

Discussion Revision

Twice during the semester, in pairs or small groups, you will be tasked with “revising” one of our class discussions. The audio recording of the discussion will be provided to you in text form. Your job is to *tidy* it and produce a revised version that can be shared with everyone.

The purpose of this assignment is a) to give you the opportunity to reflect carefully on the process of philosophical discussion and how it can go well (or not); and b) to create a set of reference materials for your classmates that captures the ideas and arguments that have been raised and discussed in class.

(Optionally, after the revised discussion text has been submitted, the text can be reconverted into audio using AI voice clones of the participants, where permission has been given.)

Assignment Instructions

The central goal of this assignment is for you to *understand* what the discussion was doing and make that understanding clear to others. As such, keep in mind the following:

- This task is not about correcting grammar or improving how people spoke. You *can* – and probably should – do both of these things. But this is a minor part of the assignment: it certainly doesn’t end there.
- Your goal is not to decide who was right or wrong, but to represent the discussion that took place, albeit in an idealised form.
- Disagreement is an integral part of philosophical discussion. Hence, your task is *not* to smooth over disagreement. If anything, you should be drawing attention to when, where, and why disagreements have occurred.
- Your goal is to “tidy” the discussion, and as such you should try to make it more coherent *in a certain sense*. That is, you should attempt to draw out the underlying structure and moves in the discussion more clearly. But typically, you should *not* paper over confusion and mistakes: these are often (though not always) essential steps in getting from where we started to where we ended up.
- One way to approach this assignment is to treat the discussion as a piece of *thinking-in-progress*. Imagine you are writing a dialogue for an essay assignment. You’ve created your first version; this version includes all the ideas and arguments you want to have in the final paper. But these ideas and arguments are – as yet – unclear to the reader. Your goal is to edit this “paper” to turn it into the best – submission-worthy – version of what it already is.

Things to pay special attention to:

- What question was being asked (it may very well not be the question we thought we were discussing!).
- Initial views on that question.
- Where the discussion moved forward, stalled, or shifted direction.
- What tensions or disagreements emerged.

- What remained unresolved.

Step-by-Step Guide

No two discussions will be the same, and this assignment will involve a great deal of your own judgement and discretion about how to conduct yourself. Any set of instructions I provide should therefore be seen as provisional and partial: guidance, but not an instruction manual.

Step 1: Identify the Guiding Question

Begin by asking:

- What question did the discussion *actually* revolve around?
- Did that question shift or sharpen during the discussion?
- If so, when and why?

The Guiding Question may not (in fact, likely will not) be identical to the original prompt. Your job is to make clear what question the discussion ended up engaging with, by drawing out and emphasising that underlying structure.

Step 2: Select Moments that Mattered

Not everything that was said needs to appear in the revised version. Focus on contributions that:

- Advanced the discussion.
- Introduced a new idea or distinction.
- Clarified an earlier point.
- Generated disagreement or confusion.
- Changed the direction of the discussion.

Include *only* what did *philosophical work*.

Step 3: Clarify the Discussion

Clarification means doing things like:

- Rephrasing contributions to make the underlying idea clearer.
- Reordering parts of the discussion if this helps reveal its structure.
- Removing repetition, false starts, or dead ends (though some dead ends are important, so use your judgement!).

But clarification is *not*:

- Attributing views to people they clearly did not hold.
- Eliminating genuine disagreement.
- Rewriting the discussion so that it appears to reach a conclusion it did not reach.

Representing Others Responsibly

Always keep in mind that you are doing your best to represent a *shared intellectual activity*. This assignment is not about judging anyone's contribution to the discussion. Hence, you should always assume that:

- All classmates were participating in good faith.
- Unclear or incomplete ideas were an important part of our collective thinking-in-progress.

In other words, always be charitable, accurate, and fair. If you are unsure how to represent a contribution, err on the side of caution.

A Good Final Result

A successfully tidied discussion is one that:

- Makes the guiding question clear.
- Shows how the group engaged with it.
- Reveals the main points of tension or disagreement.
- Preserves openness rather than forcing a conclusion.

If a student who was not present could read or listen to your revised version and understand what was at stake in the discussion, you have done the job well.

IMPORTANT: Always keep in mind that this is fundamentally an *interpretive* task. You are not producing a *record* of what happened, but a *clearer account* of what the discussion was *trying to do*.