



F I F T H E D I T I O N

ANCIENT RHETORICS
FOR CONTEMPORARY
STUDENTS

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ACHIEVING STASIS BY ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Every subject which contains in itself a controversy to be resolved . . . involves a question about a fact, or about a definition, or about the nature of an act, or about . . . processes.

—Cicero, *De Inventione* I iii 7

STUDENTS WHO WANT a systematic way of asking questions about rhetorical situations can use the ancient **stases**, which help rhetors determine exactly what any argument is about; use of the stases also ensures that rhetors investigate an issue fully. The term *stasis* (Latin *status* or *constitutio*) is derived from a Greek word meaning “a stand.” Thus a stasis can refer to the place where one rhetor takes a stand. If two rhetors disagree, the stasis marks the place where they come to rest, where they can agree that they disagree. Hence the appropriateness of the Latin *constitutio*, which can be translated as a “co-standing” or a “standing together.” But although finding the point of stasis is an important first step, this resting place is temporary, suspended as it is between conflicting movements until a writer or speaker begins the actual argument.

The most satisfactory modern equivalent for stasis seems to be the term **issue**, which we define as the point about which all parties to an argument can agree that they disagree: this is what is at issue. This point of agreement is important because all parties to an argument must know the precise issue on which they disagree; otherwise, they may just talk past one another. This failure to agree on the point of disagreement often results in frustration for all concerned parties, and thus it may be one reason why people don’t like to argue.

Determining the point of stasis is crucial to any rhetorical argument. However, figuring out the stasis is sometimes more difficult than it may seem at first

glance. Most people who are engaged in arguments want to advance their own position as quickly and forcefully as possible. Thus they do not want to take the time to find all the available arguments, as ancient means of invention require. However, this hasty approach can lead to stalemate (or shouting or violence), as has happened in public arguments over abortion.

Happily, the stases also provide rhetors with a set of questions that, when asked systematically, can help them to determine the arguments that are available in a given rhetorical situation. Rhetors who do take the time to find all the available arguments can be assured both that their position is defensible and that they have found the best evidence to support it. The very old systematic investigative procedures described in this chapter were used for thousands of years to help rhetors figure out what arguments are available to them, and we hope that they will help you to determine the issues you want to argue, as well.

ON INVENTING: HOW TO PROCEED

We recommend that you begin your work with the stases by trying to answer the questions outlined next. Consider all the statements you generate to be potential propositions. If you work systematically and thoroughly, you should produce a full and useful analysis of the issue you have chosen to examine. Doing all this intellectual work has several advantages. Rhetors who work through the questions raised by this heuristic in systematic fashion will find that

1. It clarifies their thinking about the point in dispute.
2. It forces them to think about the assumptions and values shared by members of their targeted audience.
3. It establishes areas in which more research needs to be done.
4. It suggests which proofs are crucial to the case.
5. It may point the way toward the most effective arrangement of the proofs.

What this or any heuristic will not provide, however, is a draft of a paper or speech. Ancient rhetors spent a good deal of time in preparation for writing or speaking, trying out one method of invention or another. They did not mind if these trials produced false starts because they knew that the false starts turned up in one case could most likely be used in some other rhetorical situation. Contemporary debaters work in a similar fashion, preparing all relevant arguments in advance in case they ever need to use them, and to limit the chance that a skilled opponent will use an argument they are not prepared to answer. It is important to remember, then, that practice with this (or any heuristic) also supplies the rhetor with *copia*. Proofs generated in practice with any heuristic may prove useful at some other time.

One additional caution: heuristics do not work as reliably as mathematical formulas do. In many cases, you will continue to refine the issue and to develop

nuances of your proposition as you work through each of the rhetorical canons. In fact, invention can begin all over again during late stages of the composing process—arrangement, revision or even editing. However, attention to the heuristics described in this book will certainly enrich your stock of arguments—your verbal *copia*. And systematic, thoughtful consideration of the issue at hand just may provide you with precisely the proposition you are looking for, as well as arguments you can use to support it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACHIEVING STASIS

Contemporary public discourse about abortion provides a good example of an argument that has been sustained for many years but that shows no sign of being resolved. Public debate on this issue began in earnest nearly forty years ago, when the Supreme Court legalized the practice in 1973. Ever since that time, those who oppose the availability of abortion, usually on moral grounds, have employed a number of tactics to get the procedure banned, while at the same time, those who support the availability of abortion have fought to keep the practice, as they say, “safe, legal, and rare.” Those who oppose abortion are called “pro-life” because of their belief that abortion is murder; those who support it are called “pro-choice” because they believe that women should be able to choose their methods of controlling reproduction.

Ever since *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion, proponents and opponents of abortion have battled one another in both the judicial and legislative arenas. In 2005, for example, the state legislature of South Dakota passed a bill making it a felony for a doctor to perform an abortion anywhere in the state. The legislation allowed no exceptions whatever: abortions were not permitted when a mother’s health was at stake (unless her life was in danger), and citizens of South Dakota who had suffered rape or incest were denied this option as well. The law had been expressly designed by its advocates to produce a test case that would challenge *Roe v. Wade*. Then, in 2006, abortion rights activists succeeded in placing a resolution on the ballot that would strike down the 2005 legislation, and the people of South Dakota supported it. Legislation similar to the 2005 bill that banned nearly all abortions appeared on the ballot again in 2008, and once again voters in South Dakota defeated it.

Clearly this issue is hotly contested in South Dakota, as well as in other states. One reason that the argument over abortion has not been resolved is that it cannot be, as long as the central propositions put forward by those involved in it are not in stasis. People who oppose the legalization of abortion ordinarily offer the following statement as their major proposition: Abortion is murder. People who argue that abortion should maintain its current status as a legal operation put the following statement forward as their major proposition: Women have the right to control their reproductive practices. Keeping in mind that reaching stasis means finding the place where opponents agree to disagree, even a cursory examination of these statements shows that they are not in stasis.

A rhetor who wishes to find stasis with someone who believes that abortion is murder should argue (a) that abortion is not murder, or (b) that abortion is legal so therefore it cannot be murder because murder is illegal in America, or (c) that abortion is not murder because a fetus is not a human being, or some other proposition that defines abortion in such a way that it can be excluded from the category “murder.”

Stasis Achieved: Rhetors Can Now Agree to Disagree

- A. Abortion is murder.
- B. Abortion is not murder.

A rhetor who wishes to find stasis with someone who believes that women have the right to control their own reproductive practices, on the other hand, must argue that (a) women do not have that right, at least when they are pregnant, or (b) that the right to life of a fetus outweighs a woman’s right to choose what happens to her body, or (c) that the right to life extends to fetuses and takes primacy over any other human right, or some other similar proposition about the priority ordering of human rights.

Stasis Achieved: Rhetors Can Now Agree to Disagree

- A. Women have the right to decide what happens to their bodies, including terminating a pregnancy.
- B. Women do not have the right to decide what happens to their bodies when they are pregnant because a potential life is at stake.

Although the propositions we turned up in our stasis analysis do appear in contemporary discourse about abortion, they are seldom offered in the systematic, head-to-head way we have listed them here; that is, they are seldom put in stasis. But the act of putting them in stasis establishes that the participants in this argument are usually arguing right past each other. That is to say, the major propositions they put forward do not address the same issue.

Interestingly enough, the statements that would achieve stasis in this argument are not very persuasive to opponents: pro-choice advocates do not often directly address the pro-life position by saying, “Abortion is not murder.” Nor do pro-life advocates often say in public forums that “women do not have the right to determine what happens to their bodies.” This reluctance to state the implications of its propositions may be another reason why the argument is not in stasis. Those who frame the abortion issue as a question of murder are compelled to argue that abortion, defined as murder, outweighs a woman’s right to determine when or if she will have children. They frequently support their position by making reference to religious, moral, or natural laws. Those who support legal abortion, on the other hand, must either argue or ignore the claim that abortion is not murder, and to do so they have recourse to the political discourse of rights, arguing that individuals have a right to conduct private business without interference from the state.

This argument assumes further that deciding to have an abortion is a private, not a public, matter.

Another way to articulate this failure to achieve stasis is to say that people who oppose abortion are arguing from philosophical or theological assumptions about the point at which life begins; people who defend women's rights are arguing from political grounds about the rights of individuals and the relation of those rights to the good of the community. The point to be made here, however, is that as long as the major propositions in this discourse remain out of stasis, the argument will continue. To date, those who argue about this issue in these terms have ordinarily been unwilling to meet one another on the same ground.

THEORETICAL VERSUS PRACTICAL QUESTIONS

Ancient rhetoricians divided questions into two kinds: theoretical and practical. Some questions concern what people should do (action), but these are always related to questions about why people should do something (theory). Cicero gave this example of a theoretical question in his treatise called *Topics* (xxi 82): Does law originate in nature or in some agreement and contract between people? This is the sort of abstract theoretical question that is discussed today by law school professors and their students when they talk about what grounds or centers the law. It is an important question because certain practical actions follow from any answer that may be given. If law is grounded in nature it cannot easily be changed; for instance, it is futile to argue that the law of gravity is wrong, or ill-suited to the times, or that it supports one party to the detriment of another. A rhetor's only option in this case is to argue that the law in question is unnatural. To get an idea of how difficult this is, imagine yourself arguing in court that gravity is unnatural. The theoretical argument from nature is used on occasion: motorcycle riders who opposed legislation requiring them to wear helmets argued—without much success—that such laws violate the natural human desire for freedom from restraint.

If law results from human contract, on the other hand, it is much easier to justify alterations to laws because a rhetor can appeal to the expressed opinions or desires of the majority as support for her argument that a law should be changed. Someone who advocates against a helmet law for motorcycle riders, then, can simply provide as proof a survey showing that some percentage of riders (preferably more than 50%) prefer to ride unprotected by a helmet; someone who advocates the practice of abortion can cite polls showing that the majority of Americans want *Roe v. Wade* to stand (which can be tricky because the percentage of Americans who support or disapprove of abortion changes from poll to poll, depending, in part, on who is taking the poll).

Unlike theoretical questions, which address the origins and natures of things, practical questions always concern proposed actions, what people should do. Cicero gave this example of a practical question: Should a philosopher take part

in politics? Notice that this question asks what people who study philosophy ought to do; it does not raise questions about the nature or aim of philosophy or politics, as a theoretical question would. The English word *theory* derives from a Greek word (*theorein*), which literally meant “to sit in the highest row of the theatre.” More freely translated, the term meant something like “to observe from afar.” A theoretical question, then, allows rhetors to view questions “from afar,” as though they had no immediate relevance for daily affairs and putting aside for the moment their practical effects. Many times theoretical investigations will provide positions on more practical issues. But they also take rhetors far afield from everyday events. Take this very practical (and very specific) question, for instance:

Should I drop engineering and major in history instead?

To answer this question, a rhetor needs to consider the reasons why he decided to study engineering (interest, good job opportunities) and why he now might prefer to study history (interest, he wants to become a teacher or archivist). He also needs to consider the consequences attached to each choice (If I change majors, will it take me longer to graduate? What sort of work is available to a history major? and so on). Another way to think about the difference between theoretical and practical questions is to consider the **level of generality** at which an issue may be addressed. Greek rhetoricians used the term *hypothesis* to name a specific question that involved actual persons, places, or events. They used the term *thesis*, on the other hand, to name general questions having wide application—matters suited to political, ethical, or philosophical discussion—which don't refer to actual persons or events. The classic example of a general question was:

Should anyone marry?

The classic specific question was:

Should Cato marry?

Here are some contemporary examples of general and specific questions:

1. *General*: Is it legal to protest at funerals?
Specific: Should members of the Westboro Baptist Church be allowed to protest at funerals for soldiers killed in the line of duty?
2. *General*: Should people convicted of murder be put to death?
Specific: Should Timothy McVeigh have been put to death for blowing up the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, an act that resulted in the deaths of 168 people?

3. *General*: Should the sexual orientation of couples who want to marry be taken into account?

Specific: Should our state legalize gay marriage?

More Specific: Should Joan and Annette be allowed to marry?

The ancient distinction between a theoretical question and a question of action is a binary distinction—that is, it allows for only two possibilities. However, as the last example demonstrates, general and more specific questions are more helpfully thought of as lying along a spectrum or range from very general to very specific. There are many levels of generality and specificity at which any issue can be stated. Hence the generality or specificity of a given claim is never absolute; it follows that statements of a question are general or specific only in relation to each other. For example:

General: Is conservation of the environment more important than economic development? (*This is a theoretical as well as a very general question—stated this way, the question raises issues for contemplation and discussion rather than action.*)

More Specific: Should the United States sacrifice industries that negatively affect its environment—logging, manufacture of certain chemicals and plastics, nuclear power plants—to conserve the environment? (*This question, although still general, is no longer simply theoretical; answers to it imply actions to be taken by the United States.*)

Even More Specific: Should the City Council of Ourtown reject an application to build a large discount department store if this requires clear-cutting five acres of forest?

Very Specific: Should I take time to recycle plastics, paper, and aluminum even though to do so costs money and time? (*The last three versions of the claim raise practical questions, insofar as they imply human actions, but each successive claim involves fewer people, so each is more specific than the one preceding it.*)

The level of generality at which a question or issue is stated determines the amount of research needed and the kinds of proofs that must be composed to argue it persuasively. More general questions require broader knowledge, and they usually require a longer and more complex treatment. To answer the general question about conservation given here, for example, would require at least a book-length discussion. On the other hand, the very specific question, involving a personal decision, at minimum requires some private reflection and a bit of hands-on research. To answer the very specific and very practical question whether I should take time to recycle only requires me to recycle plastics, glass, paper, and aluminum for awhile to see how much time and/or money is required to recycle these substances and to compare these results to the time and money required in having unsorted garbage hauled away by the city. A paper or speech answering this question could simply state a proposition (“Recycling is expensive and time-consuming for me”) and report the results of this research.

As you can see, though, answers given to this very specific question depend on answers given to more generally stated questions, including the first, very general, question stated earlier. Whether you recycle or not depends, ultimately, on your values: Is preservation of the environment more important to you than your time or your budget? (Here we’ve restated the very specific question just a bit more generally).

The relation of general to specific issues was a matter of debate among ancient rhetoricians. As Quintilian pointed out, every special issue presupposes a general one: for example, the question of whether Cato ought to marry really couldn’t be answered satisfactorily unless the general question, “Should a person marry?” had also been considered (III v 13). Too, there are questions that hover somewhere between the very general and the very specific: for example, “Should an older person marry?” For ancient rhetoricians, questions like these were ethical ones, having to do with a person’s character and the right course of conduct for certain characters. Ethical questions still concern us, of course. We regularly read or hear arguments about whether young people ought to marry, for example, or whether gay people ought to be allowed to marry. Often these arguments are cast as personal or financial choices, but they have ethical aspects, too, because decisions about marriage and reproduction affect many people, not just those who make them.

Of course any decision you make about the level of generality at which you will pursue an issue is always affected by the rhetorical situation for which you are composing. Who is the audience for the paper or speech? What is the setting? How does the audience feel about the issue? What do they know already, and what will the rhetor have to tell them?

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

The process of asking questions does not conclude once the point of stasis has been identified. Ordinarily, the determination of the question for debate will give rise to other questions. Ancient rhetoricians devised a list of four questions or stases that would help them refine their grasp on the point at issue.¹

1. **CONJECTURE** (*stasis stochasmos*)—“Is there an act to be considered?”
2. **DEFINITION** (*stasis horos*)—“How can the act be defined?”
3. **QUALITY** (*stasis poiotes*)—“How serious is the act?”
4. **POLICY** (*stasis metalepsis*)—“Should this act be submitted to some formal procedure?”

If someone is accused of theft, for example, the first question that must be raised is **conjecture**: “Did she do it or not?” If all parties agree that she took the property in question, the stasis moves to a question of **definition**: “Was it theft?” (She might have borrowed it). And if everyone agrees that the act can be defined

as theft, the stasis becomes: “Was it right or wrong?” (The theft might be justified on any number of grounds—she took liquor from the house of a friend who is an alcoholic, for instance). Some ancient teachers called this stasis “quality,” and we will use this term as well. Last, if the question of quality is agreed on, the stasis then becomes: “Should she be tried for the offense?” This last stasis is the question of procedure or **policy**.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

Conjecture: Does it exist? Did it happen?

Definition: What kind of thing or event is it?

Quality: Was it right or wrong?

Policy: What should we do?

Cicero and Quintilian insisted that only the first three questions were necessary to the preparation of arguments to be used outside the courtroom. Nevertheless, the fourth stasis, policy, is sometimes useful in nonlegal settings. People who deliberate in city councils or student assemblies often have to decide how to regulate practices: Should we put a crosswalk on Elm Street to eliminate jaywalking there? Should we lobby the administration for faculty library privileges for graduate students?

Cicero recommended that speakers and writers work through the questions in order. This approach has several advantages: the process of working through questions of conjecture, definition, and quality, in order, will help rhetors to find the points about which they and their audience agree; it will also establish the point from which they must begin the argument—the point where they disagree.

In the first stasis, conjecture, the rhetor determines whether or not he and his audience agree about the existence of some being or thing or act or idea. If they do, this stasis is no longer relevant or useful, having been agreed to—waived—by both parties.

In the second stasis, definition, the rhetor determines whether or not he and his audience agree about the classification of the being or thing or idea or the act; if so, the stasis of definition may be passed by.

In the third stasis, quality, the rhetor determines whether he and his audience agree about the value of the thing or idea or being or act. That is, what is its importance to the community as a whole? Cicero explained the function of the third stasis as follows: this stasis comes into play when there is both agreement on what has been done and certainty about how the act should be defined, but there is a question nevertheless about how important it is or about its quality: for example, was it just or unjust, profitable or unprofitable? (*De Inventione* I viii 12). Use of this stasis required rhetors to think hard about values that are widely held in their community, values such as loyalty and responsibility, thriftiness and benevolence, heroism or self-control.

In the fourth stasis, policy, there is controversy about what should be done in a given situation: Should citizens pass a property tax increase? Should the students at State University establish policies opposing the expression of bigotry? Should I drop engineering and major in art instead? As you can probably guess, the point of agreement is often much easier to establish in the first and second stases than in the third and fourth.

A Simple Example

During the midterm elections in 2010, citizens of Florida were asked to vote on a proposition that would raise class sizes in Florida’s public schools. Here is an article from the Fort Myers *News-Press* about voters’ decision, written by Dave Breitenstein:

Florida’s public schools must adhere to strict class-size caps after a provision to relax standards couldn’t muster enough support.

Statewide, 55.3 percent of voters wanted to calculate class size by using school-wide averages, as opposed to individual classroom limits. However, the constitutional amendment needed 60 percent to become law.

The rejection of Amendment 8 means core classes—math, English, science and social studies—still cannot exceed 18 children in pre-kindergarten through third grade, 22 students in grades four through eight and 25 in high schools. Caps do not apply to art, music or physical education classes . . .

Class-size reduction has been a costly initiative. In Lee [County] alone, the district spent \$535.5 million through last year to hire more teachers and build additional classrooms, and \$92.4 million was budgeted this year.

Lee estimates the negative vote will cost an extra \$30.3 million annually to create overflow classrooms for extra students. School districts can be fined if they’re not in compliance.

In 2002, 52.4 percent of Florida voters approved class-size limits. Initially, the state used district averages, then school averages, and individual classroom caps were implemented in August. The amendment proposed capping classes at 21, 27 and 30 students for the three grade levels, respectively.

Obviously, when a ballot proposition receives just over 50% of the vote, an issue exists. That is, the people of Lee County disagree about the importance of class sizes in public schools. Some possible arguments about this dispute emerge when we consider the four questions of stasis in regard to it:

Is there a question of fact or conjecture? Yes. In 2002 Florida voters approved class-size limits, and then in 2010 they rejected a proposal to raise those limits. Does anyone disagree that these events occurred? Probably not. So this question can be agreed to, or waived, and participants in this discussion can move to the second question.

Is there a question of definition? That is, what kind of thing, idea, or act is at issue here? The stasis of definition is clear in this dispute: What is at issue is a

previous vote to limit class sizes; that is, a ballot proposition. It is doubtful that any party to the discussion would deny this definition of the act, although the minority who voted against it might object to its having been placed on a ballot at all. But this objection is not relevant under the head of definition; it is instead a policy question and should be raised under the fourth stasis.

As is often the case, the third and fourth stases yield more interesting, and more controversial, arguments. Even a cursory examination of the third stasis, questions of value, suggests that there are at least two values at stake in this dispute. The first is educational excellence: all parties to the discussion must agree that limiting class size is a good thing. Those who do not agree must offer evidence that counters the many studies supporting this point, or, they may take issue with this claim on some other ground. It appears, for instance, that some school districts have had difficulty raising enough money to support the extra classrooms and teachers that are required by smaller classes. It is, after all, cheaper to assign 30 or 40 students to a single teacher using one room than it is to find space and teachers for more, smaller, groups of 18 students each. People who voted against the ballot proposition in 2010 apparently valued educational quality over economy; that is, they believed that limits on class size improved educational quality sufficiently to offset the additional cost. So the values at stake here include at least quality of education and economic expediency. We have chosen a relatively simple case for illustrative purposes, so rhetors will ordinarily find more than two competing values at work within the complex issues that people face in their daily lives.

Let us move on to the fourth stasis. Is there a question of procedure? Yes. The ballot proposition itself is a proposal to eliminate a program that was established eight years earlier. No doubt the legislators who struggled with this issue in 2010 examined alternative policy suggestions, which could include raising class sizes only in high schools, where students can be expected to need less help than do elementary students. Or they might have proposed a tax increase to pay for the reduction in class size. Or, they might have offered a different kind of proposition that required only a majority vote to pass, rather than trying to amend the Florida constitution, which requires 60% support. When the four questions are expanded and specified, as recommended by ancient teachers, they ordinarily create additional propositions like these.

EXPANDING THE QUESTIONS

Each of the four questions can be expanded into other sets of questions. According to Cicero, there are four ways of dealing with a question of conjecture (*Topics* xxi 82). One can ask

- Whether the thing exists or is true
- What its origin is

What cause produced it

What changes can be made in it

Some modern rhetoricians call the issue of conjecture “the question of fact.” However, the Greek term *stochasmos* is more literally translated as “a guess” or “an inference.” Today the term *fact* connotes hard physical evidence, but this reading is misleading here (see the chapter on extrinsic proofs for more information about factual evidence). The stasis of conjecture does not establish anything at all about the truth or fact of the matter under discussion; rather, it represents an educated guess about what might be, or what might have occurred. And because reality may be perceived very differently by people who occupy different social and political positions, people may paint very different pictures of that reality. For example, people who opposed federal legislation about health care in 2010 worried that it mandated “death panels”—committees of doctors that would condemn elderly people to die without medical care. Proponents of the measure, on the other hand, pointed out that the legislation only contained a provision providing insurance for anyone who wanted to make a living will in consultation with a doctor. People on both sides of this issue offered conjectures about the way the legislation would work, or how people would behave were it to pass. In these examples of conjecture, each party to the dispute has some stake or *interest* in picturing the legislation in the way that they do. Their disagreement about these facts is what renders conjecture rhetorical.

Questions of Conjecture

Does it exist? Is it true?

Where did it come from? How did it begin?

What is its cause?

Can it be changed?

For example, let’s say that a rhetor named Lisa Simpson wants her city, Springfield, to pass a dark-sky ordinance. Under the question of conjecture, she can ask:

Does light pollution exist in Springfield?

What is the origin of the pollution?

What causes it?

What will change it?

When she tries to answer these questions, Lisa learns that she will probably need to provide evidence that light pollution does indeed exist. She will also need to provide evidence that the pollution is not natural (that is, that it doesn’t originate from moonlight or starlight). She will have to establish that the pollution

is caused by billboards and streetlights, and she will need to establish further that elimination of these two sources will produce a level of light that will make astronomic observation possible.

Use of the stasis of conjecture is often productive in just this way—that is, it demonstrates to rhetors what evidence they need to mount their arguments. Sometimes, use of the stasis of conjecture also establishes that there is no issue, or that a rhetor has framed the issue incompletely, or that he wants to change his mind about the issue. Because heuristics often produce surprises—that is what they are for, after all—rhetors must be prepared for shifts in their thinking. When using the stases—or any means of invention—rhetors should always remain aware that invention may cause them to change their minds about an issue.

If all parties to the discussion agree about the conjecture—the description of the state of things—the search for stasis moves on to matters of definition.

Questions of Definition

What kind of thing or event is it?

To what larger class of things does it belong?

What are its parts? How are they related?

Definitions are rhetorical because they can determine on whose ground the question will be taken up (see the chapter on the sophistic topics for advice about composing definitions). In this case, Lisa Simpson can take advantage of the rhetorical aspect of definition to compose one that suits her interest. Lisa and the astronomers at the local observatory are probably the only parties, other than thieves and lovers, who have an interest in diminishing light pollution.

Definition requires that Lisa name the particular or proper quality of light pollution and divide that quality into its constituent parts. Let's say that she defines light pollution as "those levels of light that are sufficient to interfere with astronomical observations." She might then divide such light levels into

Light caused by billboards

Light caused by streetlights

Light caused by home lighting

Light caused by natural sources such as the moon

This **division** demonstrates to her that she needs evidence that establishes the level of pollution caused by each of these sources. It tells her further that if the evidence demonstrates that natural light is not an important factor in creating light pollution, she can concentrate her major arguments on the other sources of light, all of which can be mitigated by a dark-sky ordinance. As it does here, the

stasis of definition will sometimes produce a way of dividing up the discourse—producing what ancient rhetoricians called the **partition** (see the chapter on arrangement for more about partitions).

Other parties concerned about this issue might return to the question of conjecture to assert that there is no such thing as light pollution, in an attempt to render Lisa's definition irrelevant. If they succeed in this, she too will be forced to return to the stasis of conjecture if all parties wish to continue the discussion. If they accede to her definition, on the other hand, the argument is in stasis, and all parties can turn to the next stasis: quality. If, on the other hand, they do accept that light pollution exists, and that it can be defined as she asserts, Lisa has been able to set up the discussion in terms that favor her interest.

Questions of Quality: Simple or Complex

Simple questions of quality attempt to determine the worth of the issue—its justice or rightness or honor—or how much the community desires it. Comparative questions of quality put the issue in the context of other qualities, comparing it with other values to determine its priority among the community's values. If asked simply, then, the question of quality is, "Is light pollution a good or a bad thing?" If asked comparatively in this case, the question could become, "Is the safety of citizens more important than the needs of astronomers?"

According to Cicero, there are three kinds of simple questions of quality:

what to seek and what to avoid,

what is right and what wrong,

what is honorable and what base (*Topics* xxi 84).

Simple Questions of Quality:

Is it a good or a bad thing?

Should it be sought or avoided?

Is it right or wrong?

Is it honorable or dishonorable?

Comparative Questions of Quality

Is it better or worse than something else?

Is it more desirable than any alternatives?

Is it less desirable than any alternatives?

Is it more or less right than something else?

Is it more or less wrong than something else?

Is it more honorable than something else?

Is it less honorable than something else?

Is it more base than something else?
 Is it less base than something else?

Thus Lisa might ask the following simple questions of quality:

Should lower levels of light pollution be sought, or should they be avoided?
 If the lower levels of light affect other situations, like citizens' safety, should they then be avoided?
 Is it right or wrong to ask for lower levels of light?
 Is it honorable to put the needs of astronomers above those of ordinary citizens?
 Is it dishonorable to deprive citizens of a source of safety?

Thinking comparatively, the rhetor compares the importance of her issue to other related issues. In Lisa's case, for example, a general comparative question of quality is

Should the present state of affairs, which includes light pollution, be preferred to a state of affairs in which light pollution has been lessened?

A comparative specific question is

Should the present state of affairs in Springfield, which includes lighted billboards, be maintained in preference to an imagined state of affairs (or the actual state of affairs in the town down the road), where lighted billboards have been eliminated so that astronomers can see better?

Because questions of comparison are of two kinds—similarity and difference—Lisa can ask herself what differences will be brought about in her observations of the night sky if light pollution is reduced. She can argue from similarity that astronomers in the town down the road enacted legislation to control light pollution, and the quality of their observations of the night sky improved.

If she is systematic in her use of the stases, Lisa must produce all the available arguments, even those that oppose her position. She can be sure that those who disagree with her will produce these arguments, and so she must be prepared to answer them. For example, her use of the stasis of comparative difference may produce this question: Will the reduction of light pollution alter our previous descriptions of the night sky because it gives us a clearer view? In other words, will astronomers be forced to revise our earlier work if we can see better?

As this example makes clear, the stases of quality are ordinarily very productive. Using them, Lisa has generated some questions that can show her which arguments are available in a given situation. In some cases the stases may force rhetors to articulate assumptions they previously held more or less

unconsciously, and which may be controversial to others. For example, any astronomer might simply assume, without giving the issue much thought, that other citizens value a dark sky as much as he does. Other citizens, however, will not take this proposition for granted. The police will be concerned about safety, and billboard companies will be concerned about possible loss of revenue if they cannot light their advertising signs at night. Use of the stases, then, demonstrates that a rhetor must prepare arguments that defend his proposition, should it become necessary to do so.

Questions of Policy

The fourth stasis, policy, is relevant to Lisa's case as well. In questions of policy, the rhetor proposes that some action be taken (or not) or that some action be regulated (or not) by means of a policy or law. Questions of policy are usually twofold: they are both **deliberative** and **forensic**. That is, a rhetor who wishes to put forward a question or issue of policy must first deliberate about the need for it and then argue for its implementation.

Deliberative Policy Questions

Should some action be taken?
 Given the rhetorical situation, what actions are possible? Desirable?
 How will proposed actions change the current state of affairs? Or should the current state affairs remain unchanged?
 How will the proposed changes make things better? Worse? How? In what ways? For whom?

Forensic Policy Questions

Should some states of affairs be regulated (or not) by some formalized policy?
 Which policies can be implemented? Which cannot?
 What are the merits of competing proposals? What are their defects?

How is my proposal better than others? Worse? When Lisa considers the questions of policy, she will ask herself some hard questions. She has already decided that some action should be taken. She needs now to ask herself whether her proposal to enact a dark-sky ordinance can be implemented (for instance: How much will it cost? What changes in technology or equipment will need to be made?) and whether it is a good thing for the community it will affect. She needs to consider changes that its implementation might bring about—loss of revenue to Springfield, possibly dangerous situations for citizens—and determine whether the seriousness of these changes outweighs the merits of her proposal. If anyone has made an alternative proposal, she needs to compare that to her plan and find arguments showing that her proposal is superior.

Lisa can find arguments for implementing her proposal by showing how it will improve the current state of things, by showing how alternative proposals are not as satisfactory as her own, and by showing that implementation of her proposal is entirely possible. For example, she should try to counter the opposing argument that lowered levels of light can endanger citizens' safety (in other words, this argument requires **refutation**. See the chapter on arrangement for information about refutation). If possible, she should point out in her proposal that current levels of light from streetlights do not pose a problem to astronomical observation.

Once she has considered all the questions raised by the policy questions, Lisa can draft a proposal of her dark-sky ordinance. The draft demonstrates the depth of her concern about the situation because she took the time to compose it. It also strengthens the possibility that her audience will use part or all of her draft when they actually write the ordinance, as busy people are likely to make use of work that has already been done.

So if you wish to recommend that a policy or procedure be implemented, you should first compose it. It will help if you can find out how similar policies are enacted in similar situations and compose a similar plan for implementing the one that you suggest. You should also determine how the policy that you recommend can be enforced. If you are recommending, on the other hand, that some public practice be changed, you must first compose your recommendation. Then find out who can make the changes you suggest, and find out what procedures must be followed to make the recommended change. You should also try to find out how your recommended change can be implemented and enforced, and offer suggestions for achieving this.

USING THE STASES

The stases still prove surprisingly useful for beating a path through the thicket of issues that often surround a controversy. We suggest that rhetors begin by considering the issue under each the four stases: conjecture, definition, quality, and policy. Then compare the arguments generated under each head: Do any seem to capture the point at issue? Do any hold out the possibility of helping you with further investigation? Do any tell you something about issues that might be raised by a member of the audience, or by someone who disagrees with you? Do any help you to begin to develop an argument? Remember that this procedure is only intended to help you decide where to start. Its use does not guarantee that you will generate any useful proofs, much less that you can begin to draft a speech or paper at this stage of your preparation.

In the sample analysis that follows, we used the stases to find out what issues reside in the controversy surrounding abortion.² The example is intended to demonstrate how this heuristic can help someone who is just beginning to think about a rhetorical problem. We did no formal research on the issue before we began this analysis, although of course we had heard it discussed in

conversation and had read news articles about it. Many more propositions and arguments are available within these issues than those we found during this trial run. However, even a preliminary use of this heuristic discloses its rich argumentative possibilities and points out as well the amount of the research and composition that are necessary to argue it persuasively. Our example cannot be followed slavishly because it does not model all possible uses of the system. The rhetorical situations that gave rise to controversies always differ from one another, and so the stases can never be applied mechanically. The issues or problems it turns up will differ from situation to situation, so any rhetor who uses it must be alert to all the possibilities it raises in any case. Rhetors should always be ready to follow any tangent thrown up by their consideration of the stases.

In other words, we use stasis theory here as a heuristic—a means of discovery. We state the issue both theoretical and practically and consider what happens when we state its available propositions at various levels of generality. Then we subject its available propositions to the four questions to see if we can discover persuasive arguments that may be useful on occasions when we wish to enter into discussions about abortion.

Step 1: *Decide whether to formulate the question in theoretical or practical terms.*

Possible Theoretical Questions:

Seen "from afar," or theoretically, what is the nature of abortion?
What are its origins? Its ends?

Possible Practical Questions:

Where and when do abortions occur? Who is involved?
Why do people practice abortion?
What and whose interests are served by the practice of abortion?
What and whose interests are denied by the practice of abortion?

Your answers to these questions may yield propositions that you wish to support or reject. If you try to answer the theoretical questions, you will probably discover that you do not know all that you need to know about this issue to argue responsibly about it. To answer the first theoretical question, for example, you need a medical dictionary that will tell you just what this procedure entails. Answers to the second require you to know something about the history and contemporary use of the practice.

Answers to the practical questions lead to **lines of argument**—the related issues that we discussed in the chapter on kairos. For example, the second practical question might be answered as follows: people practice abortion as a means of birth control. This answer suggests a line of argument: Because there are other means of contraception available, why do people resort to abortion for

this purpose? Is there some feature of the state of affairs that keeps people from using these other means?

Step 2: *Decide whether to formulate the question generally or specifically.*

Possible General Formulations of the Question:

- Do abortions occur? (conjecture)
- What is abortion, exactly? (definition)
- Is it a good or a bad thing? (quality)
- Should abortion be regulated? (policy)

Possible Specific Formulations of the Question:

- Do abortions occur in Ourltown? (conjecture)
- Can the abortions done in Ourltown be classified as medical procedures? Murders? Methods of contraception? (definition)
- Is the availability of abortion a good thing or a bad thing in Ourltown? (quality)
- Should the practice be regulated in Ourltown? (policy)

This analysis reveals something about the scope or size of the available arguments on this issue. That is, a rhetor who undertakes this exercise learns how much research will be necessary to tackle the question on either a theoretical or practical level. To answer the theoretical question of conjecture requires empirical research. Additional research would be necessary to determine, for instance, the number of abortions practiced prior to *Roe v. Wade*. Answers to the second theoretical question require the composition of a definition suitable to the rhetor's position on the issue, although a careful rhetor will look for definitions advanced by others as well so that he is prepared to argue for the superiority of his own definition. (See the chapter on the sophistic topics for advice about composing definitions). The third and fourth theoretical questions require at least book-length examination, and indeed, many books have been written about both of them. The practical and specific questions cover less daunting amounts of space and time and hence require a rhetor to do less research. The specific questions may also be more interesting to the immediate community of Ourltown.

Step 3. *Decide which of the four stases best describes the point at issue in the rhetorical situation at hand.*

In arguments over abortion both the conjectural and the definitional questions are very much at issue. People who are pro-choice conjecture abortion to be among the rights granted to citizens. Those who are pro-life find this position unacceptable. The second stasis, definition, is crucial for the pro-life position because the pro-life definition of abortion as murder is precisely the point at issue in this

argument. Other definitions thrown up by the stasis of definition (abortion is a method of contraception; abortion is a medical procedure) are not acceptable to the pro-life position, and any rhetor who argues that position should find arguments against both during invention because opponents will surely use them. Pro-lifers and pro-choicers also struggle over the definitional issue when they contest how, exactly, to define a fetus. Is it a human life even though it cannot survive without the woman who carries it? The question of quality often forms the point of stasis in this argument as well, as when the question arises whether the ready availability of abortion is a good or a bad thing for a given community. The question of policy has already been decided in American courts of law (abortion is currently legal), although pro-life advocates are seeking to change the policy. It is hard to generalize about which question will prove most useful in a given case because the rhetorical situation dictates which of the propositions yielded by the stases will prove most useful to a rhetor (see the chapter on *kairos* for more about rhetorical situations).

We are now in a position to determine which of the four stases best represents the point at issue. Remember that our analysis is cursory; we have not by any means exhausted the interrogative possibilities raised by the stases.

Conjecture: Questions to Ask

1. Does abortion exist? Pro-life people sometimes attach a number to abortion, saying say that over four million "babies" have been "killed" since *Roe v. Wade* became law. (We put the words "babies" and "killed" in quotation marks because use of these words already presupposes the pro-life position). Is this figure correct? Is it current? Under what conditions are abortions performed? Because of pressure from antiabortion activists, fewer doctors and hospitals will perform abortions. Are private clinics still performing abortions? If so, how many are there? How many pregnant women opt for adoption instead of abortion? In short, consideration of this question demonstrates the sort of factual information that is required to argue this question usefully.
2. How did it begin? Abortion has been used as a method of birth control for thousands of years. Recently, however, safer and more effective means of birth control have been found, and the use of abortion as a means of contraception has become increasingly controversial. Can the practice of abortion be ended? What would be the result?
3. What is its cause? In some cases, of course, abortions are performed because they are required to save women's lives. Although contested, this cause does not seem to be so controversial as cases in which abortion is used as a means of birth control. Here the question of cause asks us to consider what causes people to choose abortion rather than other available means of contraception. Those who support the legality and availability of abortion suggest a number of causes for its use: lack of education about birth control, lack of access to birth control, women's fear of rejection or abuse if they use other

means of birth control, and women's lack of control over their reproductive choices—the most glaring example of which is rape. Those who oppose abortion conjecture its causes quite differently: as irresponsibility, lack of the correct values, and disrespect for tradition.

4. Can it be changed? It is an interesting question whether the practice of abortion will ever cease, or whether the number of abortions, legal or illegal, can be changed by regulation. Abortion has been legal in America for almost forty years, which suggests that it can be made illegal again. States have limited access to abortion by mandating a twenty-four-hour waiting period or parental counseling, for example. And on the national level, opponents of abortion rights have attempted to outlaw certain kinds of abortions. These are legal means of seeking change, as are demonstrations and parades and petitions. Some antiabortion actions have on occasion been found to be illegal, such as protests in which property is damaged, clients are harassed, or clinical staff are injured or killed. Conjecture about the possibility of change in this case raises further interesting questions: Can illegal procedures—such as the bombing of abortion clinics or murder of doctors who perform abortions—effect a change in law? If not, why do the perpetrators of such acts engage in them?

Definition

How can the act be defined? As we have seen, this is a crucial stasis in the debate over abortion. In this issue the question of definition requires rhetors to examine their moral positions—something that is ordinarily very difficult. Perhaps the question of definition is seldom raised in public discussion about abortion because of the difficulty and seriousness of the questions it raises. If a rhetor accepts the definition of abortion as murder, she can argue propositions that treat abortion like other instances of murder. It would follow that similar punishments should be meted out to those found guilty of performing the act. A rhetor who supports abortion rights cannot allow the argument to be taken up at the stasis of definition if his opponents argue that abortion is murder. If he does, he will inevitably find himself in the unenviable and untenable position of defending acts of murder. If he accepts some other definition of abortion, certain other consequences follow. If he defines it as a woman's right, for example, he can compare it to other rights enjoyed by citizens, such as the right to vote and the right to free speech. If he defines abortion as a woman's health issue or as a reproductive issue, other arguments appear. If abortion is defined as a feature of health care for women, for example, a rhetor can argue that its practice ought to be supported legally and perhaps even financially.

Definition Questions to Ask

1. What kind of a thing is it? Is abortion an act of murder? Is it a medical practice? A means of birth control? An affront to family values? A feminist issue?

2. To what larger class of things does it belong? Does the term "prenatal care" include abortion? Is a fetus a human being with all the rights to which humans are entitled? Or is a fetus not human if it is not viable outside the womb? What is a human being, anyway? What is the essence of "being human"? Is abortion a crime against humanity? Is resistance to legal abortion part of a disabling set of patriarchal prescriptions against women?
3. What are its divisions? Currently, federal law proscribes medical intervention into a pregnancy beyond the first trimester (three months), unless some overriding concern (such as the mother's life or health) warrants this. Is this the best temporal division that can be devised? There are other ways to apply division to the issue of abortion—who practices it, places where it is illegal and for whom, and so on.

Quality

How serious is the act? Answers to questions of quality always depend on the values maintained in the community. Few issues currently under public debate so deeply involve community values as abortion does. For many religious people who oppose abortion, its practice is a sin. But people who support legalized abortion take the issue seriously, too, arguing that its practice is part of the larger issue of women's control of their reproductive lives.

Simple Quality Questions to Ask

1. Is abortion good or bad? No one who is party to this argument thinks that abortion is a good thing. Those who oppose it want it banned completely. Those who support it want it to be safe and legal, but they would prefer that women not have to resort to it as a means of birth control.
2. Should abortion be sought or avoided? Are there any cases in which abortion ought to be sought? Or should abortion always be the choice of last resort?
3. Is abortion right or wrong? Those who oppose abortion say that the practice is always wrong. Can you imagine a hypothetical situation in which this is not the case? In other words, are there any situations in which abortion is the right choice?
4. Is abortion honorable or dishonorable? Those who are opposed to abortion have tried to shame doctors who perform the procedure by convincing them that it is a dishonorable act. Some doctors refuse to perform the procedure, whereas others consider it a mark of courage and pride that they are willing to continue performing abortions under frightening and sometimes dangerous conditions. Are they behaving honorably or dishonorably?

Comparative Questions of Quality

1. Is it better or worse than some alternative? A pregnant woman has only a few alternatives to abortion: parenthood, adoption, or abandonment.

Given that situations differ, can these alternatives be ranked in terms of their relative goodness and badness?

2. Is it less or more desirable than any alternative? Most parties to this discussion think that abortion is the least desirable alternative of those listed. Can you think of situations in which abortion may be the most desirable alternative?
3. Is it more or less right or wrong than any alternative? Those who support abortion rights often argue that abortion is preferable to bringing an unwanted child into the world. In other words, they say that abortion is less wrong than giving birth to an unwanted child. Is this argument valid? With whom might it be effective?
4. Is it more or less honorable or base than some alternative?

Policy

Abortion is currently a legal medical procedure. However, there is much contemporary debate about policies related to abortion (for example: Should so-called partial-birth abortions remain legal? Should women under the age of 18 be forced to tell their parents about a planned abortion?) As is the case with any issue, rhetors who wish to advocate or oppose adoption of a policy must first deliberate the need for the policy or procedure, and second, they must study how it would be implemented (or removed).

Deliberative Questions of Policy

1. Should some action be taken? Should abortion remain legal? Should it be made illegal? Should it be made illegal in some cases only? Pro-life supporters have tried to extend the definition of "childhood" to the moment of conception. Should this be done? Is it possible?
2. Given the rhetorical situation, what actions are possible or desirable? Is it possible to outlaw abortion?
3. How will the proposed actions change the current state of affairs? Or should the current state of affairs remain unchanged? Or, is the status quo satisfactory? Desirable? Will these changes be desirable? Satisfactory? To whom?
4. How will the proposed changes make things better? Worse? How? In what ways? For whom? The proposed redefinition of "when life begins" will force reconsideration of *Roe v. Wade* and other legislation related to the practice of abortion that depends on the division of pregnancy into trimesters. It could also affect the practice of contraception because the argument could be made that if life begins at conception, any means of contraception is murder. If any of this happens, will the world be a better place? How so?

Forensic Questions of Policy

1. Should some state of affairs be regulated (or not) by some formalized procedure? The practice of abortion is currently legal, although it is regulated

by a variety of state and local laws. Those who oppose abortion, obviously, would like to see it made illegal so that all the regulatory procedures that attend illegal operations (the police, courts, prisons) can be brought to bear on those who participate in abortion.

2. Which policies can be implemented? Which cannot? Given the current ideological climate in America, the legality of abortion must be defended against those who would outlaw it. So it does not seem likely that a proposal that recommends free abortions for everyone will be readily accepted. Rather, proposals intended to limit or deter access to abortion have been successful in recent years.
3. What are the merits of competing proposals? What are their defects? Those who support abortion rights have often argued that better and more widely available sex education and wide distribution of free contraceptives would markedly reduce the number of abortions that are performed in this country. Are they right? If their proposals were adopted, could abortion then be made illegal?

RHETORICAL ACTIVITIES

1. Here are ten arguments used by each "side" to the abortion question, assembled by Linda Lowen. Choose two or three arguments from either list, and decide which arguments from the second list, if any, are in stasis with your choices. Remember that the point of this exercise is not to argue the issue (yet), nor is it to determine either the quality or the truthfulness of the statements listed. Rather, your job is to determine which arguments listed are in stasis with any argument on the other list.

Pro-life Arguments

- A. Because life begins at conception, abortion is akin to murder as it is the act of taking human life. Abortion is in direct defiance of the commonly accepted idea of the sanctity of human life.
- B. No civilized society permits one human to intentionally harm or take the life of another human without punishment, and abortion is no different.
- C. Adoption is a viable alternative to abortion and accomplishes the same result. And with 1.5 million American families wanting to adopt a child, there is no such thing as an unwanted child.
- D. An abortion can result in medical complications later in life; the risk of ectopic pregnancies doubles, and the chance of a miscarriage and pelvic inflammatory disease also increases
- E. In the instance of rape and incest, proper medical care can ensure that a woman will not get pregnant. Abortion punishes the unborn child who committed no crime; instead, it is the perpetrator who should be punished.

- F. Abortion should not be used as another form of contraception
- G. For women who demand complete control of their body, control should include preventing the risk of unwanted pregnancy through the responsible use of contraception or, if that is not possible, through abstinence.
- H. Many Americans who pay taxes are opposed to abortion; therefore it's morally wrong to use tax dollars to fund abortion.
- I. Those who choose abortions are often minors or young women with insufficient life experience to understand fully what they are doing. Many have lifelong regrets afterwards.
- J. Abortion frequently causes intense psychological pain and stress.

Pro-Choice Arguments

- A. Nearly all abortions take place in the first trimester, when a fetus cannot exist independent of the mother. As it is attached by the placenta and umbilical cord, its health is dependent on her health and cannot be regarded as a separate entity, as it cannot exist outside her womb.
- B. The concept of personhood is different from the concept of human life. Human life occurs at conception, but fertilized eggs used for in vitro fertilization are also human lives and those not implanted are routinely thrown away. Is this murder, and if not, then how is abortion murder?
- C. Adoption is not an alternative to abortion because it remains the woman's choice whether or not to give her child up for adoption. Statistics show that very few women who give birth choose to give up their babies—less than 3% of white unmarried women and less than 2% of black unmarried women.
- D. Abortion is a safe medical procedure. The vast majority of women—88%—who have an abortion do so in their first trimester. Medical abortions have less than 0.5% risk of serious complications and do not affect a woman's health or future ability to become pregnant or give birth.
- E. In the case of rape or incest, forcing a woman made pregnant by this violent act to give birth would cause further psychological harm to the victim. Often a woman is too afraid to speak up or is unaware she is pregnant, thus the morning-after pill is ineffective in these situations.
- F. Abortion is not used as a form of contraception. Pregnancy can occur even with responsible contraceptive use. Only 8% of women who have abortions do not use any form of birth control, and that is due more to individual carelessness than to the availability of abortion.
- G. The ability of a woman to have control of her body is critical to civil rights. Take away her reproductive choice, and you step onto a slippery slope. If the government can force a woman to continue a pregnancy, what about forcing a woman to use contraception or undergo sterilization?

- H. Taxpayer dollars are used to enable poor women to access the same medical services as rich women, and abortion is one of these services. Funding abortion is no different from funding a war in the Mideast. For those who are opposed, the place to express outrage is in the voting booth.
- I. Teenagers who become mothers have grim prospects for the future. They are much more likely to leave school; receive inadequate prenatal care; rely on public assistance to raise a child.
- J. Like any other difficult situation, abortion creates stress. Yet the American Psychological Association found that stress was greatest prior to an abortion, and that there was no evidence of postabortion syndrome.

Sources

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- Legal Abortion: Arguments Pro & Con*. Westchester Coalition for Legal Abortion Placing children <Adoption.com>.
- National Abortion Federation.

2. Find a letter or op-ed piece on the editorial page of your college or community newspaper. Write a brief analysis of the argument that appears in this letter. Here are some questions to ask: What is the issue under debate? Given the writer's account of the issue, can you determine at what stasis the argument seems to lie? That is, does the argument rest at conjecture (X exists; X is a problem)? Definition (X is this kind of thing or event)? Quality (X is a good or a bad thing)? Policy (what should we do)? Can you determine the position that is being argued against? That is, what position or positions is the writer attacking? Can the writer achieve stasis with her opponents, given the way she has stated the issue and the ground on which she has taken up her stand?
3. If you discovered a better way to compose the argument you investigated in the previous activity, develop a proposition for it and subject this proposition to the extended questions of stasis.
4. Here is a list of values that have been revered at one time or another in American culture: beauty, bravery, courage, discipline, efficiency, excellence, fame, fitness, friendship, generosity, race, happiness, honesty, independence, industry, integrity, kindness, liberty, loyalty, maturity, originality, popularity, preparedness, respect, selflessness, self-reliance, tolerance, trustworthiness, wealth, wisdom, and zeal.

Choose one or two of these values (or add some to the list if you like). Now, using the stases, examine one of the values you have chosen. Subject

it to the questions of conjecture, definition, and quality. That exercise should give you some preliminary notes for a paper on the value you have chosen to examine.

5. Select one of the issues you worked with in the last exercise in Chapter 1, or use the notes you composed while completing activities 2 and 3, listed here. Examine your selection using the questions suggested by the stases, and develop at least two propositions or arguments under every head. Give yourself plenty of time to work. Write down all the propositions you can think of, even the wildest and most imaginative. The first time you try this, you may wish to use our example as a model. But because every issue is different (because every rhetorical situation is different), you will soon discover that our example does not raise all the relevant questions for your issue, and it does raise some questions that are not relevant to your issue.
6. Now imagine that you have been asked to compose a speech or paper on this issue. Look over propositions generated by the stases. Decide which ones will be most persuasive to your audience and best fit the occasion. (See the chapter on *kairos* for help with audience and occasion). Find reliable evidence that supports each of them (see the chapter on evidence for help here). Now compose each argument, combining the available evidence with whatever ethical, pathetic, and logical proofs you decide to use (see these chapters for help in composing proofs). Let this draft sit for a couple of days, and then read it carefully. Is it effective for your intended audience and occasion? If so, add a suitable introduction and possibly a conclusion (see the chapter on arrangement). Eureka!

PROGYMNASMATA III: PROVERB

Fable, tale, *chreia*, and proverb were the exercises used by grammarians to help younger students master the basic composing skills. You might have noticed when working with the earlier exercises that they have a strong moral component, illustrating the ancients' concern about producing upstanding people who would use rhetoric ethically. After all, as we saw with the *chreia* attributed to Diogenes, teachers were often held accountable for their students' actions. When students matured, they moved on to study with a teacher of rhetoric, who saw to it that they practiced exercises in the achievement of *copia* that were directly related to composing skills they would need as rhetors.

The last of the elementary exercises is **proverb**. The Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes once observed, "A proverb is a short sentence based on long experience." The ancients' fondness for pithy sayings, quotable quotes, and memorable actions still endures today. Nowadays it is common practice to append a proverb-like quotation to an e-mail signature or to personalize Web pages, and Facebook and Myspace pages with favorite proverbs or maxims. Such quotations can serve as the starting point for this exercise, which asks that short statements be elaborated.

Ancient rhetors could **amplify** any theme to meet situational constraints, such as resistant audiences who needed a good deal of convincing. They could also shorten their compositions if time limits were imposed on them. **Amplification** evolved into something of an art form in Roman rhetoric. Seneca the Elder told a story about a rhetor named Albucius, who could amplify a single theme so fully that he could speak through three soundings of the trumpet (the trumpet blew at the end of each three-hour watch during the night). Seneca reported that Albucius wished "to say not what ought to be said but what is capable of being said. He argued laboriously rather than subtly; he used argument to prove arguments, and as though there were no firm ground anywhere confirmed all his proofs with further proofs" (*Controversiae* 7 pref. 1).

PROVERB

Proverbs are common sayings that nearly every member of a culture knows: "A stitch in time saves nine," "Haste makes waste," and the like. (Aristotle regarded proverbs as maxims, and he discussed them as a means of proof—see the chapter on rhetorical reasoning.) Hermogenes defined a proverb as "a summary saying, in a statement of general application, dissuading from something or persuading toward something, or showing what is the nature of each" (27). That is, proverbs are either persuasive or expository. Examples of contemporary proverbs that persuade people to action are: "The squeaky wheel gets the grease," "Wake up and smell the roses," and "The early bird catches the worm." Proverbs that dissuade people from doing things are "Friends don't let friends drive drunk" and "Don't count your chickens before they hatch." Explanatory proverbs include "Rolling stones gather no moss" and "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Any of these proverbs can be amplified according to the ancient directions for doing so: begin by praising either the wisdom of the proverb or its author (if the author is known), paraphrase or explain the proverb's meaning, give proof of the proverb's truth or accuracy, give comparative and contrasting examples, supply testimony from another author, or compose an epilogue. We possess an example of this exercise composed by the seventeenth-century poet John Milton, who elaborated on the proverb "In the morning rise up early."

(ENCOMIUM): Tis a proverb worn with age, "it is most healthy to rise at break of day." Nor indeed is the saying less true than old, for if I shall try to recount in order the several advantages of this, I shall seem to undertake a task of heavy labor.

(PARAPHRASE): rise, then, rise, thou lazy fellow, let not the soft couch hold thee forever.

(CASE): You know not how many pleasures the dawn brings. Would you delight your eyes? Look at the sun rising in ruddy

vigor, the pure and healthful sky, the flourishing green of the fields, the variety of all the flowers. Would you delight your ears? Listen to the clear concert of the birds and the light humming of the bees. Would you please your nostrils? You cannot have enough of the sweetness of the scents that breathe from the flowers.

(ANOTHER CAUSE): But if this please you not, I beg you to consider a little the argument of your health; for to rise from bed at early morn is in no light degree conducive to a strong constitution; it is in fact best for study, for then you have wit in readiness.

(COMPARISON): Besides, it is the part of a good king not to pamper his body with too much sleep, and live a life all holidays and free from toil, but to plan for the commonwealth night and day.

(ANCIENT TESTIMONY): As Theocritus wisely urges "It is not well to sleep deep." And in Homer the Dream thus speaks to Agamemnon "Sleepest thou, son of a wise-minded, horse-taming Atreus? 'Tis not well for a man of counsel to sleep all night through."

(EXAMPLE): Why do the poets fable Tithonus and Cephalus to have loved Dawn? Surely because they were sparing of sleep; and, leaving their beds, were wont to roam the fields, decked and clad with many-colored flowers.

(CONTRARY): But to extirpate somnolence utterly, to leave no trace of it, I shall attempt to lay bare the numberless inconveniences that flow to all from it. It blunts and dulls keen talent, and greatly injures memory. Can anything be baser than to snore far into the day, and to consecrate, as it were, the chief part of your life to death?

(CONCLUSION): But you who bear rule, you especially should be wide awake, and utterly rout gripping sleep as it creeps upon you. For many, coming upon enemies, whelmed by heavy sleep, and as it were, buried therein, have smitten them with slaughter, and wrought such havoc as it is pitiful to see or hear of. A thousand examples of this kind occur to me which I could tell with an inexhaustible pen. But if I imitate such Asiatic exuberance, I fear lest I shall murder my wretched listeners with boredom.

(quoted by Clark, 235–46)

We think the Milton example is careful and funny. For something a little more contemporary, we decided to compose our own amplification of a proverb. For this exercise we chose a proverb that might be relevant for the lives of our readers: "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today."

[PRAISE OF THE PROVERB/AUTHOR]

Thomas Jefferson penned this wise maxim in his "Decalogue of Canons for Observation in Practical Life." Jefferson is, of course, well known for his labors on liberty, and it's certainly the case that his views on liberty and basic freedom likely informed his views on diligence that motivate this proverb. The virtue of this quotation is what remains unsaid, namely the direct ties to personal freedom. One must work to remain free, or else one risks becoming oppressed by worry resulting from work undone. As an example, once we hit upon this proverb as one to amplify, we nearly let the mere discovery stand as our work for the day. That's right, we almost put off the amplification until tomorrow. And then deciding not to waste too much time musing over the irony of what we'd nearly done, we set to work expanding the proverb.

[PARAPHRASE AND EXPLANATION]

Jefferson, then, in listing this piece of advice at the very top of his observations on practical living, urges us to tend to business that needs to be tended to and not to defer it just because it's easy to do so. Of course, this maxim is not just appropriate to business matters, or matters of schooling, but personal matters as well, like that phone call to your grandmother, or an overdue lunch with a friend. The main question here is, why delay? Get things done in a timely manner. These days, people write entire books on how to get things done, and they are all expansions of Jefferson's pithy but simpler rule of thumb.

[PROOF]

Pressing tasks really ought to be handled sooner rather than later, in part because you never know what other matters will arise tomorrow to prevent you from doing that which you deferred in the first place.

[EXAMPLE]

Consider this scenario: in June of 1776, a committee appointed by Continental Congress delegated to Jefferson the task of drafting the Declaration of Independence. What if Jefferson, feeling a little overwhelmed by the task, had convinced his friends Madison and Adams to join him at a pub instead? "Oh, I can get started tomorrow," he might have assured them. "The vote for independence hasn't even happened yet, anyway." And then what if the next day Jefferson slept late and woke up with a terrible headache and finding himself unable to focus properly, decided to put off beginning the draft yet another day? Instead, Jefferson set right to work, completing a draft in plenty of time for his colleagues John Adams and Benjamin Franklin and the rest of the committee members to revise it and to present it to the Continental Congress in late June. Had Jefferson not followed his own advice, we might be celebrating Independence Day in mid-August, closer to Thanksgiving, or not at all.

[TESTIMONY]

We say not at all because as Martin Luther, another producer of a timely document, once said, "How soon 'not now' becomes 'never.'" There's also the famous saying "Procrastination is the grave in which opportunity is buried." And Jefferson's colleague, Benjamin Franklin, to whom the preceding proverb is sometimes attributed (most likely because someone put off checking their sources), also said, "You may delay, but time will not." Perhaps most compellingly, Martin Luther King, Jr. made good use of antideferral logic where civil rights are concerned. In "Letter from Birmingham Jail," he wrote,

For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Too true. Kings's testimony confirms our belief that liberty undergirds Jefferson's proverb.

[EPILOGUE]

Now that we have completed this amplification, we will have the afternoon free. Perhaps we will discover something else that can be done today.

Rhetorical Exercises: Proverb

Visit one of the following Web sites (or another one you locate through a search). Select a quotation and amplify it following our example.

<http://www.quotationspage.com/>
<http://www.bartleby.com/>
<http://www.brainyquote.com/>
<http://en.thinkexist.com/>

ENDNOTES

1. The system of questions given here does not appear in the work of any ancient thinker. We have generalized the four questions we feature out of primary and secondary classical sources (for an illuminating if complex account of competing ancient traditions of stasis, see Quintilian's painstaking discussion in the third book of the *Institutes*). Our system is a hybrid, although it is the same one that George Kennedy reconstructs for Hermagoras' lost treatise (307–08). In particular, our consideration of policy along with the other three stases is a departure from ancient thought because the ancients usually classed policy with questions of law (forensic rhetoric), whereas the first three stases we discuss were ordinarily associated with deliberative rhetoric.
2. We are aware that some readers may find this topic too sensitive to discuss in the detail required by the stasis heuristic. If so, we recommend that such readers find

another issue with which to practice using the stases. And we would remind readers that, according to Aristotle, the point of engaging in rhetoric is to find *all* of the available arguments, whether we agree with them or not, whether we find them distasteful or not.

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