Learning Innovation Co-op Fellowship Proposal

I am interested in the social aspect of learning, especially in the digital sphere. The internet provides us with an unprecedented opportunity to connect in a very personal way with people all over the world. However, too often, rather than being a moment of mutual engagement and growth, this plays out as angry and petty fights in youtube comments sections. Our attempts at earnest communication through small-scale interactions in such a vast, turbulent ocean of unknown, faceless users are too subject to random chance—perhaps we might, on occasion, meet someone who's worth talking to. The kind of person who's willing to have an open mind, to learn, to take us seriously, and to have the patience to explain things to us when we are ourselves ignorant, without getting angry. Needless to say, these people are rare. Thus begins the first problem of creating mutually engaging, earnest communities of learners online—how and where do we find these people in the first place?

But suppose that we've somehow solved that and found ourselves a group of such individuals. The second problem is infinitely harder—how do we cultivate these communities, challenge them, protect them, and grow them? How do we prevent them from stagnation, from becoming insular ideological cesspools, being flooded by ignorant newbies, dominated by insincere trolls, from becoming narcissistic social cliques that inhibit learning, or the billion other ways in which online groups tend to spiral out of control, or even from being stifled by the tyranny of the moderators themselves? How do we stay true to our ideals in the midst of all this chaos?

And finally, the last question becomes: how do we move beyond the little groups that we've made and engage with the greater community at large? With the constant pressure of popular media towards mindless entertainment, how do we create an environment where learning as a collective, social, and entertaining activity is incentivized and normalized? Just as the geography, history, environment, and other surrounding influences affect a community, so does the topography of the internet landscapes shape the cultures that take root there. We can either let the social platforms that we use determine our fate, or we can use those platforms to create a world that we believe in.

I am one of the leaders of an online collective called The Philosopher's Meme, which tackles these problems head on, through both theory and practice. At TPM, we critically engage with the internet, researching memes, art, and politics in online communities and theorizing about how groups and cultures function online. We then put those theoretical frameworks into practice, testing their validity in education, governance, and community building.

We tackle the first problem by attracting individuals interested in earnest, rigorous discussion and learning through our Facebook Page, where we post memes, infographics, charts, and other visuals as well as linking serious, long-form articles from our website. We create rich, complex, and interesting content about philosophy and related subjects that draws in the kind of people that we're looking for. The humorous content casts a wide net and reaches an audience of almost 150,000 people, allowing the serious essays and analyses to get greater exposure to the people that might critically engage with them.

Once we have created our community, we move on to the second problem—managing it. We run several discussion groups, totaling over 3,000 members each. Our discussion groups are where we engage with our community to collectively inquire and theorize about internet culture. They are spaces of sincere, earnest connection, of teaching each other and learning from each other, of working together, having fun together, and growing together. We carefully cultivate, monitor, and shepherd these communities, watching out for problems and constantly working to make them better. We are as much the members of the community as we are the leaders of it—we play and learn alongside everyone else.

And finally, we come back full circle to the problem of bringing this educational flourishing back into the wider internet community in order to enrich it. Edutainment is so often not taken seriously because it is created by people who are out of touch with their demographic, trying to inject unfunny academic material into unfunny and stale cultural artifacts, despite all their best intentions. We have to be participants in the cultures that we are trying to influence. We have to deconstruct humor and understand it better in order to be able to make complex, piquant, and poignant content that will reach the hearts, minds, and intellects of people, young and old. Memes are a complex art form like graphic design—simple reference humor is not enough and will not build rapport with our audience, we have to make our memes meaningful, reconcile the formats and references we use with the intellectual narratives

that we want to inject in them. They have to function on all levels and be appreciable by both the learned and the not-yet-learned. TPM studies and undertakes painstaking efforts to analyze and understand how memes function stylistically, rhetorically, and structurally. The modus operandi of the Facebook page is to hijack common "low art" memes about mundane, universal topics, turning them on their heads and injecting them with philosophical facts, analysis, quotations, stories, etc, in order to create engaging and educative snippets which can be shared and proliferated—weaponizing the dumbing-down, passive, consumerist humor machine of popular social media against itself.

TPM seeks to use its online presence to jumpstart a self-propagating cycle of people joining our community, learning, and inviting others to learn with them. We are part of a network of other philosophy and intellectual memepages on Facebook, and through our research, we want to empower others to continue in this spirit and create their own educational communities. Already, we have several members and friends who have branched out and created pages and discussion groups about their own topics, and it is our task to support them and keep building this community.

I believe that learning innovation is about studying, researching, and understanding the way that communication and education happens online, and harnessing this potential power in pragmatic, thoughtful ways. I have devoted the past year and a half of my life towards this effort, despite being a full-time student and working two part time jobs. It is a labor of love and I will continue doing it no matter what, however, I would love to be able to give it the time, effort, and focus that it deserves. The resources, guidance, and mentorship of the ExCITe center will be an incredible help. I believe that the Learning Innovation Fellowship is the perfect opportunity for me to take this huge endeavor to the next level, and I would be very honored to have the chance to work with all the talented, ambitious, and enthusiastic people involved.
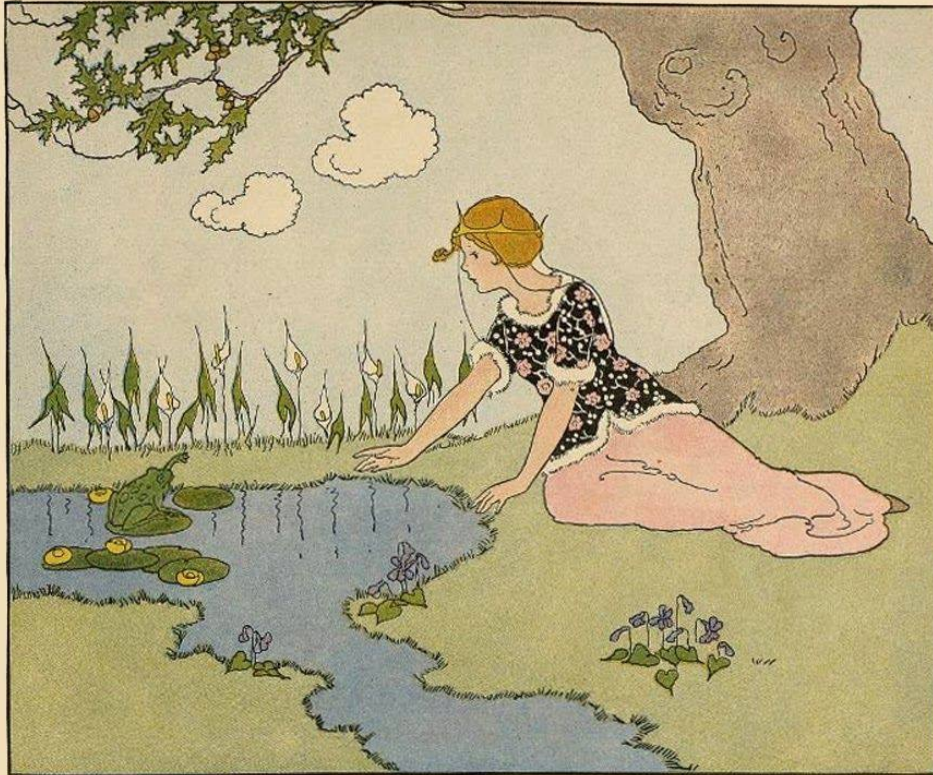
Ree, ree!" cried the frog, "Get out, normie!"

"Now hold on just a minute," said the princess. "Can't you see that your negative outgroup bias against me has been formed according to the most trivial criteria imaginable? We are not so different, you and I."

">outgroup bias," said the frog, ">implying sociology is a real science!"

BASED ON THIS, WHAT ARE YOUR ROOTS?

homo sapiens sapiens

Modern Biological Definition:
• a bipedal primate
• a brain capacity averaging 1400 cc (85 cubic in.)
• dependent upon language and the creation and utilization of complex tools
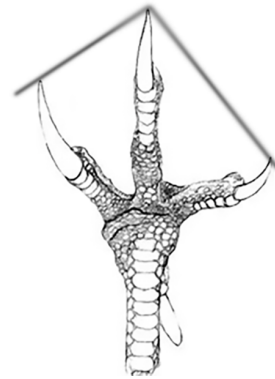
rational animal

Aristotelian Definition:
• able to carry out rationally formulated projects
• doesn't necessarily have to make rational decisions
• applies to fools and wise men alike
• above plants and animals

symbol-using animal

from Kenneth Burke's "Definition of Man":
• use of symbols to communicate
• understanding of negation
• separation from nature by his own techniques
• existence in differing social structures
• desire for self-improvement

featherless biped

Platonic Definition:
• NO feathers
• TWO legs

just awoke from uneasy dreams lol

The Philosopher's Meme ☑ page ○

11/28/2015 🖩 — 01/04/2017 🖩

Last month ⋯⋯⋯ Last year ⋯⋯⋯ All time

Stop scanning

758 posts   254 authors   14746 commenters   38058 likers

Activity
by types / overall

	posts
■	likes
■	comments

0
1,000
2,000
3,000
4,000
5,000
6,000
7,000
8,000
9,000

ember
2016
February
March
April
May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December
2017
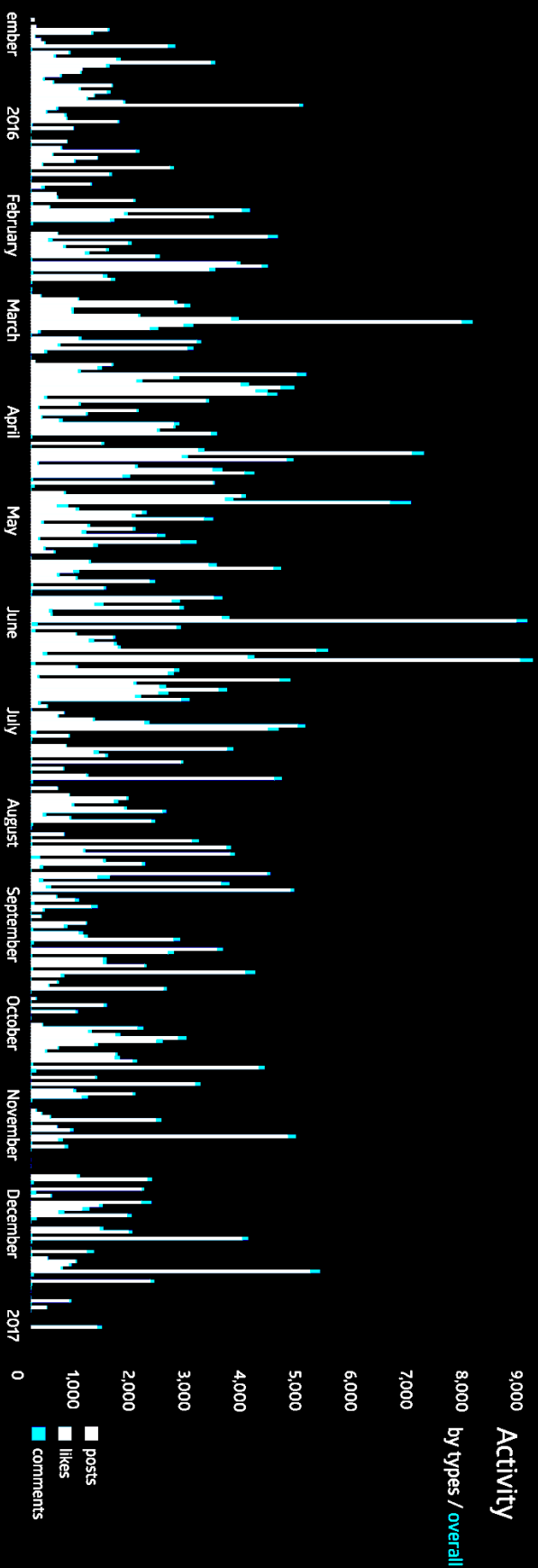
Total/Per post

489K 644	139K 182	26K 34
likes	shares	Comments

Post types

585	46	59	68	0
photos	videos	links	statuses	events

/tpmg/ - TPM discussions ⊠ group

Activity
by types / overall

Activity axis: 0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900

Legend:
- ■ comments
- ■ likes
- ■ posts

Timeline: tober November December 2016 February March April May June July August September October November December 2017
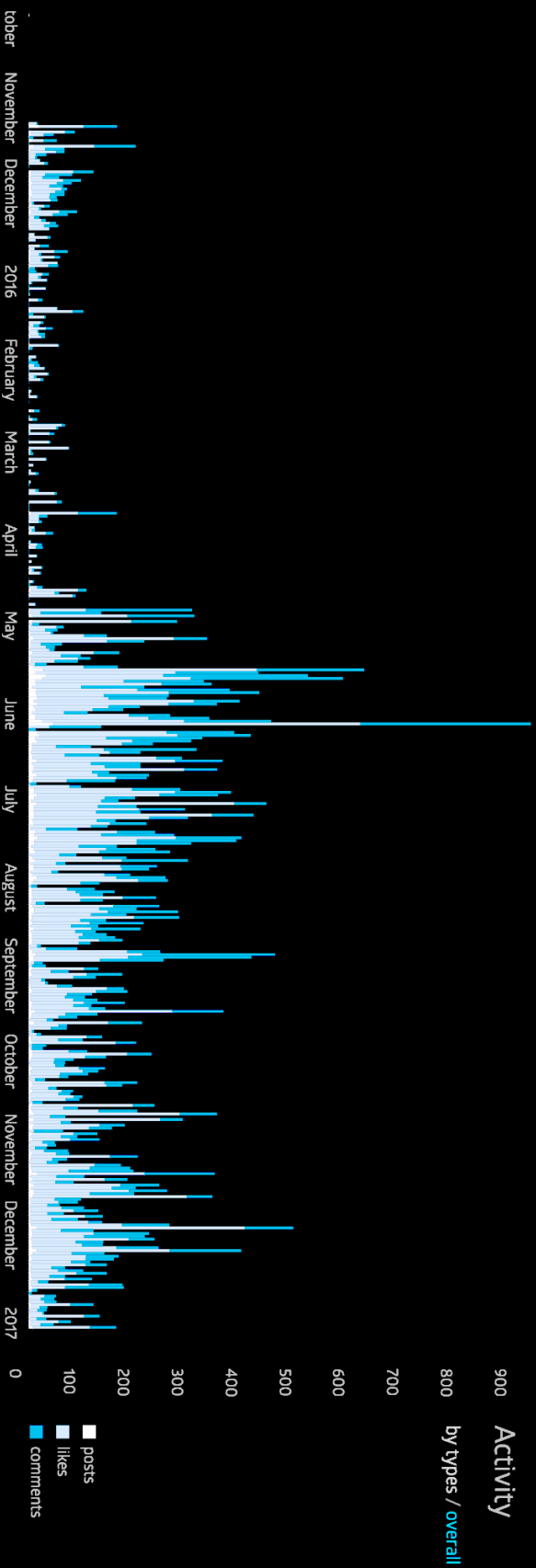
Total/Per post

Total/Per post			
30K$_{14}$ likes	195$_0$ shares	17K$_8$ comments	

Post types

Post types					
864 photos	161 videos	221 links	807 statuses	1 events	

/tpm/ - Research Group for The Philosopher's Meme ☑ group

04/04/2015 🔲 – 01/04/2017 🔲

Last month   Last year   All time   948 posts   264 authors   783 commenters   1379 likers

Activity
by types / overall

■ posts
■ likes
■ comments

250   200   150   100   50   0

July   October   2016   April   July   October   2017
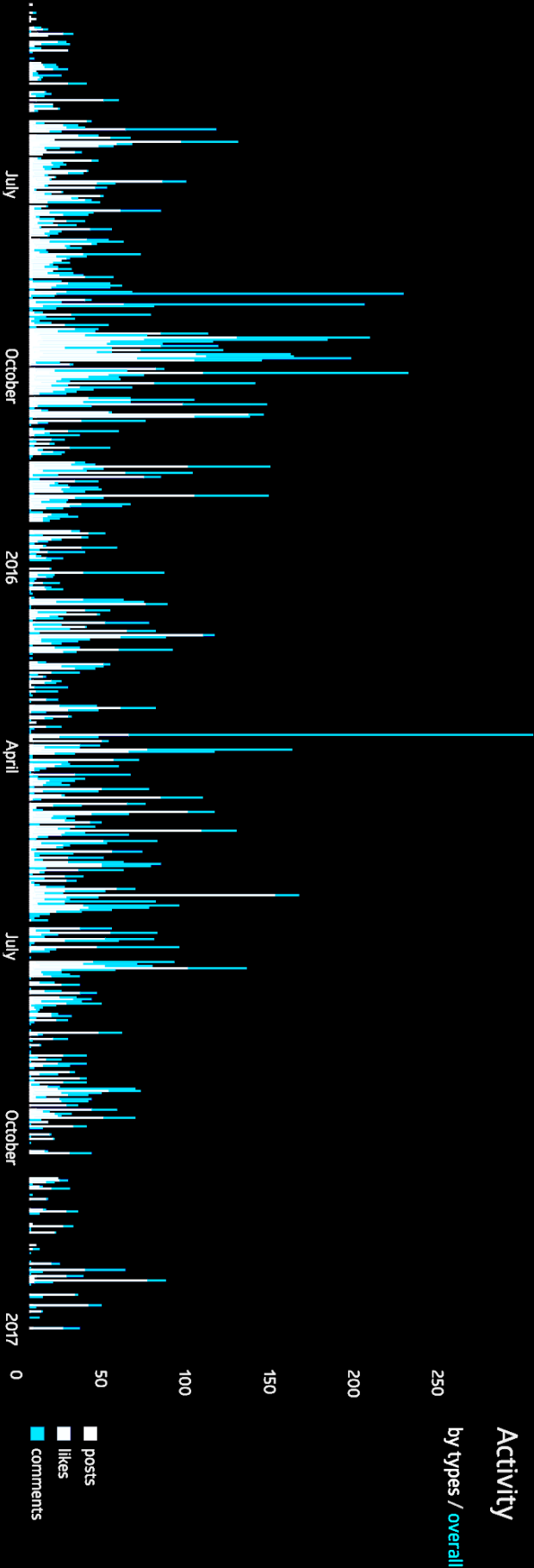
Total/Per post

8.6K₉ likes	**73**₀ shares	**7.9K**₈ Comments

Post types

334 photos	**64** videos	**144** links	**405** statuses	**0** events

The Philosopher's Meme Projects

Current or Ongoing

Facebook Page - Publishes informational and humorous content, reaches broad community

/TPM/ Research Group - discussion group for serious inquiry and research

/tpmg/ General Group - discussion group for socializing and building community

ThePhilosophersMeme.com - website, hosts our longer and more serious essays and articles

Politics Reader - collection of essays about memes and the US Election

Gondola - 2 FB pages, 2 discussion groups, a microcosmic study of the evolution and reception

of a single complex of memes, focusing on both artistic, philosophical and humorous aspects

Past

Memes: A Microcosm of Art History - Lecture and Workshop at Humboldt University, 12/14/15

Future

Book - explaining our theories about the evolution of ironic memes

IMU.Online - collective research hub that aggregates information from memepages

Podcasts

More special issue articles

Semantic Network of memes