**Chapter 3 Overview Video Transcript**

Chapter 3 considers Plato's famous and controversial criticism of the sophistic approach to rhetoric and the dialogue Gorgias. The question, of course, as to whether Plato offered the sophists a fair assessment is something we consider, as well as Plato's own role as a rhetorician.

It's useful at the jump to think about Plato's attack on the sophists has as kind of the big bang of rhetorical theory. And by that, I mean Plato and his attack on the sophists kind of set up the argumentative structure or the argumentative parameters of rhetorical theory that are still with us today 2,500 years later.

So in this short video, I want to talk about who Plato was, why he was so upset with the sophists and their approach to rhetoric, and a couple things to highlight to look out for as you read through chapter 3.

So who was Plato? Now, we think about names like Plato and Socrates as common in public conversations today. But it's important to note 2 things. One, Socrates was Plato's teacher, but he didn't write anything down. So what Plato often does is put Socrates' words in kind of a dialogue form coming out of his mouth. They were written down by Plato.

It's also important to recognize, as we described in the introduction for chapter 3, that although Plato and Socrates are famous today, probably more famous in public conversations in names like Protagoras and Gorgias, in their day in ancient Rome, people like Socrates and Plato were less influential and less popular than the sophists that they're actually attacking. So having that insight on some of the asymmetrical power dynamics is useful.

We might think about Plato today as akin to like a religious zealot, a fundamentalist, any thought truth, was permanent and infinite and perfect. And so he worked really hard in his writings to establish a method for locating truth that stretched far beyond the physical world. So he was a philosopher, he wasn't a rhetorician, and he was suspicious of rhetoric because as the sophists reflected, as the sophists put it into action, they viewed truth as contingent and relative and subjective. Plato did not.

One of the most useful ways to understand Plato's worldview is through his cave metaphor. So in the cave metaphor, chapter 3 includes an image of that and a description of it. It's something that's kind of influenced Western thought for thousands and thousands of years. And it goes like this. Plato thought with the cave metaphor that life on Earth was represented by kind of chained men, bound men, as you see in the image in chapter 3, the men to the left, that can only see pale reflections of reality. So they can't see reality. They can only see the shadows or the pale reflections of reality.

And Plato assumed that it was only after we died that we could then become like the men on the right of the image that are capable of coming out of the cave and embracing the light and seeing things clearly. And by things, I mean truth and reality.

Most of chapter 3, at least at the beginning of chapter 3, is focused on examining Plato and the charges that he offers to the sophists and their approach to rhetoric. So Plato puts rhetoric on trial. He accuses rhetoric of being a sham art, a phony art, and he compares it to something like makeup or something like cooking that didn't really require a lot of access to objective truth, capital T kind of truth.

The irony, of course, is that Plato was a very effective rhetor. As we talked about early on in chapter one, rhetoric is ubiquitous, and if you're going to deal with other human beings, it's hard to get away from it. And here we have an example of that. We talked earlier about how one cannot not communicate. Well, here we have applied to Plato, a rhetor trying to use rhetoric to show that rhetoric is a sham art. So the irony just drips off of Plato's accusations in chapter 3.

So as you read, notice that Plato's extensive written record has kind of influenced the argumentative parameters of politics and religion and culture in Western thought for thousands of years. So be on the lookout for reflections of Plato's worldview, his approach, and his attacks on the surface in some of our own public conversations today in religion and politics and in legal thought.

Another way to say that is if Plato would have been hit by an olive cart as a young man and never become the prolific writer that he did, our world probably would be a lot different. But he didn't. And he offered a searing critique on the sophists and a searing critique on rhetoric that still informs public conversations today. So be on the lookout for that relationship as you read through chapter 3.