA ain't cheap you know." Others begin to hop in restating expensive housing costs around different parts of North America. User Zaktan clarifies what is considered

problematic with Hasan, "…he defends very liberal and sometimes even Neo-liberal forms of politics. He doesn't talk at all about socialism, he screams at and silences minorities somewhat often…He's a demagogue profiting off of it completely removed from what it means to be an actual working person in American society." While these conversations are more laid back (e.g. linguistical words such as "ain't") in tackling theoretical philosophies, talking about current events pushes individual beliefs more, which in turn creates cognitive conflict, each individual presenting new information trying to re-structure another's cognitive structure, "[cognitive conflict creates] contradictory experiences. A key element here is the development of awareness of beliefs… The students take in (assimilate) the new information, then restructure (accommodate) their existing cognitive structures as a result" (O'Donnell & Hmelo-Silver, 2013, p. 7). One side believes housing costs in America have risen that a three-million-dollar home in Los Angeles, given the economic circumstances is reasonable, while another side dictates that it goes against Marxist-socialist beliefs as he acts as a "demagogue profiting off" [of viewership], implying his capitalistic endeavors.

It is difficult to note whether or not a shift in their thinking has occurred after the dispute. Though, these conversations generate higher engagement because of diametric views. The Hasan Piker housing debacle was an ongoing conversation throughout the server that would pop up again from time to time. As User Ivan the Kino Enjoyer stated, "wait is there still discussion around Hasan buying a house?" The resurfacing of the debate over the course of several months helps demonstrate that the more people disagree, the more they want to engage and prove their point. The question of whether or not they learn or have a cognitive shift continues to reside, though polarized beliefs push us to socialize more.
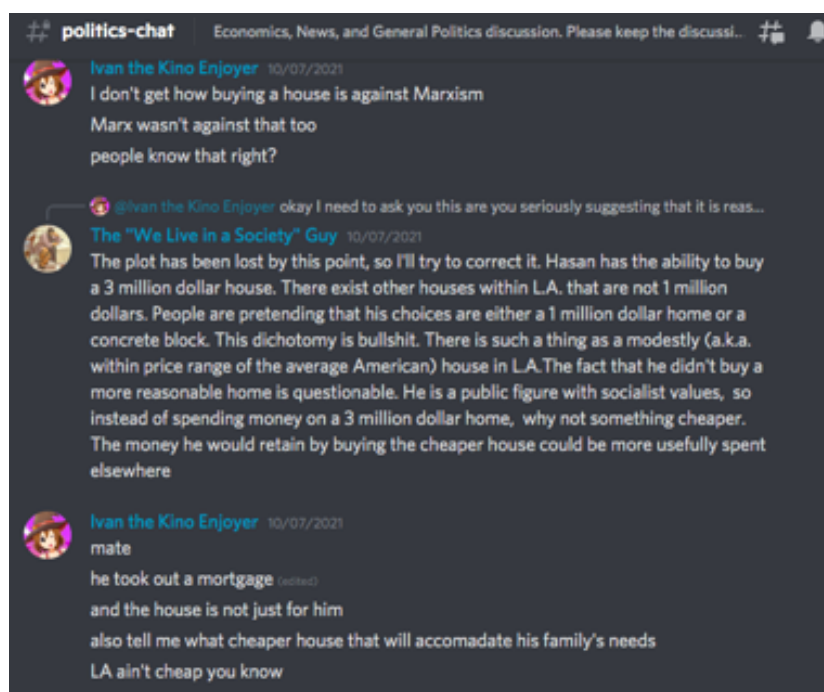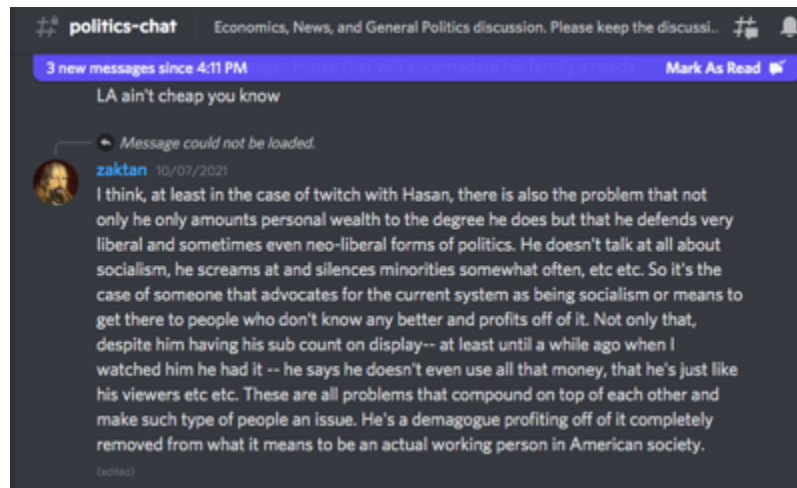


Fig 7. Marxism socialism Hasan Piker debate part 1

Fig 8 and Fig 9. Marxism socialism Hasan Piker debate part 2 and 3

**Example 2**

An argument unraveled between user erist and TwoWizards challenging an understanding of Nietzsche and whether or not he is a "nihilist" but moreover, what type of theory "nihilism" counts as. TwoWizards states, "He's not concerned about suffering and there's no sorrow", while erist replies, "I'm getting the impression you think nihilism is somehow sad…we're all gonna disagree. I don't think we're talking about nihilism the same way, fam." TwoWizards answers, "Nihilism is just something Nietzsche is extremely hostile to and as he defines it it's anti-life." What I found most compelling about this exchange, was not necessarily the heart of what was

being debated, which was ultimately somewhat confusing for me to distinguish each individual's take, but rather, the cultural addition of the word "fam" thrown into a relatively heavy exchange on Nietzsche, nihilism, cheerfulness, and sorrow. The linguistics of taking primary discourse learned among friends is collapsed within secondary academic discourse (Gee, 1989). This is a unique transformation of semantics, bringing two different types of discourse into one, the *mushfake,* where it is unclear whether or not the user has acquired proper secondary academic Discourse and is *making do.* When words such as "fam" are thrown into dialogue about philosophy, it can potentially drive us to question how much the user actually knows. I will attempt to elaborate on this concept further in my reflections and conclusion.
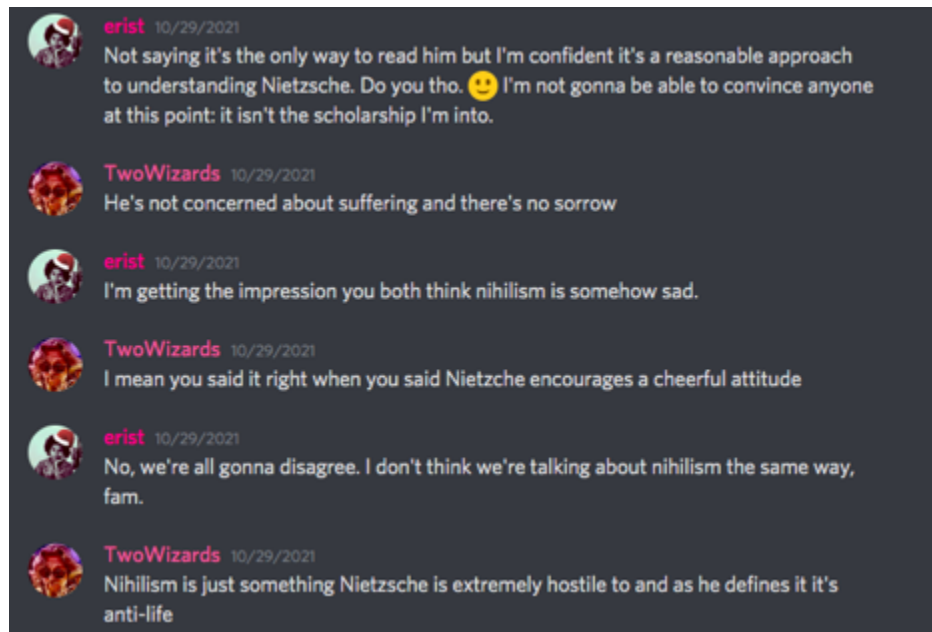


Fig 10. Nietzche and nihilism debate

### Claim 3: Links to social media posts from Twitter do not initiate conversation

Initially I proposed that learning would be a mixture of passive and active. However, I believe learning within this platform is far more constructive and interactive as seen in the channels mentioned prior (Chi, 2009). On the other hand, it is salient to propose a juxtaposed look at where dialogue falls flat. Take for example, how multiple links and screenshots of Tweets from Twitter are spread throughout the #politcs-chat. The one I picked to focus on showcases New York Times headlines that state, "Bomb Syria, Even if It Is Illegal", "To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran", "Bomb North Korea, Before It's Too Late", "Bombing Iraq Isn't Enough." The headlines displayed together, likely a connotative nod questioning the political leaning of the newspaper's content. Twitter links are not usually responded to, only occasionally, but sometimes you will see an emoji reaction, which hints at acknowledgement but does nothing

additional to expand one another's knowledge upon the topic. Considering the visual symbolism of emojis, users apply "thinking" emojis to express that they are "thinking" about the topic, though it is not clear whether anything was learned from the quick digital reaction. There is no co-construction of knowledge when links are shared. This passivity acts as a stark contrast to the usual buzz and bumble of elongated conversations that tend to regularly happen.
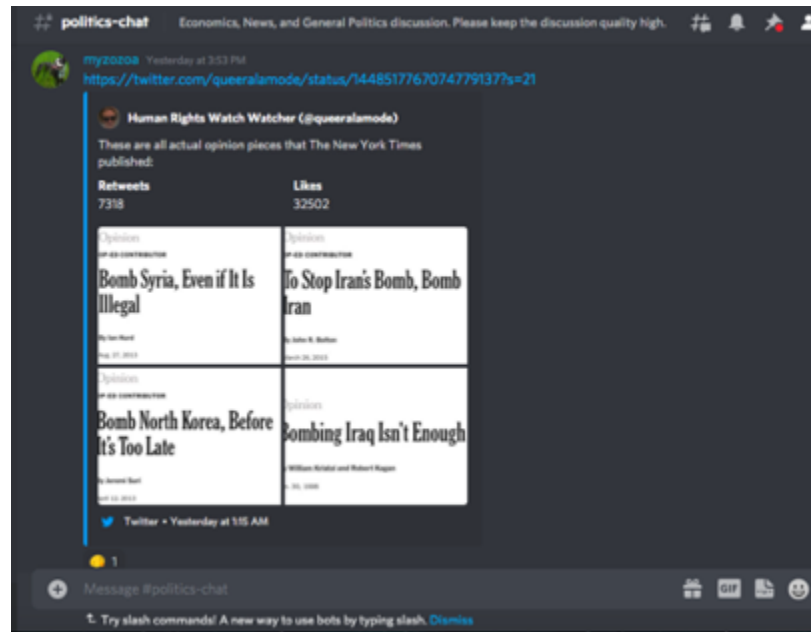


Fig 11. Twitter links

### *Claim 4: Learning is regulated to create a knowledge building discourse*

As I presumed in the project proposal, communities of practice are at work here, learning through the process of participating in back and forth texts as well as group discussions (Lave & Wenger, 1998, p. 47). Most interestingly, though is how firmly individuals stick to the server rules and channel distinctions. As AltF4 notes in #serious-discussion "The specialty channels are for informed philosophical discussion", once discussions seemingly "get out of hand" or as Rhize notes, "lack even a semblance of rigour" they "ask discussants to move elsewhere", which can seem frustrating to discussants. Take into consideration a question asked in the #aesthetics channel about aesthetics of porn. Questions that lack proper intent will not be answered. User The Reading Dragon advises, "Your question was abstract and disconnected from aesthetics as I know it, please provide something specific to discuss." This allows the community to prosper in its co-construction of philosophy as it does not allow non-sensical thinking to come into the arena, lifting the society's aim at keeping a high level of discourse throughout as mentioned in the Server Rules. But that also makes me question, who gets to deem what is appropriate? As user mileale states in irritation, "if I wanted to debate free speech what is the correct channel?"
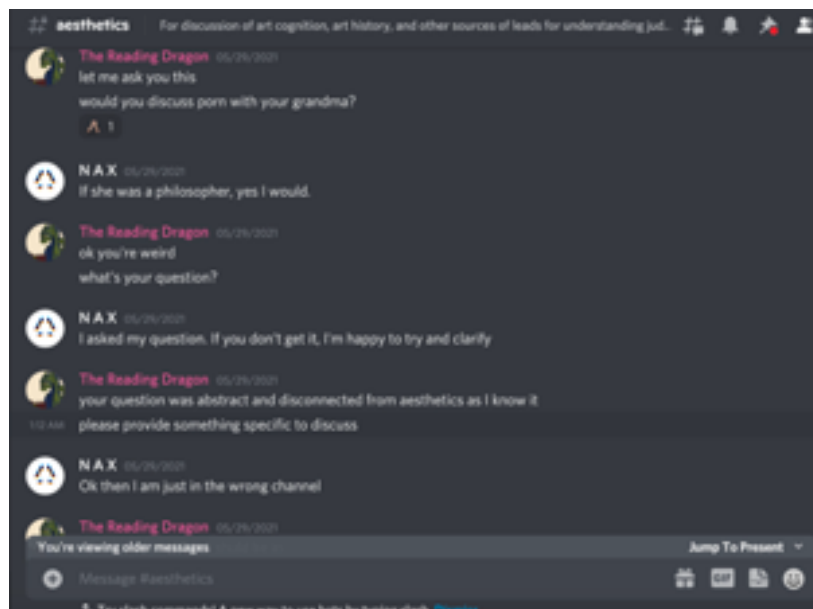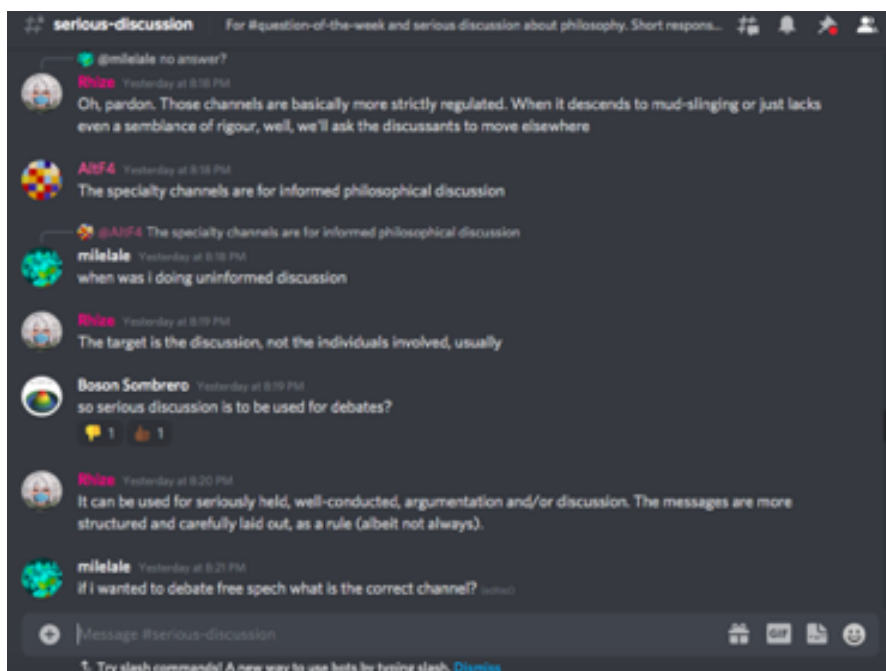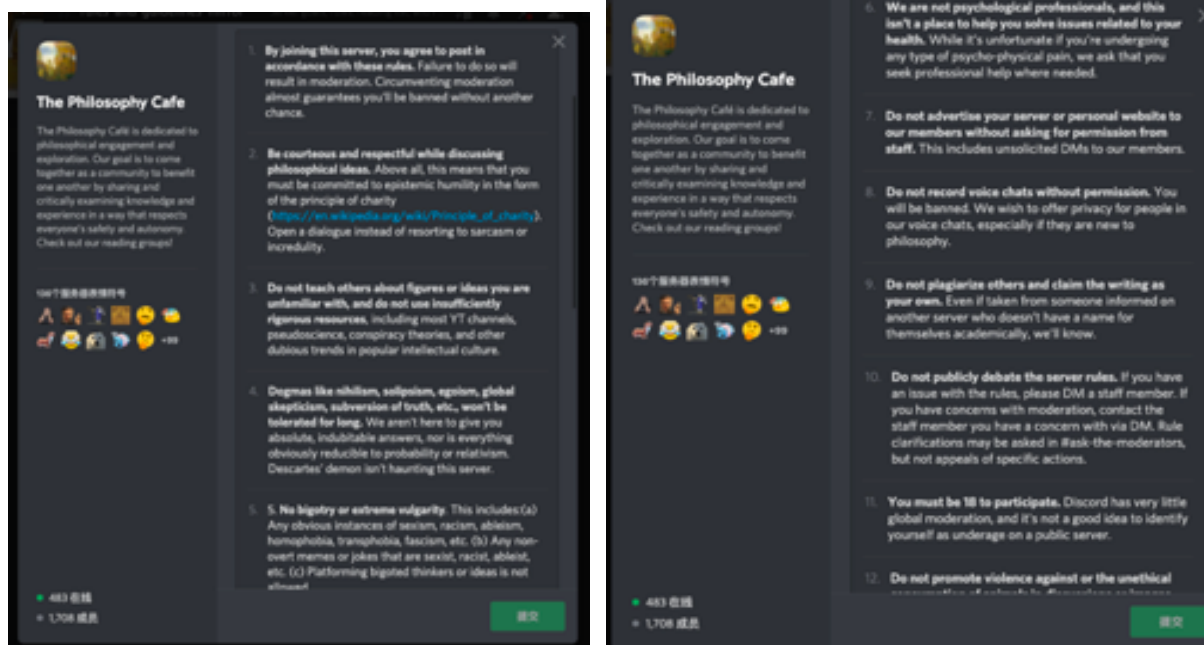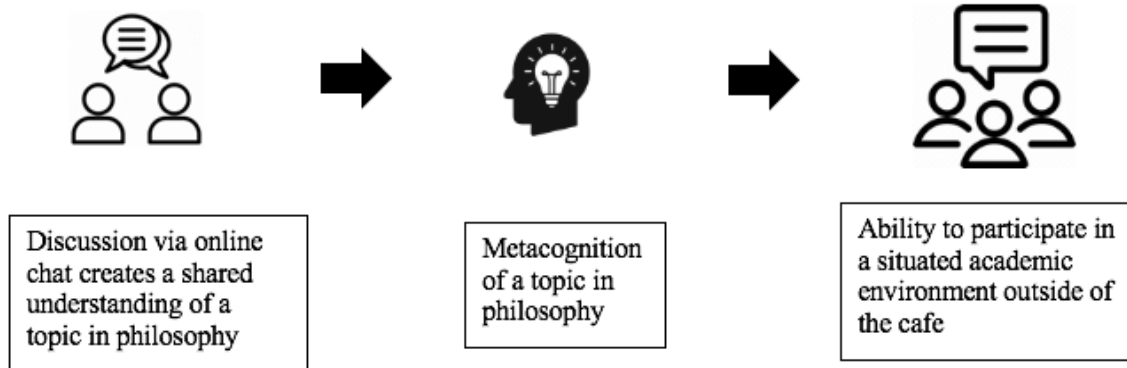
Fig 12 and Fig 13. Server Regulation

Fig 14 and Fig 15. Server Guidelines

*Framework*



Discussion via online chat creates a shared understanding of a topic in philosophy

Metacognition of a topic in philosophy

Ability to participate in a situated academic environment outside of the cafe

*Localized Theory of Learning*

The environment of social interaction reinforces individual analytical reasoning skills to better enable a stronger sense of secondary discourse that may happen beyond the café. The latter half of my localized theory of learning is difficult to prove and built more on assumptions than evidence, however, as individuals within the platform consistently hinted at "papers" they were working on, I can make an appropriate connection to knowledge that is extended beyond the café.

*Reflections and Conclusion*

If I had the opportunity I would sift further into The Philosophy Café to see if these four claims continue to show the co-construction and understanding of philosophy and a variety of philosophical theories. I will need more evidenced passages to see if a genuine Discourse is

maintained or if it is simply shared knowledge. My teammate helped influence my work by better outlining the membership process which I was not initially clear on. This provided crucial insight to the nature of exclusivity and required refined speech needed to participate within the Café. In reflecting back towards the questions I asked initially I was able to pick up on the textures of the environment, the screenshots of texts shared with one another, voice channels, emoji reactions, each of which produced a dynamic image of the different elements involved in the learning process.

Personally, I found discussions most engaging when there was a sense of cognitive conflict where individuals needed to assimilate new information but do not accommodate their existing cognitive structures. Individuals are firm in their thoughts and it also sheds light on how he or she interprets a given philosophical stance. While it begs me to question here, whether or not learning actually happens when an argument takes place, it also reinforces the notion of how healthy debate fuels greater conversation.

I also initially wondered whether or not deep knowledge is being formed, to which I am still limited on answering. Although, looking closely at the linguistics of the actions I observed, I gravitated towards thinking about James Paul Gee's *"mushfake." Mushfake explains* when discourses (primary and secondary) are folded into one another, or rather as he explains it "partial acquisition coupled with meta-knowledge and strategies to "make do" (Gee, 1989, p.13)." He goes onto state that "*Mushfake,* resistance, and meta-knowledge seems like a good combination for successful students and successful social change" and that "a Discourse is an integration of saying, doing, and *valuing,* and all socially based valuing is political" (Gee, 1989, p.13). So, then we have to ask ourselves, what is the Discourse (Discourse with a capital D) of philosophy and what are its inherent values?

Philosophy is the act of constantly questioning until you get towards the answer you are searching for; the Socratic method builds knowledge on recollection and deductive reasoning. "Philosophy" or "philo-sophia" in Greek is defined as the love of wisdom. To be a philosopher means to be a lover of knowledge. The act of questioning one's thoughts, and engaging in discussion with others to affirm one's understanding of a topic, creates self-reflexivity, and develops the ability to strive for a greater level of knowledge. Hence, the desire to co-construct knowledge, building upon each other's knowledge of philosophical topics. As Gee suggests, "metaknowledge is liberation and power, because it leads to the ability to manipulate, to analyze, to resist while advancing" (Gee, 1989, p.13). When individuals co-construct or debate philosophical theories, they are growing towards self-empowerment by expanding their cognitive abilities.

Remaining questions, I would continue to ask in relation to what is being learned: How would society value this type of learning outside of The Philosophy Café? How does the ownership of philosophical knowledge exhibit power over ownership of other skills given the skills-based economy we are currently positioned in? Overall, however, I believe this community has cultivated a space for intense and serious discussion, allowing us to see knowledge on fire.

**YS - Situativity**

My choice of the Philosophy Cafe (TPC) server on Discord as my observation site originated from its members' active participation despite being bound by specific rules. It appears that Discord cultivates a stronger sense of community compared to other learning sites that I explored, such as Reddit, Facebook groups, or Coursera. Having this in mind, I chose the situativity lens as I believe TPC is a fertile ground to observe a community of practice where learning happens in the form of one becoming a participant in the knowledge practices of this community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53).

As mentioned in Part 1 of the report, my original research interest focused on the across-channel comparison - whether each type of channel created a specific context and environment for learning, despite all being under the umbrella of TPC, and how one might transfer their knowledge from one channel (i.e., context) to another? However, after my initial observations of the server structure, I realized that differences in learning activities primarily resulted from a learner's identity - whether they were newcomers or experienced members. A focus on the context without first delineating user identity would lead to oversimplified conclusions since the two types of participants could hold contrasting perceptions of their learning environment even in the same channel (i.e., physical environment) of the site. Thus, I shifted my research focus to the differences between roles at TPC, specifically I aim to explore and analyze learning that happened on TPC with one primary research question formed within the situativity framework:

- How, if at all, do newcomers and experienced members learn differently on TPC and how do the potential differences in their learning context affect their learning or shape their identities?

To further elaborate on my data collection process, I first focused my observations on the site environment or structure as a starting point, followed by observations of tracking a purposefully selected newcomer and her engagement at TPC. Meanwhile, I used the search function in the server, searching the keywords "newcomer" and "whitename[1]" to observe conversations that directly referenced newcomers and might reflect between-member dynamics to substantiate my understanding of learning at TPC.

In this report, I first share three local knowledge claims that are data-supported and theoretically grounded. I then present a localized learning theory and a conceptual framework that is guided by the situativity framework and is specific to TPC. In this subsection, I also articulate my theory-building process coupled with a brief introduction to the analysis methods I have adopted in this process. Lastly, I conclude my section with reflections on the project and on my role as a researcher.

---

[1] "A user that is new to a Discord server. As they are new they are not accustomed to the culture or norms of the server and have not acquired any roles beyond the default role which causes the user's name to be white in color. These users are typically oblivious to server rules and are most often inactive and out of touch ("Urban Dictionary: Whitename", n.d.)."

***Claim 1: Learning at TPC can be influenced by its site environment and culture, which is both inclusive, shown in its encouragement of active participation from all members, and hierarchical, shown in its membership structure.***

To understand how learning happens on TPC, I thought it would be important to first characterize the situational context (Paulus & Wise, 2019) of this site as I noticed that there is a designated section for newcomers with channels that are more general, such as #quick-questions, #casual-chat, #serious-discussion, and #currently-reading. This is in addition to the two main topic-oriented sections, "Philosophy" and "Reading Group." It seems like TPC emphasizes participant characteristics, especially a hierarchical categorization based on one's engagement with the community. Another example is TPC's membership rule. Although members can assign roles such as pronouns, educational level, and interested reading groups themselves, they have to "earn" the Member[2] role through their contribution to the community:

> "The basic @Member role is given to users who have shown themselves capable of contributing positively to our community. Two concrete examples of this might be competence in philosophy demonstrated by discussing a philosophical work with others, and general conversational pleasantness." - TPC Rules and Guidelines

For example, in the #question-of-the-week channel, it is clearly stated the purpose of the channel is for non-members to "demonstrate their candidacy for membership" via engaging in "thoughtful" discussions on a regular basis (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Screenshot of TPC #question-of-the-week channel introduction*
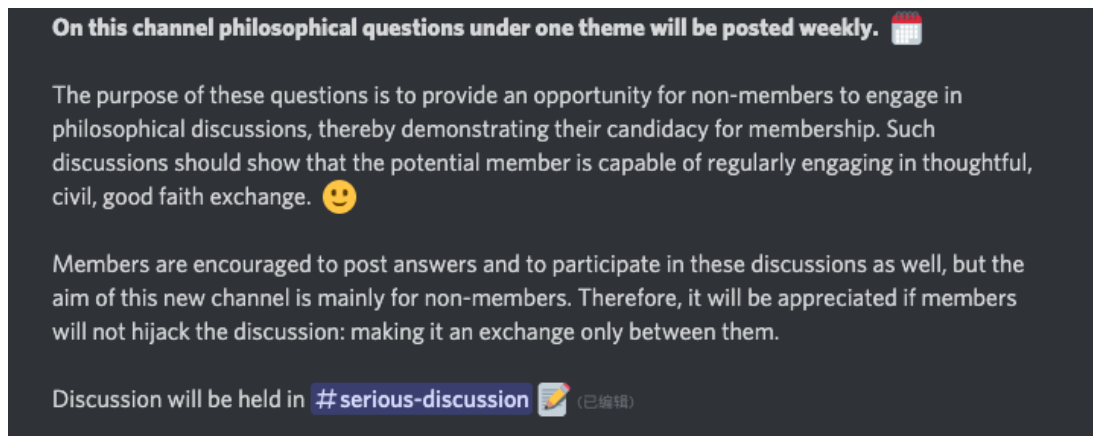


This explicit identifier for one's contribution to the community, as well as how it is grounded in server and channel rules, reveals to me that not only does becoming part of the community and engaging in knowledge practices take time and effort, but there is also a community-wide consensus on how one's contribution and engagement is retrained by the server rules and

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[2] "Member" is capitalized when I try to emphasize the difference between those who already earned this role and participants who have not yet made enough contributions to be assigned the server role. If "member" is not capitalized, I am referring to server participants in general.

hierarchy. One example is that a newcomer, dg, was conscious that a channel could be Member-only when asking for suitable channels to engage in discussions regarding race and a Member, FemmeFoxglove, responded with guidance on "a good way to get" membership, which is first to produce "fruitful" dialogue in a newcomer-specific channel (Figure 2 - Left). Even when newcomers break the rule by joining a Member-only channel, they tend to ask for confirmation on the acceptance of their presence (Figure 2 - Right), showing an awareness of how a newcomer's status may restrain their participation.

**Figure 2**

*Screenshots of members' awareness of TPC membership restraints*
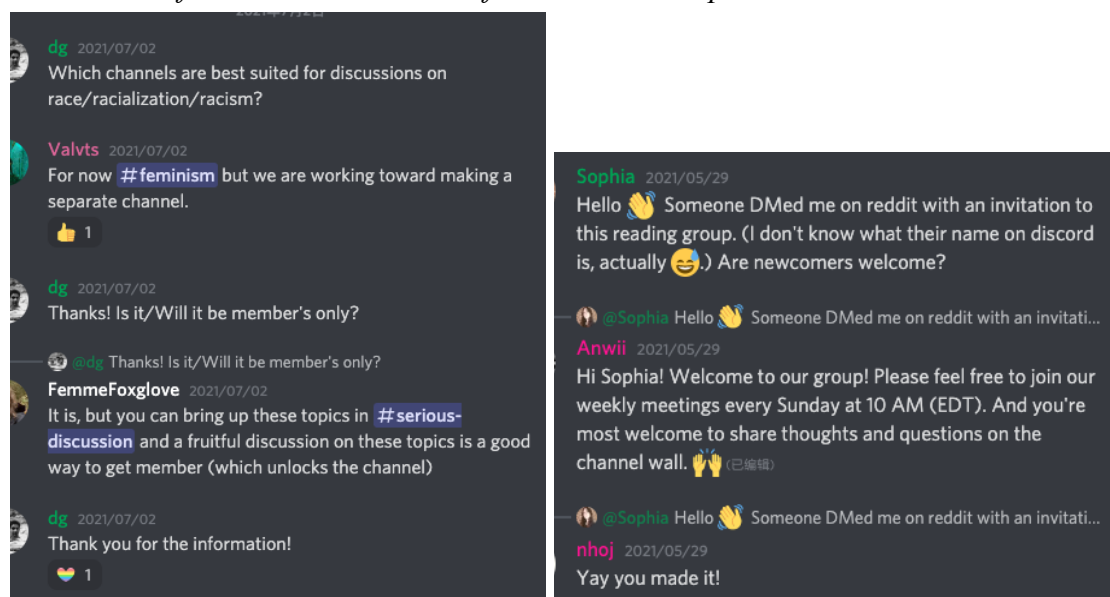


Observations of TPC structure led me to conclude that this community has an inclusive culture where all members, despite their roles, are encouraged and guided to participate in community activities (i.e., philosophical dialogues), but one's learning is governed by the site hierarchy reflected in the membership rule. Learning, in this case, is manifested as an enculturation process where newcomers observe, learn, and essentially observe community cultural practices while behaving in accordance with community norms (Brown et al., 1989). In addition, the particular structure of TPC poses a methodological challenge as it limits my observation stance to that of a complete observer (Kawulich, 2005) as I lack the background knowledge to contribute and become a Member.

The structure of TPC also provides opportunities for, or to some extent, enforces legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), an important position for newcomers to become experienced members in a community of practice. According to LPP, "the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move forward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Thus, in the case of TPC, it means that learning will exemplify through newcomers' active participation, with support from experienced

members, to gain Member status or more experience role status like "Active Contributor" or even a leadership role. The notion of LPP will be further elaborated in Claim 3.

***Claim 2: TPC cultivates an apprenticeship-like learning environment for newcomers, manifested in the support offered by experienced members on domain knowledge and cognitive skills.***

Despite a hierarchical participant structure, I also noticed great support from the server Members (whether the server owner, active contributors, or reading group leaders) for newcomers. When newcomers first join the server, they are provided with a TPC reading list and a resources list to get started. There also appeared to be collective efforts in creating the reading list, which was triggered by a Member, Raven, who posted some commentary calling for revisions to the reading list with detailed reasoning such as the need for the reading list to be dated, properly formatted, and consistent with TPC's core values. Raven's proposal also attended to the needs of newcomers by pointing out that the reading list failed to provide the guidance for newcomers to self-evaluate whether they had the knowledge that current community members expected them to have (Figure 3a). In other words, the reading list failed to elucidate the desired discourse that newcomers should aim to obtain. Raven's considerations for newcomers were well supported by other Members and following this post, Members came to a revision plan where they could create a shared Google doc with selective access to Members to crowdsource suggestions.

One Member also emphasized that the reading list should give newcomers "a snapshot into the intellectual life of the community." This suggests to me that the intended guidance offered by old-timers for newcomers was beyond offering general resources to bridge the potential knowledge gaps in philosophy but again to specifically help them acquire the essential discourse to participate in the intellectual life of TPC. Moreover, there are many resources shared in the introduction message of the #question-of-the-week channel. These resources include more than just suggested readings but also a list of philosophical questions to think about (Figure 3b) and a guide on "learning how to do philosophy" (Figure 3c).

**Figure 3a**
*Consideration of why the Café Reading List (CRL) matters by Raven (TPC Member)*
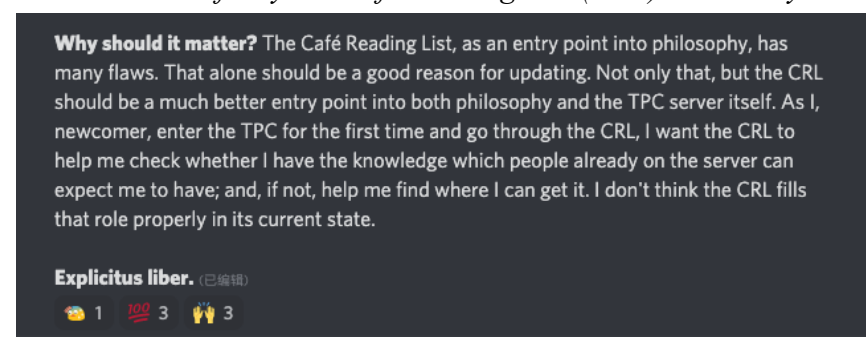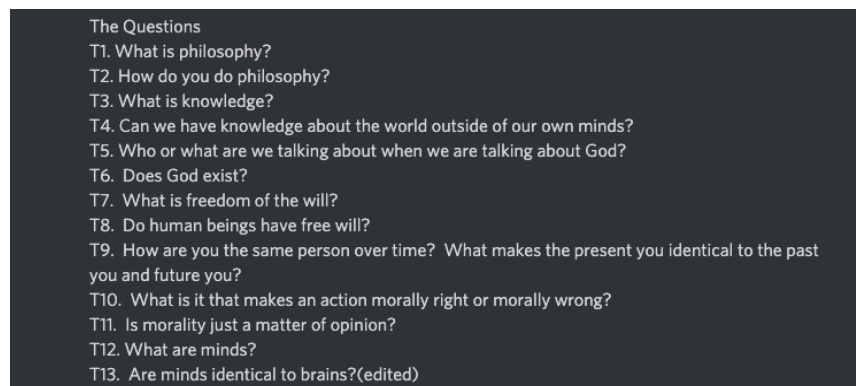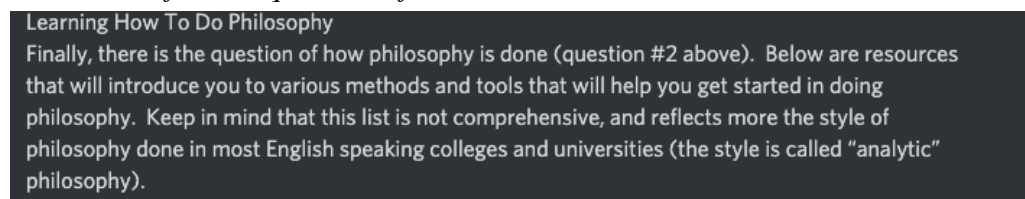
**Figure 3b**

*Screenshot of TPC #question-of-the-week Channel - Guiding Question List*



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The Questions
T1. What is philosophy?
T2. How do you do philosophy?
T3. What is knowledge?
T4. Can we have knowledge about the world outside of our own minds?
T5. Who or what are we talking about when we are talking about God?
T6.  Does God exist?
T7. What is freedom of the will?
T8. Do human beings have free will?
T9. How are you the same person over time?  What makes the present you identical to the past
you and future you?
T10.  What is it that makes an action morally right or morally wrong?
T11.  Is morality just a matter of opinion?
T12. What are minds?
T13.  Are minds identical to brains?(edited)
```

**Figure 3c**

*Screenshot of TPC #question-of-the-week Channel - Guide on How to Do Philosophy*



```
Learning How To Do Philosophy
Finally, there is the question of how philosophy is done (question #2 above).  Below are resources
that will introduce you to various methods and tools that will help you get started in doing
philosophy.  Keep in mind that this list is not comprehensive, and reflects more the style of
philosophy done in most English speaking colleges and universities (the style is called "analytic"
philosophy).
```

According to Collins and Kapur (2014), cognitive apprenticeship in nature emphasizes two aspects in learning, a dual focus on expert processes and applying knowledge to real-world issues (apprenticeship) and attention to advancing cognitive skills (cognitive). TPC supports both in that TPC newcomers are learning the discourse that experienced members use via interactions with them. This process of interaction is also cognitive as Members often challenge newcomers to think critically about why they hold certain perspectives. For example, a non-member, Cyanhunter demonstrated his perspectives on logic being "an evolved structure" in the human mind (Figure 4a). A Member, Computer, Play Celery Man (CPCM), guided Cyanhunter to be reflective and provide a more thoughtful reasoning as to why he thought that way. Perhaps Member CPCM was just genuinely confused about Cyanhunter's statement and wanted more clarification, but her approach of asking to reason at a deeper level is commonly seen at TPC among philosophical discussions, which reflects a common technique to do philosophy in practice.

The support in a cognitive apprenticeship was not only shown by TPC providing content of domain knowledge (subject matter of philosophy) and heuristic strategies (generally applicable techniques to do philosophy), but also shown by the methods TPC Members use (Collins & Kapur, 2014). For example, Members use the articulation method (Figure 4b) where they encourage newcomers to express their thoughts and participate in the discussion (Collins & Kapur, 2014). Therefore, I came to a conclusion that TPC cultivates an apprenticeship-like environment for newcomers in learning philosophy and in obtaining essential discourse at TPC that also has the potential to be used in a real-world academic setting.

**Figure 4a**

*Interactions with/between Members can contribute to a newcomer's improved cognitive skills*
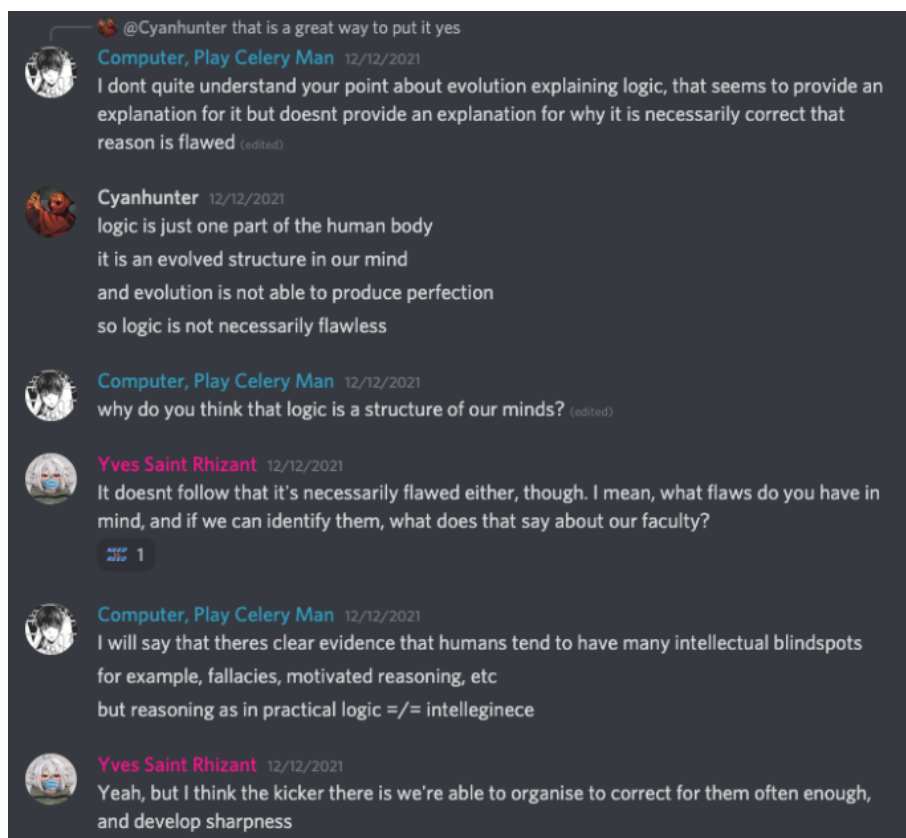


**Figure 4b**

*Special attention to newcomers in a newcomer channel #serious-discussion*
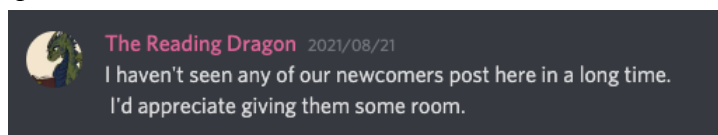


***Claim 3: Learning at TPC is when newcomers acquire specific TPC discourse through meaningful contributions to the community and are able to fully participate in the community.***

　　Moving forward, I focused my observations on a purposefully selected newcomer, Corsicajones, and I tracked all of her activities on TPC until Oct 25, 2021. From her self-introduction, I learned that Corsicajones is an undergraduate majoring in history with no previous knowledge of philosophy. Her first message was posted in the #quick-questions channel asking for recommendations on suitable reading material before reading a specific philosopher, Nietzsche. Through the suggested readings, she hoped to gain sufficient prior knowledge so that she could understand Nietzsche better. In her message, she also explicitly indicated her background in philosophy - none. A total of five Members responded to her inquiry, with four of them recommending specific readings. What caught my attention was that one Member pointed

out that Corsicajones's intended approach to first reading general information about a philosopher was not helpful based on his own experience. In his response (Figure 5), he talked about his approach to reading a philosopher, which was to dive directly into the literature of the interested philosopher and to re-read a couple of times in order to achieve understanding. He elaborated why he recommended this method: since "any [introductory] book or companion book is full of the interpretations of whoever is writing the book," first reading through the content on one's own and seeing what they "get from it" might be a better way to construct one's own philosophical understanding. The communications about learning strategies and different ways to achieve learning goals represented that learning at TPC happens via the process of this community working together and refining its practices (Collins & Kapur, 2014). It also conveyed a sense of attentiveness towards new community members when the response to Corsicajones's inquiry went beyond what she was asking for (i.e., suggested readings), reinforcing TPC's inclusive and apprenticeship-like culture discussed in the previous claims.

**Figure 5**
*Screenshot of Member Response in the #quick-questions Channel*
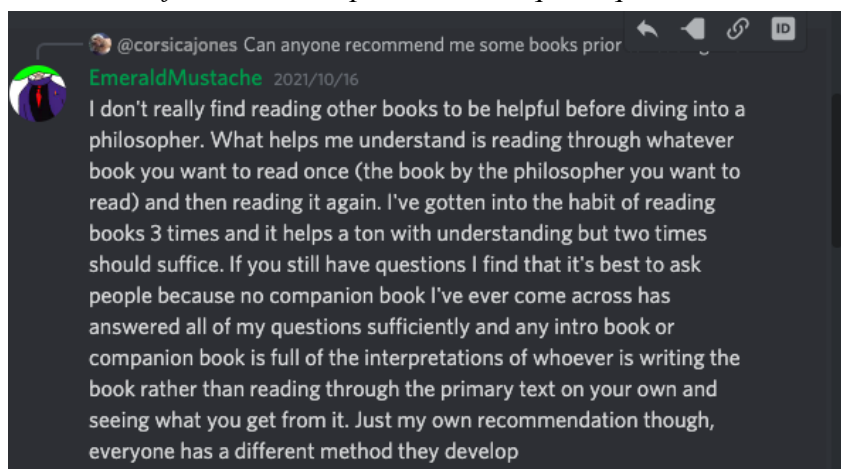


The caring for new community members is shown in another engagement in the #quick-questions channel that Corsicajones had. She posted a message asking for advice on the most suitable reading groups for her to join, given her background (Figure 6). She also expressed in the message her concerns of "saying something stupid," which in my opinion should be specific for newcomers and also implies that there is a specific discourse that this community uses. It is natural for newcomers to feel stressed when they have not yet been equipped with this discourse because the inability to use the specific discourse exposes their peripheral position in the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). There were several Members who replied immediately indicating their suggestions to follow her interests and to not be afraid. As we know from the server membership rule, reading group channels are intended for more informed discussion among Members. Therefore, it was not surprising to me for a reading group leader, Philo (he is also one of the only two philosophy professionals in this community), to respond by suggesting the "proper" way for her - how a new member who does not have prior knowledge can engage in

this community and move into deeper contribution. It is interesting to see the different focus that Philo and other Members placed in their recommendations. Philo's stance appears to be more tied to his leadership position and identity in this community, which likely derives from his evolution of participation in the community from an apprentice or a newcomer and then later as a more central member (Collins & Kapur, 2014).

**Figure 6**
*Screenshot of Member Responses in the #quick-questions Channel*
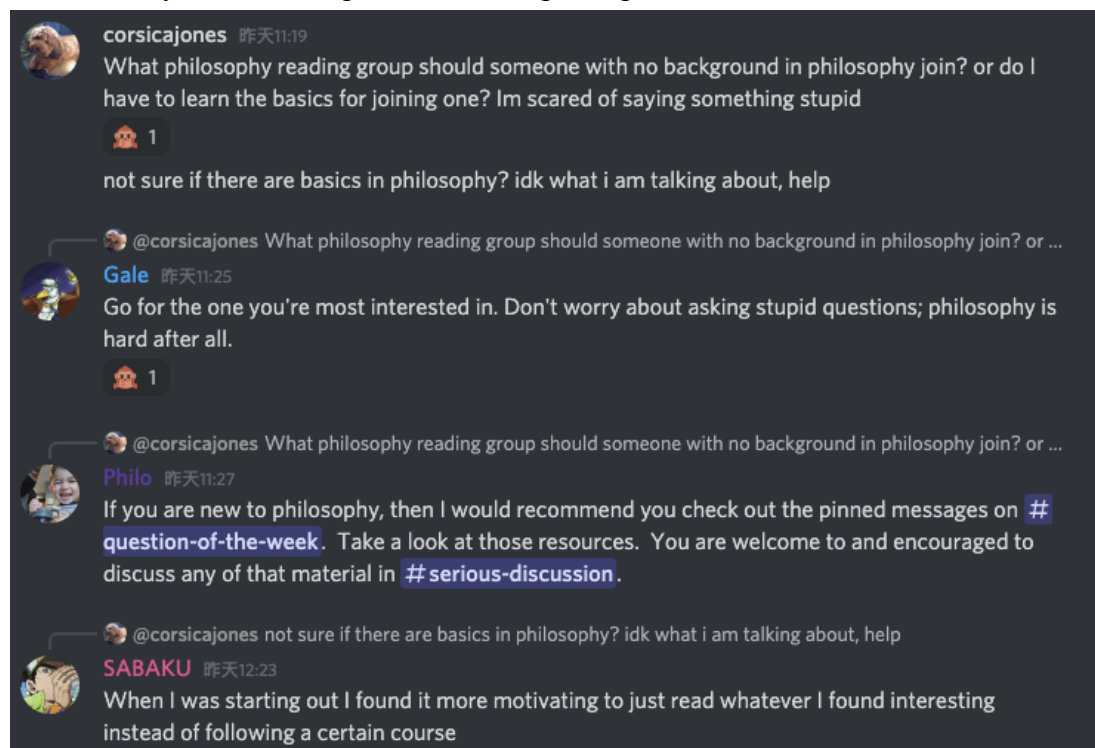


During my search of Corsicajones's activities, I noticed she indeed participated in a reading group channel after her inquiry discussed above, but I was surprised by the fact that she was invited by a Member, Tom, to the channel. Tom was not involved in her initial inquiry of reading groups so he must have read through the thread of messages and come to a decision to help Corsicajones. In his invitation, he said:

> "@corsicajones, from your #quick-questions, I invite you to read with the Aristotle philosophy reading group. Here is my roundabout reasoning. I have some friends who are school teachers, and one of them gave a reason why she prefers teaching only third graders. Third graders are beginning abstract thinkers, unlike second graders, who are concrete-bound to the extent they can be said to think … third graders still retain that sense of wonder and expectation that the world (and the people in it) can be understood … You're like a third-grader. You're innocent of academic philosophy. If you prize your life and are questioning what you've been taught all this time, and are wondering if there are truths and proper methods for obtaining them, then reading Aristotle's writings

(pro-living, pro-what-is) is a solid beginning. You don't have to join. I extend the invitation nevertheless from my own motive, having accepted Aristotle's truth about active benevolence (NE IX.7, Irwin). Good luck!"

In my initial interpretation, Tom's politeness and openness in his invitation, for example via the usage of language like "I invite you to…" and "You don't have to join …," again suggested a supportive and inviting culture that TPC cultivates for its community, especially for its "apprentices." It also highlights a sense of equality among community participants despite the emphasis on one's identity because even though a community leader suggested one way that obeys the general server guideline, other members can still approach different methods that are less traditional.

However, contrary to my initial conclusion, I later found out that not all experienced Members hold the same inviting and supportive attitude toward newcomers. For some, they emphasize the need for a hierarchy on TPC and often use the term "whitename" to refer to people new to Discord and unfamiliar with the server rules (Figure 7). Matze (TPC Member) showed a clear attitude difference as he pointed out that Members are the peers and are the community when compared to whitenames or newcomers. I speculate that this could be one of the reasons why some of the newcomers like Corsicajones present a more careful or polite way of speaking on TPC, but my speculation needs further validation.

**Figure 7**
*Examples of Members' less positive attitude toward newcomers*

To further validate my hypothesis, I used the search function to find all related conversation threads that referenced "whitename[3]." First of all, there were less than 60 threads that had shown up in the results by Dec 6, 2021. Since multiple threads can make up one conversation, the actual number of conversations that referenced "whitename" at TPC would be less than the search result. I was surprised by the low number of relevant conversations as I had biases going in with assumptions that the hierarchy at TPC would likely result in a pejorative attitude of experienced members toward non-members. Despite the fact that there were a few discussions on whether "whitename" is an "abusive" term (Figure 8), this way of reference appears to more often be used in a neutral way. For example, when a Member, anno, shared extensively about his view on the topic of "moral goodness and badness," he concluded that his reason for sharing his thoughts in the member-channel, #ethics, rather than the newcomer-orientated channel, #serious-discussion channel, to be that he would "rather help whitenames with their own thoughts than bog them down in" his thoughts (Figure 9). Not only did anno not present any negative or pejorative attitude, his action actually supported how Members at TPC attend to a newcomer's development of cognitive skills, which aligns with the main characteristic of cognitive apprenticeship (Collins & Kapur, 2014).

**Figure 8**

*Discussion of whether "whitename" is an abusive term*

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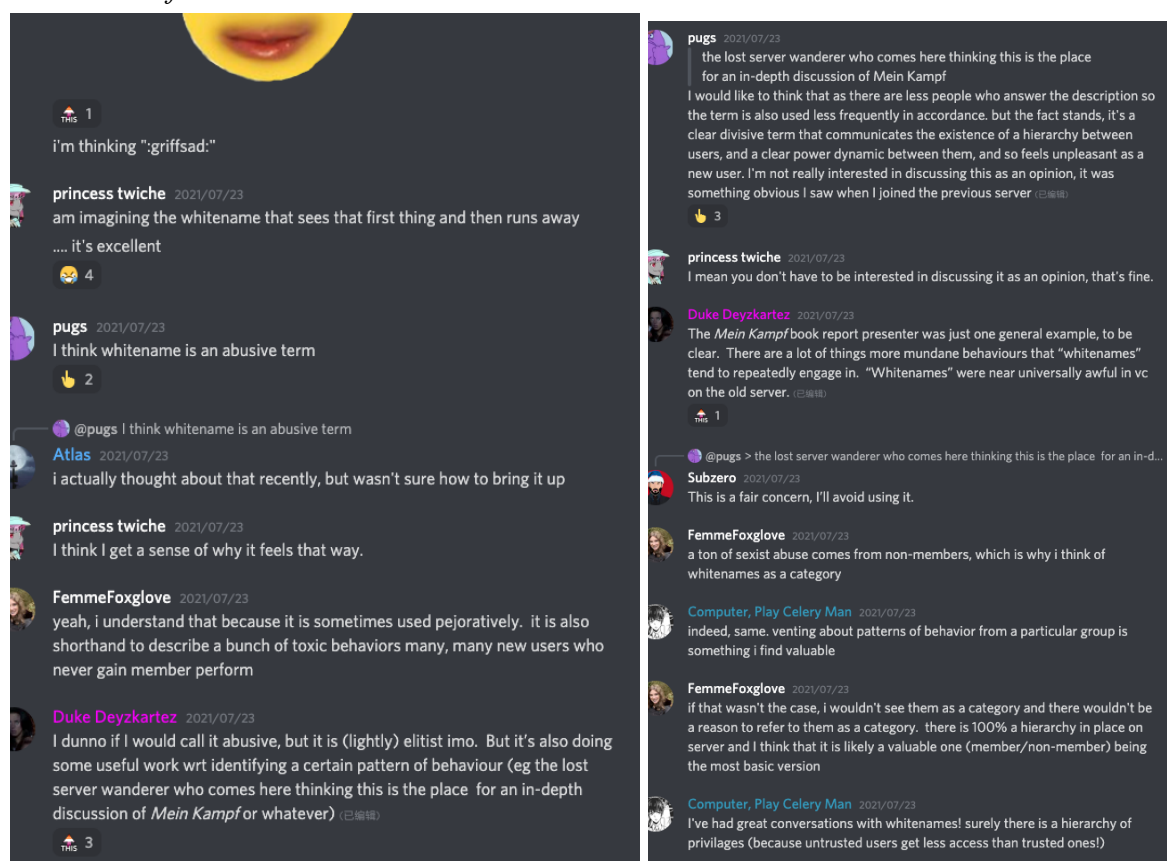
[3] Specifically, I searched "whitename," "white name," and "white-name."

**Figure 9**

*Example of whitename used in a neutral way*



> Then, is there a morally reprehensible but logically beautiful argument? I have never seen one. I have seen ugly but "good" arguments, that tends to not be ugly the way *Blasted* is ugly though, they tend to just be shoddily put together, rough, etc. So ugly doesn't function identically across different areas to me, and I have to discard thinking about it in general terms at least for now
>
> Like "can a person be ugly and morally good" yes sure that's natural language use right there, but "in the same respect" well what respect, morally designates the respect, so can someone be morally ugly and morally good at the same time? I doubt it. Those four words really throw off my ability to think in the question's terms
>
> So I find the qotw a bit of a non-starter om multiple lines. It's not put in terms I think in. I could adopt another lens that sees them as very closely related terms, and while that's an important skill I don't think it would make sense to do it in this case. And this is part of why I'm happy to put my thoughts here instead of #serious-discussion because I'd rather help whitenames with their own thoughts than bog them down in mine

  I came to the conclusion that the speculated negative attitude that some Members might hold would not be a factor inhibiting newcomers from participating in the TPC discussions and becoming part of the community. Even though there is hierarchy excited at TPC, it would be biased to assume hierarchy plays only a negative role in community engagement. In fact, it can be effective or motivating for newcomers to expedite their learning process so that they can move to a more central position in the community. In essence, learning at TPC happens when "learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move forward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29)."

***Conceptual Framework***

**Figure 10**

*Speculated journey of a TPC newcomer*
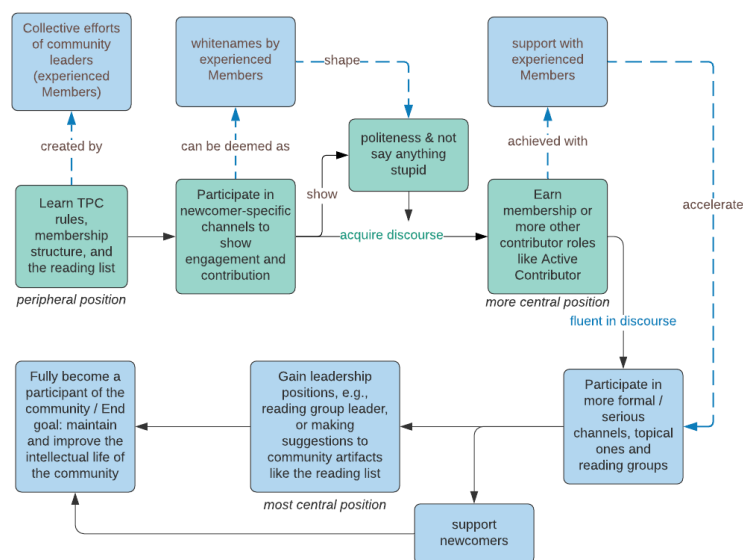


  To build stronger connections among my observations as well as my localized learning theory, I first organized my insights into a journey map of a TPC newcomer (Figure 10) where I am able to see clearly how a newcomer can move from a peripheral position to a more central position in the community of practice through what actions. This journey map of how one becomes part of the community serves as the foundation of my conceptual framework.

In summary, learning at TPC has the following characteristics through the perspective of situativity as shown in my conceptual framework (Figure 11). First, learners are situated in an inclusive and apprenticeship-like cultural environment where active participation in the community is encouraged, supported, and regulated. Second, learning happens when newcomers acquire the essential discourse and move to a more central position in the community. Third, learning also happens when newcomers and experienced members interact via philosophical discussions. Newcomers have the opportunity to observe and learn the cultural practices of TPC and experienced members have the opportunity to refine community practices, both leading to new generations of members who can fully participate in the community (Collins & Kapur, 2014). Lastly, as a community of practice, all TPC members, regardless of their identities, share the same goal of maintaining and improving the intellectual life of TPC.

**Figure 11**

*Conceptual framework representing the localized learning theory specific to TPC*
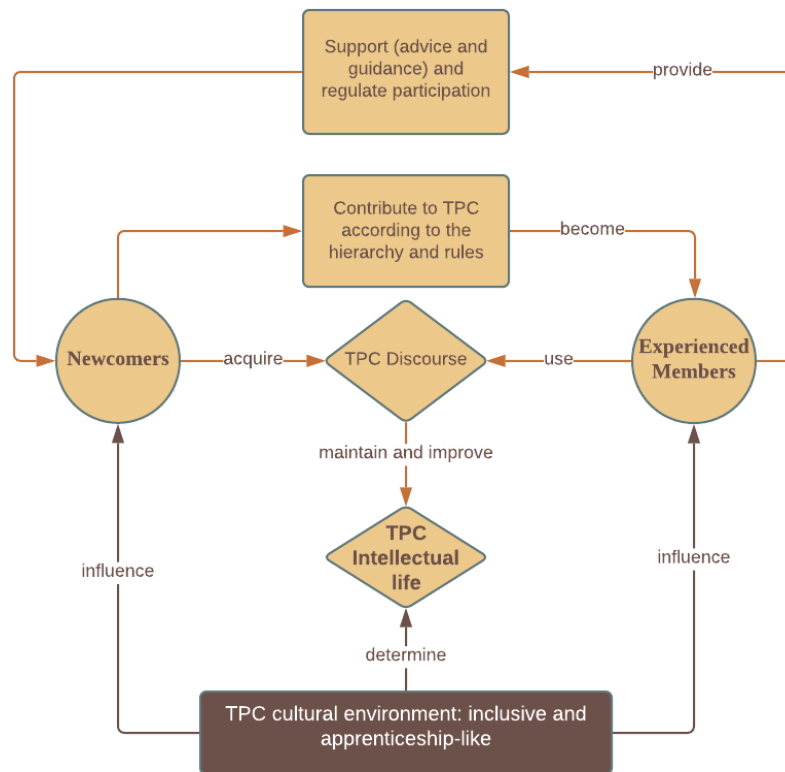
*Reflection*

      Coming from a quantitative-research background, I'm accustomed to a miner's perspective on research and have always confirmed hypotheses to test before I moved to data collection. This project, in need of a traveler's lens, posed a few challenges for me. My first challenge was on the goal and purpose of the project and when there was no hypothesis drawn from literature guiding me, I felt lost at the beginning about what to observe and how to interpret the collected data. The second challenge was that I was overwhelmed by the amount of data on my learning site. When I was working on my first analytic memo, it was difficult for me to synthesize about five hours worthy of field notes and organize my thoughts in a coherent way. The last challenge was on building a localized theory. This was another major difference from quantitative research in which we aim to have a generalized theory that is applicable to the population rather than the sample.

      However, these challenges all serve as great learning opportunities for me. I think the first analytic memo was a turning point where I gained a clearer understanding of the project. This was achieved by 1) actually practicing and writing an analytic memo 2) reading about example projects, and 3) reading more class material about different learning lenses. For example, I was originally concerned that my lack of prior knowledge in philosophy may limit my ability to capture the "right" data (data that could reveal learning activities in accordance with the situativity lens), but I realized later my initial concern still resulted from a miner view rather than a traveler one - there is no such thing as "right" data as I was not supposed to "find" anything but to observe with an open mind and make sense of what happens in the site. At the same time, learning about how a learning activity can be interpreted differently through different theoretical frameworks really helped contextualize the project goal and needs. Once I deepened my knowledge in situativity, the process of interpreting my data became easier and this process, in turn, further helped me solidify the situativity theory. Furthermore, I believe that during the peer review stage, both receiving feedback on my work and reviewing my classmates' work were very beneficial; for example, it made me more reflective about the alternative interpretations of my data.

      In the end, I appreciate the opportunity of doing this project as not only did I learn a new approach to doing research, I have become more reflective in my analysis and more comfortable with being open and transparent with my thinking process in communicating my research results.

**Part 3: Synthesis and Implications**

**Synthesis**

Philosophy is rooted in academia and with this in mind, it helps bring our two lenses, social-constructivism situativity together. Overall we found that there was a healthy amount of overlap. There are multiple points of convergence and divergence in our deductive reasoning of how philosophy is learned, specifically:

- Communities of Practice
- Zone of Proximal Development
- Culture of Knowledge Building
- Micro-macro levels of learning

**Communities of Practice.** In *Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning,* Brown, Collins, and Duguid discuss Geertz description of communities practice, where learners are "connected by more than their ostensible tasks. They are bound by intricate, socially constructed webs of belief, which are essential to understanding what they do" (Brown, et al., 1989, p. 33). This was apparent in both of our combined analyses and the shared set of interests and goals individuals strive towards in the Cafe. "Unfortunately, students are too often asked to use the tools of a discipline without being able to adopt its culture. To learn to use tools as practitioners use them, a student, like an apprentice, must enter that community and its culture" (1989, p.33). Communities of practice and culture work hand in hand within our site. Philosophy enthusiasts seeking a platform such as The Philosophy Cafe are trying to work on how best to use the tools they are developing, for example, analytical reasoning. "People who use tools actively rather than just acquire them, by contrast, build an increasingly rich implicit understanding of the world in which they use the tools and of the tools themselves" (1989, p. 33). The Cafe acts as a space to practice and test out the tools they're working on acquiring before refining what they've learned to use in an academic environment. While an individual might *want* to consider themselves a philosopher, he or she may not know how to properly utilize the tool they are working on as well as any tools they are working with, which is why in this platform you consistently see a pattern of screenshots of philosophical texts sent back and forth to one another. Moreover, individuals look up to users with greater knowledge to help guide them, to build on philosophical knowledge together and to develop the tools to be a philosopher.

**Zone of Proximal Development.** As depicted in both lenses, there may exist a more established mentor figure in the background to be able to chime in and assist novices on how to acclimate themselves into the community or to support in better understanding a particular passage with readings. The "knowledgeable other" is able to bridge the gap from what he or she currently knows to what he or she can acquire. Certain hierarchical roles were more firmly established over others when you would read individual bios, explaining the strata of knowledge, from undergraduate philosophy, to graduate, to professionals.

**Culture.** Learning outside of the classroom can enhance thought and expression. "Historically, studies of culture have often viewed nondominant students and communities as different or deficient and assumed a singular pathway of development based on dominant cultural norms. From this viewpoint, the proper way to address diversity is to help nondominant groups become more like dominant groups" (Nasir et al., 2014, p. 688). The secondary discourse required to be part of the group's dynamic helps foster a rather academic cultural environment. We're reminded of Paris' Cafe de Flore or Les Deux Magots where surrealist artists, writers, and philosophers would speak with each other on topics maintaining an intellectual dialect. From a social-constructivist perspective, the act of working together to create one meaning within this cafe is that of an intellectual nature. From a situativity lens, each individual needs to be enculturated with walking the walk and talking the talk of an intellectual. "Intellectualism" could then be considered both the shared goal and culture of the platform. If learning focuses on individual mental states, while knowledge focuses on public ideas and theories then we must ask where "intellectualism" lies. How does one learn to be an "intellectual?" But more importantly, how do you become part of "intellectual" culture?

**Micro-macro levels of learning.** When thinking about the connections between the two theoretical lenses, whereas social constructivism highlights a process of co-constructing knowledge via social interactions, examining learning at TPC via the situativity lens provides attention to how the context can mediate these social interactions. In another sense, instead of seeing social constructivism and situativity as two separate lenses, it might be more appropriate to see our approach as using one lens with different focal lengths. Situativity allows us to zoom out and attend to the inclusive cultural environment that learners are situated in and social constructivism allows us to zoom in to see the detailed dynamics between individuals. Only with both do we have a more comprehensive picture of learning at TPC.

**Recommendations**

While we believe The Philosophy Cafe has triumphed particularly well in cultivating a space for lovers of knowledge, we see room for improvement, both on how the material at hand is taught and discussed as well as the implications and connotations of the hierarchy feature might possess. The server does provide a reading list to all members, however, we may suggest that the version of "how to read philosophy" be better embedded into the Cafe's entry as an easily accessible hand book. On top of knowing what books act as the criterion for philosophical knowledge, it is important to learn how to read philosophically, that is, an abridged version on how to read analytically could provide necessary scaffolding needed in acquiring essential philosophical tools.

We took note of key resources. The following website: https://plato.stanford.edu/ was linked throughout multiple channels within The Philosophy Cafe 241 times. It is an essential resource to the community and we would suggest a more refined approach in optimizing the overall utility of this resource as individuals continue with their philosophical journey. If there was a way to properly embed the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy or SEP into the server as

a feature, that would be ideal (in place of linking it). It would be even more beneficial if a partnership was formed between the SEP and the Cafe. The improved utility can essentially help newcomers better and more quickly equip users with discourse to gain a more central position in the community.

Although the hierarchy at TPC protects its intellectual life by setting a filter to distinguish newcomers who are serious about participation, it may also create an imperious environment for newcomers, which prohibits them from willingly or actively engaging in conversations that are critical for community growth, for example, discussions on diversity. It is also shown in our data that TPC inhibits discussions on personal feelings possibly to ensure an intellectual and formal environment. A channel where TPC participants can openly share and discuss their feelings and concerns may be conducive to a more welcoming and casual learning environment that also boosts newcomers' confidence. Additionally, the current leadership composition appears to be fixed and heavily focused on seniority. Thus, bringing in those who only recently gained membership to leadership positions and building a more flexible leadership structure can allow for a more supportive learning environment as those new leaders may be more emphatic with different roles and more familiar with the dynamics at TPC.

**Future Work**

Ideally, if we were able to, we would follow a user outside of the platform as well, to see how the learning that was conducted within Discord transitions into the real world, and whether or not the knowledge they have built is comparable/at an appropriate academic level. We also wonder how they engage in philosophical conversations in a real-world setting with the discourse and skills they acquired from their time at the Cafe.

Interviews and focus groups can be conducted to substantiate participant observation findings. Additional interviews in the future can help confirm our interpretations of a user's cognitive and emotional process, increasing our research validity. For example, with these qualitative methods, we can gain a deeper understanding of why exactly a newcomer might feel stressed or concerned about posting inappropriate or "stupid" comments, or how a newcomer feels when being called whitename. Interviewing experienced members who play the role of a mentor could also uncover how much of a sense of responsibility they might have towards novice learners.

In the long run, we both believe that Discord's The Philosophy Cafe accomplishes a great deal of what it set out to do. The main goals of the server consisted of community building, sharing and examining knowledge in a respectful manner and cooperative engagement from all members to achieve a form of enlightened thinking.

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