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Philosophers in Public Policy Commissions

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ABSTRACT

What role should philosophers play in public policy, especially in structured contexts like policy commissions? The commission paradigm is a formal governmental setting for discussion aimed at policy recommendations. However, it may not be obvious what philosophers (predominantly normative theorists but also others like philosophers of science) can add to such commissions. What role a philosopher should play is worthy of investigation, especially because this can allow for more explicit methodologies and procedures to be provided to other commission members. This paper considers three such roles: "the partisan" (an advocate of a specific normative position), "the populist" (an exponent of public values), and "the philosophical conduit" (an explainer of disciplinary normative positions and arguments who draws attention to divergence and convergence on policy options across normative positions).

1 | Introduction

Public philosophy is growing but is still young. Think of public philosophy as philosophy contributed by professional philosophers but aimed at nonphilosophical audiences, usually in nonacademic contexts (Pigliucci and Finkelman 2014). We can distinguish between the *philosophy–science interface* (i.e., interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research with academics in other disciplines), the *philosophy–public interface* (i.e., to nonacademic laypeople), and the *philosophy–policy interface* (i.e., to governments or policymakers). Given these distinctions, public philosophy is usually thought of as including interactions at both the philosophy–public and philosophy–policy interfaces (Mintz-Woo 2025).

This article focuses on a particular type of case at the philosophy–policy interface, which Buchanan (2009, perhaps disparagingly) calls the "commission paradigm" (also cf. Hegstad 2024)—with the expectation that these points generalize to other circumstances across philosophy interfaces. The role of public philosophers on commissions has been addressed in a variety of special issues, which, while having different emphases, all point toward interest in closely related questions (Archard and Mendus 2009; Boss 2026; Brody 1990; Elster and Holst 2024; Fehr and Plaisance 2010; Maffettone et al. 2014; Walters 1989; Weinstein 2014; Weisbard and Arras 1984; Wikler 1987). In a commission context, a group of experts is convened by the government to individually and jointly evaluate some portfolio of policies and, usually, recommend some to decision-makers. Of special interest for this article are normative theorists who act as moral experts in commissions (they can be any theorists working with practical normative reasoning including, but not limited to, political philosophers, political theorists, moral philosophers, and critical theorists), but many of these points apply more broadly to other kinds of philosophers, so for simplicity, I will simply say "philosophers."[1] Furthermore, there are many instances of philosophers reflecting on their service on such commissions (e.g., Brody 1990; Hirose 2023; Kass 2009; Toulmin 1981; Weisbard 1987;

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Weisbard and Arras 1984; Wikler 1991) and also pieces of writing where philosophers examine moral considerations relevant for such commission members (e.g., Archard 2021; Benjamin 1990; Brock 1987; Brody 1989; Crosthwaite 1995; Floyd 2022; Hegstad 2023; Kamm 1990; Schneider et al. 2024; Warnock 1985; Wikler 1987; Wolff 2019, 2020)—and, in some instances, the two groups overlap.

On the one hand, some such commissions are "ethics commissions," where *many* members of the commission are meant to represent normative positions (Walters 1989). On the other hand, many are more general "policy commissions," where we might expect that only one philosopher is present. Of course, the vast majority of commissions lack philosophers at all (perhaps to their detriment, cf. Crosthwaite 1995; Veatch 2005), but, of course, these raise no questions about the role of philosophers.

Why focus on the commission paradigm? There are at least three reasons. First, among formal processes, it is perhaps the one that could most directly impact policy and society for philosophers, raising both the practical stakes and the importance of procedural legitimacy (Dietrich 2012). Second, there is some literature about philosophers in such contexts, but it is mostly unsystematic and responsive to particular substantive policy, so more generic structure in the discussion would be valuable. Finally, there is pragmatic value in having explanations of applicable commission procedures or methodologies. Because many nonphilosophers are unsure what philosophers can contribute or what we do (Wikler 1991), it can be valuable for actual philosophy committee members to have published work available that explicates potential procedures in order to share. Although many of the points raised here apply to other contexts where philosophers engage with policy and the public, having a specific concrete paradigm helps fix ideas.

Another axis of consideration is the point of view of commission evaluation. From a third-person point of view, some of the literature discusses how to evaluate and categorize such commissions (e.g., Brody 1989; Dzur and Levin 2004; Hegstad 2024, 2025). For instance, we might ask what purposes the government or citizens might want commissions to serve, what standards we might apply to a commission report, or why philosophers should be included (Schneider et al. 2024).

In contrast, this article considers commissions from a first-person point of view, that is, explicit roles for the philosopher herself in policy contexts (little work has directly tackled first-person philosopher roles, but a notable exception is Crosthwaite 1995, also cf. Wolff 2019; this review closely follows my presentation from Mintz-Woo 2026). Assuming that a philosopher accepts an invitation to such a commission, how should she approach her own role?

Note that the issue of whether she *should* accept an invitation to a commission raises distinct moral questions. For instance, if she has radical or revolutionary goals, would she be complicit in structures she rejects if she accepts? Or, if her role would be limited by law or requests to do something very specific, would she be sufficiently free to contribute something morally valuable? Or, if she thinks that the commission is just a fig leaf and the government is going to go forward with a preapproved policy regardless of her work, should she dignify the commission even if it will not make a difference? I think these moral questions regarding when or whether to accept a commission invitation are undertheorized and themselves require more systematic examination, but I set them aside here.

In Section 2, I lay out three potential roles for philosophers. Based on a survey of the literature, I identify two types of roles ("the partisan" [Section 2.1] and "the populist" [Section 2.2]). The partisan develops, defends, and demonstrates her own considered normative position. The populist investigates and infers the values of society before applying those to the policy question. I consider arguments for and against these roles before introducing a new type ("the philosophical conduit" who engages in "convergent evaluation," Section 2.3). I then conclude in Section 3.

2 | Three Roles for Philosophers

The commission paradigm includes many cases, but for our purposes, one important distinction is between ethics commissions (with many philosophers) and policy commissions (with few or one). Besides philosophers, the commission may include any mix of academic experts, think tank members, governmental ministers, and representatives of civil society.

Supposing our philosopher is a lone normative theorist (i.e., is in a policy commission), she may be introduced as "the ethicist" or "the justice theorist," and in many such cases, she would be the only commission member with any exposure to normative theory. Insofar as she is introduced in this manner, I take it as a desideratum that she adopts a role that reflects her philosophical or theoretical expertise, even if it is not fully determined by the commission what that role is. (If she were just meant to be another intelligent person with some domain familiarity, this would be less relevant, but then she would not be introduced in this manner.) In particular, one salient skill of normative theorists is the capacity to draw out valid inferences from normative and empirical premises (Føllesdal 2004; Mintz-Woo 2025). In terms of empirical premises, assume that our philosopher does have some domain familiarity and was chosen at least in part because she knows about the practical and policy issues under discussion.

2.1 | The Partisan

First, consider "the partisan" role. If she is a normative theorist, our philosopher was invited presumably due to some type of moral or normative expertise, and she has thought carefully about the issues at hand. So one natural position is that she develops her (normative) philosophical position, defends it against some alternatives, and demonstrates its relevance by explaining how it bears on the policy question at hand.

Not only is this role at least initially plausible, but the literature also has some very strong claims in its favor. Brock indicates that, in contexts of deep moral disagreement, philosophers will "inevitably [press their own views], even if neither they nor others construe their role to be provider of the moral truth and of

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solutions to moral problems," rendering some version of a partisan role "inevitable" in such commission contexts (1987, 790). Even for those who do not claim that it is inevitable, some argue that it is normatively appropriate. For instance, Momeyer argues that it is important for philosophers to forthrightly defend their normative positions to help avoid the prejudice that philosophical debates are necessarily inconclusive or interminable (1990, 398). By forthrightly defending a moral position, a partisan can demonstrate that one can draw and endorse substantive philosophical conclusions even in the face of theoretical disagreement. The partisan role can also get support from the line of argument that a moral philosopher is more likely to be a moral expert because, for instance, she has professional time and commitment to understanding moral concepts and arguments as well as relatively developed reasoning skills (Singer 1972 is the locus classicus). Finally, Kamm takes it to be normatively appropriate for philosophers to defend their own views in policy contexts: "the philosopher should truly philosophize, rather than merely report the views of others" (1990, 358).

Here is an explicit procedure that we can consider for the partisan (note that these steps need not be performed in this precise sequence), with adjustments to one from Wolff (2019) (asterisks indicate steps that vary from role to role):

1. Identify the issue and current state of affairs
2. Identify the arguments and values*
3. Consider history and comparisons
4. Create a profile of possible policy options
5. Evaluate options with the philosopher's considered moral judgments*

However, there are some concerns here. The idea that philosophers can be moral experts (in the strong sense of having at least more reliably true moral judgment than nonphilosophers) is subject to a variety of objections and is highly contested (Niv and Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2022). For instance, Archard (2011) argues that moral philosophy is ultimately grounded in commonsense morality, which is accessible to everyone. Second, Cross (2016) argues that disagreement among moral philosophers undermines claims to moral expertise. Third, Noble et al. (1982) argue that philosophical theory is blinkered and lacks sufficient critical engagement with history and society. Finally, Cowley (2011) does not think philosophers have anything unique to offer unless they resort to such arcane language as to be incomprehensible to others—he denies that there is any coherent moral expertise that moral philosophers could claim.

Having partisans of a moral theory may be less of an issue if there is representation from a variety of moral positions, rendering the situation more like an ethics commission (Hegstad 2023, 2025). But, even in the case of ethics commissions, any selection of partisans will involve some curation of positions—whether intentional or unintentional. From the point of view of our philosopher herself, playing the role of the partisan in the context where the representation of views seems objectionably limited or skewed might be questionable. It is worth noting that, even though any selection will involve curation, we might believe there is some (imprecise) level of diversity of philosophical positions that suffices to satisfy concerns about representation.

But the problem is more pronounced for nonethics commissions, or policy commissions, because these may well have a single philosopher, or insufficiently many to even attempt an approximation of the diversity of philosophical positions. Mintz-Woo (2026) points out that one way of indicating this concern is by showing that any given partisan will be nonrepresentative of the discipline and, indeed, may not have been selected for their particular philosophical commitments. Mintz-Woo (2026) calls this problem "Contingent Selection" and argues that it introduces objectionable arbitrariness into the policy process.

Indeed, there is a potential dilemma for the partisan on a policy commission. On the one hand, if she believes that she was *not* selected in light of her substantive philosophical positions, then there are Contingent Selection concerns—namely, it is objectionably arbitrary that she, with her philosophical positions, is representing philosophical theory when equally well-placed peers representing alternative positions could have been selected and would have provided very different policy evaluations (cf. Ross 2026, 136, on a closely related version of philosophical arbitrariness). So she should be concerned about taking a partisan role because that introduces objectionable and unintended randomness into the policy process.

On the other hand, if she believes that she *was* selected to represent a particular philosophical position, then she should be concerned about being a cog in the intentional biasing of the process. So she should be concerned about taking a partisan role—at least if there is an alternative role that avoids simply endorsing the position she believes she was selected for (note that attempts to avoid defending the position she was selected for might be professionally inconsistent—presumably, she was selected because she has a clear and established track record of taking exactly that position). It is my contention that the philosophical conduit role below (Section 2.3) allows her to mitigate such intentional biasing.

2.2 | The Populist

Second, consider "the populist" role. Note that the issue is what role the philosopher should play in the *public* policy process. One intuitively democratic view is that her role should, therefore, reflect the values of the public. If we are suspicious that philosophers qua philosophers have more reliable moral judgments (for instance, because of the various lines of evidence that philosophers are subject to biases and heuristics, even in their own areas of expertise (Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2012, 2015)), then we might think it important that policies are justified or at least justifiable to the public because the public has equally (un)reliable moral judgments. In other words, we might think that the policies should answer to public values.

There are many different kinds of populists. Often, populists are constrained; they require that reasons be acceptable to "people of different, but 'reasonable,' religious and ethical views" (Jayaram 2025), which is a tradition that goes back at least to Rawls (1993). But they may also answer to extant public values, some of which could be inferred from behavior (including voting and criminal behavior), and some of which are internally held values (Floyd 2017 devotes discussion to versions of these

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under the names "normative behaviouralism" and "mentalism," respectively). The populist may only be interested in values that are suitably systematized or the output of certain procedures (e.g., citizens' assemblies) (Schroeder 2023); for our purposes, these can all count as versions of populism.

Regardless of the specific version, a variety of political philosophers have endorsed populist roles (for example, Archard 2011; Miller 1992; Walzer 1981; Wolff 2019), at least partially due to the pragmatic value of having policy justifications be acceptable to the population. They might also be motivated by a kind of deep humility, whereby the philosopher does not think that her philosophical training ipso facto guarantees more reliable moral judgment. With this in mind, we can consider a potential procedure for the populist:

1. Identify the issue and current state of affairs
2. Identify the arguments and values*
3. Determine the relevant values of society or the public, perhaps trying to render these values more systematic or coherent*
4. Create a profile of possible policy options
5. Evaluate options with reference to societal values*

However, there are some concerns that could be raised with respect to such a populist role.

First, with respect to (5), are public values even normatively relevant to policy questions? In discussions of philosophers in public policy, O'Neill (2009, 220) emphasizes that public opinion "cannot settle ethical or policy questions, and can make at best a limited contribution to public policy formation." Similarly, Kasimba and Singer (1989, 415) scoff that there "is certainly no general acceptance in Australia, nor in any other parliamentary democracy of which we are aware, of the principle of Government by Gallup Poll."

Second, with respect to (3), it is radically underdetermined *which* values reflect the public's views (Wikler 1991). For instance, are we concerned about majority-endorsed values? How do we consider various minority opinions? This relates to a standard concern about conventionalism, with Kamm noting that such an approach is "suspect since it might lead to the refusal to recommend rights for blacks or women in racist or sexist societies" (1990, 373). This is not a purely theoretical point; some extant societies have racist or sexist (not to mention nationalistic, anthropocentric, or xenophobic) values. To sidestep this conventionalist concern, a populist might think we can embrace the *deep* or *reasonable* values of a society (Wolff 2020). Perhaps the deep values are reflected in historical or religious texts, but then, of course, we have to ask which texts and indicate why *historical* texts reflect the values of society better than *contemporary* stated or revealed preferences or positions. If the polls and voting behavior of a population suggest certain values, it seems like special pleading to point to deeper, more hidden values that appear less objectionable.

Third, why is it the philosopher's role to apply societal values? She is not an elected representative, nor is she responsive to democratic pressure. Presumably, the duly elected representatives are bringing her in to give them information they *do not* have immediate access to (unlike the views of their constituents). A negative case is that, if she were to adopt a representative role, her role would be duplicating their own. A positive case is that this seems to be disanalogous to how we think about other members of a commission. We do not think that an economist is there to represent the public's (economic) views or that a biologist is there to represent the public's (biological) views; we think they are there to provide expert input and testimony, predominantly based on their disciplines' deliverances. (Intuitions like these help motivate the third role discussed below.)

Finally, there is a fourth concern, also with respect to (3), which persists even if we are able to determine exactly which values (whose, from when, or from which sources) are the ones that our policy evaluations should reflect. That concern is that the philosopher herself is not the appropriate kind of expert to be engaged in this process of understanding societal values. Presumably, for determining the values of society, the appropriate kind of expert is a social scientist (e.g., a sociologist, social psychologist, or political scientist). Philosophers are not trained to empirically research or understand large groups of people, so it seems inappropriate, or at least suboptimal, to ask her to step into this kind of populist role (Hegstad 2023). Furthermore, this concern may have a practical component: Members of a commission might be skeptical if a philosopher proclaims herself an expert on the views of society without having empirical support, a skepticism that would undercut her capacity to capably fulfill her duties to the commission.

2.3 | The Philosophical Conduit

Having found significant reasons for concern with both the partisan and populist roles, one might be skeptical about the prognosis for a less objectionable role. If the values do not come from the philosopher herself or the society of which she is a member, where should they come from? However, there is an alternative role, which, as far as I can tell, is new to the literature, called "the philosophical/disciplinary conduit," who engages in "convergent evaluation" (which I introduced in Mintz-Woo 2026).[2]

Some have argued that a variety of normative positions (perhaps reflecting Rawlsian "comprehensive doctrines") should be reflected in an ethics commission (Hegstad 2023). But what if our philosopher is invited to a nonethics commission where she is the lone moral philosopher (or the commission is otherwise highly nonrepresentative of the variety of normative positions relevant to this question)? She cannot herself change the composition of the commission, and, indeed, even if she could, it might be procedurally inappropriate for her to attempt to do so. However, she *can* control what she contributes to the commission, and, for those same reasons, she might single-handedly wish to convey some of the variety of philosophical positions, leading her to act as a "philosophical conduit" (Mintz-Woo 2026). How might she do this?

One possibility is that she selects from the published literature some set of philosophically defensible positions—positions she may or may not personally endorse. Note that there are practical

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limitations. Supposing she is a normative philosopher, she cannot hope to cover all the potentially relevant normative positions, and even if she wished to, she might be sufficiently familiar with only some subset to be able to accurately convey some of them. But that need not stop her from attempting to give *some* sense of the range of views on offer because the more comprehensive her sweep, the closer it approximates a sufficient representation of the debate (agenda-setting ethics might be relevant, cf. Kapelner 2026). The literature relevant to her own training (e.g., in analytic philosophy or political theory) could also provide some bounds on the positions she can reasonably be expected to be familiar with.

Once she has selected some normative positions, she should explain how those positions would bear on the policy issue at hand, that is, whether they support some policy options over others and why (Mintz-Woo 2025 calls this a "weak moral expert" role; also cf. Føllesdal 2004). Such explanations draw on her capacity to draw and explain valid arguments and inferences, demonstrating her *understanding* of the normative positions (Hannon and Nguyen 2026). The arguments she presents need not be her *own* arguments, and, indeed, in general, it is more helpful to lean on arguments that others have produced because she may not have carefully considered all of these positions herself (again, perhaps reference to the somewhat nebulous mainstream published literature can serve as a useful standard).

Finally, she can indicate in her policy evaluation where there is convergence and divergence (hence the "convergent evaluation" methodology moniker). For instance, she could say which policy options are supportable by *some* philosophical positions ("philosophically plausible or defensible"), which are supportable by *more* philosophical positions ("(more) philosophically robust"), and which are supportable by *none* ("philosophically implausible or indefensible") (Mintz-Woo 2026 provides an actual example of this kind of analysis in an appendix). In addition, she can consider whether or not to indicate her own position, with potential considerations for and against doing so, including some of the concerns raised with the partisan role among them (Crosthwaite 1995). Once again, we can consider an explicit procedure for such a convergent evaluation:

1. Identify the issue and current state of affairs
2. Determine the relevant arguments and normative positions espoused by philosophers*
3. Create a profile of possible policy options
4. Determine the level of convergence (and divergence) on those policy options generated by those arguments*
5. Evaluate policy options with reference to the level of convergence (and divergence) among philosophical positions*

What arguments are there in favor of the convergent evaluation methodology and the philosophical conduit role? In Mintz-Woo (2026), I listed several: (1) It draws specifically on a philosophical skill set because both understanding the positions in play in the philosophical literature and the capacity to draw valid inferences from those positions are philosophical skills (Crosthwaite 1995; Veatch 2005). (2) It is justifiable to assign a higher credence to policy options that can be supported by independent philosophical positions. (3) It is pragmatically useful in a commission context to be able to draw on diverse values, so advocating a policy option with high convergence potentially allows more people to support it, facilitating commission cohesion. (4) It parallels roles for other kinds of experts that seem to have intuitive pull. For instance, if we invite a biodiversity expert to a commission to evaluate the biodiversity implications of some policy options, the goal is not to find out what *that* particular expert has found or believes but to understand what the biodiversity community believes about circumstances like this one (Boulicault and Schroeder 2021). Similarly, the role of a disciplinary conduit is a way of transferring disciplinary knowledge instead of one's preferred philosophical position. (5) Convergent evaluations are intersubjectively verifiable in the sense that philosophers with different positions can productively check and critique each other—if they are adopting disciplinary conduit roles as opposed to partisan roles. For instance, in justice contexts, an egalitarian can check a sufficientarian's reasoning along the lines of "Yes, supposing that sufficientarianism is true, it does (or does not) follow that this given policy option is justifiable." This is possible even if the egalitarian does not accept the sufficientarian pattern of justice. (6) A policy option that is subject to convergent evaluation can be accepted as more legitimate given that it can be supported from a variety of philosophical positions (cf. Hegstad 2023). (7) Finally, the theory seems to be metaconsistent or self-recommending, in the sense that these various arguments (1–6 in this paragraph) begin with different normative positions but all support convergent evaluation. Because convergent evaluation recommends conclusions supportable from a variety of philosophical positions, if these arguments are valid, convergent evaluation is metaconsistent or self-recommending.

However, there are also concerns that could be raised against the philosophical conduit role. First, some strong skeptics might doubt that, *in principle*, philosophers can fairly reconstruct others' philosophical positions, either because they lack the breadth of theoretical knowledge or the appropriate intellectual attitudes. For instance, Wee (2025) argues that practical reasoners might have different fundamental reasoning notions ("basic concepts") that do not allow them to access each others' reasoning or recognize each others' reasoning as good.

However, it does seem that philosophers are able to reconstruct interlocutors' views and offer internal critiques that can trouble interlocutors, suggesting that there are shared reasoning concepts and standards. For one thing, this seems to be part of the role of peer reviewers: not to say when a manuscript has convinced the reviewer of substantive (normative) conclusions but to say whether the (normative) reasoning is clear, valid, and novel.

But, second, even if one thinks there is no in-principle objection to such reconstruction of philosophical positions, one might think that it is *practically* or *psychologically* unrealistic. Obviously, as a finite being, our invited philosopher is not able to canvass all the potentially relevant normative positions, and, even if she does, she may have a greater or lesser relative capacity to recreate views due to her position (Floyd 2017). Considering a convergent evaluation-style view, Moreno (1988) adds another wrinkle: Perhaps agreement on a policy option

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undergirded by subtly different normative positions will prove illusory and prevent cooperation.

However, many philosophers have practice with similar kinds of reconstruction. In our classrooms, some believe, our goal is not to proselytize our favored philosophical positions but to try to give some sense of some disciplinary debates (cf. Caney 2012, 193). Insofar as this is something philosophers try to do in the classroom, we are capable of curating and presenting debates in ways that allow our audiences to understand contrasting philosophical positions.

Relevantly, Hegstad (2025) makes a helpful point: The appropriate standard for commission policy evaluation might not be the academic standard we hold ourselves to in professional academic work but a lower ("political") standard (also cf. Weisbard 1987). If so, the fact that she may not be able to survey or reconstruct positions in line with standards we would expect in academic writing is not objectionable in the context of the commission paradigm.

Third, a last objection is that convergent evaluation avoids responding to the *implications* of policy selection: One might be able to show that some particular policy is morally justifiable (from a variety of normative positions), but it might have negative political or practical consequences which are overlooked by the philosopher (Brock 1987; Mitchell et al. 2023).

However, one could argue that it is to a significant extent *good* that philosophers avoid considering such consequences. First, as noted above, philosophers do not have the relevant social or political expertise, and there is no guarantee that they will predict the correct consequences (cf. Brock 1987 with Kamm 1990, fn4). Second, if they were to make (philosophical) policy recommendations with some mix of embedded practical and normative considerations, then it would be hard for commission members to disentangle the justifications for evaluations (e.g., if the philosopher takes one option to be morally second-best but practically productive, and they advocate it as the normatively best option, that seems both disingenuous and likely to make it hard for the commission to parse the reasons for the recommendation, which seems objectionable with respect to public reason). Such opacity seems to undermine the long-term procedural justifications for including philosophers in policy commissions, and there is a case to be made that we should factor in the social implications of the discipline being viewed as disingenuous (Mitchell et al. 2023).

3 | Conclusion and Open Questions

This survey suggests that there are a variety of roles that a philosopher invited to such a commission could adopt. There are considerations for and against each of these roles. Regardless of one's position on these roles, one goal of this article is to structure the debate in such a way that it is useful to philosophers invited to commissions and similar policy processes to understand some of their methodological options. Furthermore, explicit procedures and methodologies are valuable to the other commission members because these methodologies can be presented or explained to these commission members—people who may be entirely unfamiliar with philosophy and who have no idea how philosophical contributions could look.

Regardless, there remain several other open research questions, even if we limit ourselves to questions arising at the philosophy–policy interface (how these roles work at the philosophy–public and philosophy–science interfaces is also important to further explore). For instance, this work takes a first-person perspective (from the point of view of the philosopher) but third-person perspectives (from the point of view of morality or the government) might raise issues of the goals or standards for the commissions themselves, whether of composition or output (Hegstad 2024, 2025). Other questions are about whether the roles for different kinds of philosophers might depend on their type of philosophical expertise. Another set of open questions involves the ethics of nonargumentative contributions to commissions. How important is it that the role of a commission philosopher be reflective of her specifically philosophical competences? If it need not reflect her theoretical competences, what about other skills (Momeyer 1990)? For instance, should philosophers act as chairs or mediators, asking clarificatory questions? There is a lot of room for interesting engagement in the ethical questions arising from philosophical contributions to public policy.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author has volunteered in assisting national public policymaking in Ireland and is interested in philosophers making productive contributions to public processes. The author declares no other conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The author has nothing to report.

Endnotes

[1] Do normative theorists have different roles to play on such commissions compared to other philosophers? Why are normative theorists of special interest in public philosophy contexts? These questions, as far as I can tell, have not been addressed in the literature, but here is one answer that responds to both questions: Expertise about normative theory seems more objectionable than expertise about metaphysics or philosophy of science. For instance, Hills (2009) and McGrath (2009) suggest that believing or acting on moral testimony does not deserve moral credit or is otherwise questionable. Intuitively, believing metaphysical or philosophy of science claims on the basis of philosophical testimony seems less objectionable (perhaps because philosophy of science depends on science, and [some forms of] science can be evaluated by nonexperts, whereas normative theory is isolated from claims

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that can be evaluated by nonexperts; cf. Nguyen 2020). This could have implications for which roles are appropriate (e.g., this asymmetry supports normative populist roles due to concerns about testimony for normative partisans, but the asymmetry does not similarly support philosophy of science populist roles).

[2] More optimistically than this position, Kymlicka (1993) suggests that different theories will converge on mid-level or guiding principles. (More pessimistically, he *also* thinks this means moral philosophers are relatively superfluous in policy commissions.) Also notably, Howard (2019) defends a role related to the philosophical conduit, but his is aimed at the public, so it is something of a hybrid version—with populist components (also cf. Dzur and Levin 2004).

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