
Discovering What's at Issue

Using the *Stases* to Locate the Nature of Controversies

First used in ancient Greek rhetoric, the *stases* provide a systematic way to ask questions of any issue in order to identify likely points of disagreement. Think of the *stases* as a mechanism for locating “hot spots” within the territory of any dispute.

conjecture

Do some people believe that something exists, while others deny its existence? Is there disagreement about exactly what happened, or about the sequence of events? Do eye witnesses describe the event in different ways? Are there disagreements about where, how, or when the event or phenomenon originated? Are there differing accounts of what caused the event? Do descriptions of facts differ in significant ways? Are there disagreements about how prevalent the phenomenon is?

definition

Are there disagreements over what kind of event/phenomenon it is, or to what larger class of things it might belong? Are there differing accounts of how the phenomenon is structured? Do persons name the event/phenomenon in different ways? Do people agree on how the event should be named, but disagree about how it should be defined? Are there differences in the way that the event is defined depending on the context in which it is being defined? Are there people who stipulate a definition that differs from the term's typical meanings?

value

Is there disagreement about whether this phenomenon is a good or a bad thing? Are there disagreements about the relevance, significance, or severity of the matter? Are there disagreements about, for instance, the aesthetic, economic, political, psychological, social, or ethical value of the phenomenon in question? Are there disagreements about how virtuous the phenomenon may be? Do some believe that the phenomenon is better or worse than some alternative? Do persons reach differing judgments about the goodness, truth, rightness, appropriateness, usefulness, larger purpose, etc. of the phenomenon under consideration?

policy

Do people disagree about what should be done in response to the event/phenomenon? Are there disagreements about what procedure or policy is possible or preferable as a response? Is there disagreement about how the proposed actions will change or improve the state of affairs? Are there disagreements about whether the proposed changes will make things better or worse—for whom, in what ways? Do some advocate for a new policy, while others advocate for leaving things well enough alone? Are there disagreements about how a policy should be implemented?