

PhiloDay - The Philosophy Commission

The Philosophy Commission is a deliberating body that consists of student-members who will engage in discussions and debate, with an eye to composing and approving position papers, called **Commission Papers**, which would constitute communal responses to a selected philosophical question.

The Philosophy Commission will consist of about 20 members, excluding the chair and vice-chair. **Commission Papers** and any dissenting views of conscientiously objecting members will be presented at the conclusion of that year's PhiloDay event.

The chair and vice-chair have the prerogative, with the help of the organizing teachers, to name one participant in the Philosophy Commission as the "best member" and one text as the "best paper". These awards will be announced at the closing ceremony of PhiloDay.

Membership

Students can become a member of the Commission by submitting a **300-word** initial **Personal Position Paper** (PPP) that is their own **response** to the philosophical question crafted and announced by the chair and vice-chair.

Personal position papers will be assessed by the Philosophy Commission chair, vice-chair, and the teacher-organizers of PhiloDay. This selection committee may ask submitters to work together to merge their respective pieces into a single position paper that will be the subject of future debates and deliberation.

Structure of the initial Personal Position Paper (PPP)

Submitted PPPs should contain the following minimum requirements:

1. The **question** (possibly a personal rephrasing of the prescribed question)
2. A list of terms and their definitions (if necessary).
3. One **objection** or a response to the question contrary to the author's own position, with at least 1 relevant philosophical quotation.
4. The personal **response** of the author with quotations from relevant philosophical texts.

All PPPs should be submitted to the chair and vice-chair by email or on Teams.

Structure of the Formal Position Paper (FPP)

Members admitted into the Philosophy Commission will then compose, in collaboration with at least one other member, a more **Formal Position Paper** (FPP), which is a fuller development of their initial PPP. The FPP should contain the following:

1. **Question:** a statement of the prescribed philosophical question
2. **Key terms** with their definitions.
3. **Objections:** at least 3, maximum 4 answers that others have given or which might be given in response to the question and with which the present author(s) disagree(s). Each objection should contain a short and relevant quotation.
4. **“I respond that”** (*Respondeo*): the author’s own general response to the question. This section may contain short or substantial quotations from relevant thinkers.
5. **Replies to the Objections:** the author responds directly to each of the statements in the “Objections”.

Rules of Procedure

1. Official Languages

English and French will be the official languages of the Commission. If a language other than these is used (in a verbal citation for instance), the utterance, sentence, or phrase will be translated into French or English.

2. Dress Code

The members attending the deliberations must dress appropriately as they would if the event were conducted *in situ*.

3. Modes of Address

- a. To begin a speech, the member must first address the chair and the other members as “Distinguished chair, vice-chair, fellow members...” The chair, administrating the online meeting, will draw attention to the presenter and mute the other participants. **As soon as the speech is finished, the member gives the right to speak back to the chair** by saying, “I yield the floor back to the chair”.

- b. A member may speak in the first person singular, and she may address other members in the third person singular, using the title “fellow member” or simply “Mme. So and So” or “Mr. So and So” (e.g. “Is my fellow member aware that.../”Is Mme. So and So claiming that...”). Members may not address others using their first names. **The use of the pronoun “you” while directly addressing a fellow member of the Commission is discouraged.**
- c. Members who wish to speak may raise their hands; only the chair or vice-chair can grant a member the floor by saying “Mme. So and So” **has been recognized**” or “The chair **grants** the floor to Mr. So and So”.
- d. When a speech is over, the chair will ask if any member wishes to make a **Point of Inquiry** (see below). Only the chair can give **recognition** to a member wanting to make a Point of Inquiry by saying, for instance, “Mme. XYZ **you have been recognized**” or “Mme. CDE **you have the floor**”. Once all **Points of Inquiry** have been answered, the floor is explicitly given back to the chair.

4. Preliminary Informal Debate

After the members of the Commission have been chosen on the basis of their personal position paper submissions, a short informal debate will be held in order to introduce all members to the **Rules of Procedure** that govern all Philosophy Commission sessions.

The chosen initial personal position paper (**PPP**) for the informal debate will be briefly introduced and explained by the main submitters, and if necessary by the chair as well.

1. The chair and the vice chair will organize a short mock debate to prepare the participants for the formal debates by outlining the **Rules of Procedure** and **Modes of Address**, as well as answering questions the participants may have.
2. The chosen PPP will be presented and explained by the main submitter(s); the chair may also **briefly comment on the paper**, with a view to alerting members to the points to be deliberated upon and to clarify how subsequent debates will be organized.
3. If certain members expressed similar views in their position papers, they may be invited by the chair to form a team. The said members shall then decide if they are willing to collaborate with each other and provide an answer to the chair before the start of the official debates. The chair can grant the members some time for **unmoderated deliberations** among themselves.

The informal debate will be followed by 2 or 3 formal ones where the entire Commission deliberates on **Formal Position Papers**, each of which should be authored by at least 2 members.

5. Course of Deliberation

In the first session of the **Formal Debate** the main submitters will present their **Formal Position Paper** and the chair shall briefly (**not exceeding 5 minutes**) highlight the points to be deliberated upon. The vice chair will ensure that rules are observed and will assist the chair in recognizing members who wish to speak and/or introduce **Points of Inquiry** and **Motions** (more about these below).

At any point during the deliberations, the chair may decide to form smaller groups in order to give members some time to discuss in greater detail philosophical questions and ideas in **unmoderated deliberations**.

In the subsequent session the details of any **Formal Position Paper** at hand will be discussed and eventual **Revisions** will consequently be considered, voted upon, and implemented.

Towards the end of the deliberations, acceptance of the final version of the paper under consideration will be put to a vote. 1 or 2 members may be invited by the chair to formulate a short **Dissenting Opinion**, in order to allow the expression of views critical of the approved **Commission Paper**. Excerpts from both papers will be publicly presented at the closing ceremony of Philosophy Day.

- a. In the **Exposition Phase**, the main submitter(s) will deliver a short speech about the key terms and arguments in the paper. The chair will follow the presentation; he or she may offer a short comment on the piece; she or he may also ask the submitter for explanations when necessary.
- b. The chair will then ask the main submitter how many **Points of Inquiry** he or she is open to. The main submitter may respond "1", "2", or a maximum of "3" Points of Inquiry. The chair will then recognize which members (who are raising their hands) may make their Points of Inquiry. Once all Points of Inquiry have been addressed, the main submitter yields the floor back to the chair.
- c. The chair or vice chair can then ask members to express their views relative to the submitters' presentation. **The chair will set the time limit for this part of the discussion.** In this phase, members other than the submitters may express their positions, questions, or critique, either as a group or individually. During this stage of the debate, **members are not yet allowed to propose Revisions** to the position paper under consideration.
- d. Once the allotted time for the Exposition Phase has elapsed, the chair then shifts to the **Revisions Phase**. The chair will ask for **written** revision proposals from the members. Thereafter, the chair will set the debating time and guide the deliberation, directing the focus of the discussion to the most relevant proposals and arguments.
- e. At any point during the deliberations, the chair, vice-chair, or any member of the Commission can introduce a **Point of Inquiry**, by simply raising his or her hand. The recognition of the chair or vice-chair is necessary before the member takes the floor. A Point of Inquiry may ask for, but is not limited to, the following:
 1. repetition of and/or clarification about a specific point, statement, or term made or used by the speaker;

2. an example illustrating any term, clause, statement, or argument in the paper;
3. a rephrasing of any statement made by the speaker;
4. a definition of any term used in the paper or in any statement made by the speaker;
5. the reduction of a piece of argumentation, any part of a speech, or any section of the paper under discussion to a single thesis or declarative statement;
6. the production (and reading out loud) of a relevant quotation.

The member who is given the floor to raise a Point of Inquiry may say, for instance, “I would like to ask the speaker for an example of...” After receiving a response from the presenter, the same member who made the original Point of Inquiry may make a **Motion to Follow-up** (see section on Motions).

Note that a Point of Inquiry should not be used with the aim of making any kind of proposed revision to the paper or to an extended speech pro or contra the entire paper itself.

- f. Moreover, at any point during the deliberations, the chair or vice-chair can **require** a speaking member to clarify her or his position, using this formula “I agree/disagree with this member/clause/argument when he/she/it says ... because ...”
- g. **Revisions** to the paper can be introduced during the **Revisions Phase**. The chair decides which **written** revision proposals will be entertained. Each revision may be debated and **needs to pass a vote** in order to be accepted and incorporated into the paper. (More details below.)
- h. In each forum there needs to be a **simple majority** in order to let a revision, specific motions, or the paper under consideration pass. A simple majority means that the proposed revision, motion, or the paper in its current form is approved if there is at least one more vote for it than against. In case of a tie, the vice-chair casts the deciding vote.
- i. When the allotted debating time on the position paper and revisions has elapsed, the chair can either decide to **Continue** deliberations at a later date or to shift to the **Voting Phase**. If the latter is selected, the chair will ask all members to vote on the paper. Members can vote for or against it, or they can abstain. In the case of a tie, the vice-chair casts the deciding vote.
- j. One or two members who vote against (or abstain from voting pro or contra) the accepted **Commission Paper** may be invited by the chair to write a dissenting opinion.

6. Revisions

Revisions are *written* proposed changes to the position paper being deliberated upon. These may be submitted by any member only once the **Revisions Phase** has commenced. Within the Revisions Phase, any proposed revision allowed by the chair to be expressed before the body may be debated.

A proposed revision can only refer to one statement, phrase, clause, or term in the paper. Moreover, each phrase, clause, statement, or term can be debated only once in a debating session; this means that once a revision is accepted or rejected on a particular phrase, clause, statement, or term, the latter is no longer open for further revision. If any other member sees it necessary to change any part of a revision being proposed, he or she can formally (*in writing*) propose a “revision to the revision” at the moment the proposal is being made.

Note that a revision cannot be a proposal for the complete deletion of an entire clause, sentence, or paragraph. It should always involve a proposal to replace or revise a clause, sentence, or paragraph.

If a member who submitted a revision proposal is called upon by the chair, he or she will then take the floor. The member can now directly present her/his proposed revision, after which the chair sets the allotted time for debate on the proposal (if necessary).

After the debating time for the revision has elapsed, the voting procedure will take place. Members can vote for or against a revision; they can also abstain. **In case of a tie, the vice-chair will cast the deciding vote.** Following this, the debate on the position paper—and deliberations on other proposed revisions—will continue.

7. Motions

Members can make any of the motions below by raising their hand and verbally introducing a motion. Only the chair has the authority to grant the introduction of these motions.

- a) A **Motion to Follow-up** is made when a member wishes to ask another question right after her/his Point of Inquiry had been addressed by the speaker of the moment. This motion can only be granted once after the original Point of Inquiry.
- b) A **Procedural Query** may be introduced when a member is uncertain about the next step to take in the deliberations, or has a question about the Rules of Procedure, or wishes to call the chair’s attention to a breach of the rules.
- c) A **Point of Personal Privilege** may be made in order to make a request concerning a member’s individual comfort or well-being (for instance, if there are issues with audibility, if a member needs to temporarily excuse herself/himself from the deliberations, etc.)
- d) A **Motion to Continue** is made when a member wishes to shift the deliberations to the next phase or to another question or issue. **This motion should be seconded by at least one other member.** Once that occurs, the motion is put to a vote and requires a simple majority to pass.
- e) A **Motion to Vote** can be made when a member wishes to put a revision proposal, which at that point has been debated for a considerable amount of time, to a vote. This motion should be

seconded by at least one other member. Once that occurs, the motion is put to a vote and requires a simple majority to pass. A **Motion to Vote** does not apply to the acceptance of the entire **Commission Paper** itself.

SAMPLE FLOW OF DELIBERATIONS

THE PHILOSOPHY COMMISSION: GENERAL FLOW OF DELIBERATIONS	
TIME	ACTIVITIES
5'	EXPOSITION PHASE. Introduction by the chair; reminder of the rules; invitation to the main submitters to read part of the chosen position paper and to deliver an expository speech.
5'	The main submitters read part of the position paper; delivers a speech underlining the most important arguments. The chair briefly confirms the key points to be deliberated upon.
5'	Members (except the main submitters) may express their stance vis-a-vis the submitters' presentation, either as a group or individually. Any member can speak for or against the paper Points of Inquiry and other possible requests (for an example; a definition; rephrasing; reduction to a thesis; a relevant quotation) or motions may be made by any other member.
5'	Any member can speak for or against the paper Points of inquiry and other possible requests (for an example; a definition; rephrasing; reduction to a thesis; a relevant quotation) or motions may be made by any other member.
5'	Any member can speak for or against the paper Points of inquiry and other possible requests (for an example; a definition; rephrasing; reduction to a thesis; a relevant quotation) or motions may be made by any other member.
Once the Exposition Phase concludes, the chair sets the time for the Revisions Phase	
10'	REVISIONS PHASE. Any member can propose a revision. Points of inquiry and other possible requests (for an example; a definition; rephrasing; reduction to a thesis; a relevant quotation) or motions may be made by any other member.
10'	Any member can propose a revision.

	<p>Points of inquiry and other possible requests (for an example; a definition; rephrasing; reduction to a thesis; a relevant quotation) or motions may be made by any other member.</p> <p>+ voting if necessary</p>
10'	<p>Any member can propose a revision.</p> <p>Points of inquiry and other possible requests (for an example; a definition; rephrasing; reduction to a thesis; a relevant quotation) or motions may be made by any other member.</p> <p>+ voting if necessary</p>
5' to 10'	<p>VOTING PHASE or CONTINUATION of deliberation on a subsequent date.</p> <p>The chair or the vice chair closes the current deliberations.</p> <p>The chair may put the position paper in its current form up for a vote or schedule further deliberations.</p>