**Chapter Eight Introduction Video Transcript**

The purpose of Chapter 8 is to explore rhetoric's role in shaping knowledge and reality from the Enlightenment to today. We focus on the developments of rhetorical theory during the 17th and 18th century, first on the European continent and then in Britain.

The most important thing from Chapter 8 is to consider the relationship between rhetoric and personal refinement and success. As we've been working on throughout these chapters, what we want to expose as we focus on the specific Enlightenment time period is the relationship between rhetoric, and in this case, class and power.

To understand how rhetorical theory changed during the Enlightenment period, let's consider how the Enlightenment would define itself against some previous time periods. As always, when we're looking at a discrete time period like this, like the Enlightenment, we have to remember that it's very unlikely that anyone woke up during the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe and thought of themselves as living during the Enlightenment, or at least we wouldn't think that their daily behavior would be guided or informed in any way by this idea that they were living during the Enlightenment. It's only afterwards that we go back and we slap on a specific discrete label onto a time period.

To understand what would set off or demarcate the Enlightenment, especially for our focus on rhetorical theory, recall Peter Ramus (R-A-M-U-S) from the 16th century, and how he divorced argument and proof from rhetoric, making argument and proof what he called dialectical concerns. As a result, Enlightenment and rhetorical theory begin by eschewing memory and invention in favor of aesthetic matters, so things like style and taste and delivery.

But by emphasizing style, taste, and delivery, instead of order and argument and proof and memory, Enlightenment rhetoric shifted its focus from public argument to private consumption. That shift is important because Enlightenment rhetorical theory, at least at the beginning of this time period, assumed that rhetoric could manage and maybe even enhance pre-existing knowledge, but it didn't necessarily discover or invent knowledge.

Here's that important term, epistemic, related to the grounds of knowledge. Did rhetoric serve an epistemic function in that it created knowledge or did rhetoric instead manage or enhance the knowledge that people already had?

When we get to some important heavyweights in this chapter, people like Hugh Blair and George Campbell and Richard Watley, we study those folks because they inform how rhetorical theory evolved to redress some of the limitations of Enlightenment thinking, and specifically some of the limitations related to thinking that rhetoric is limited to enhancing knowledge and enhancing public argument as opposed to being a source of invention.

Blair, Campbell, and Whatley show how limiting rhetoric to this kind of narrow managerial function divorced from invention and focused only on the elegant communication of content fails to properly theorize rhetoric's inventive capacity for developing new public arguments for new social situations.

So consider as you read, a central theme that keeps appearing throughout our study of rhetorical theory: Does rhetoric create knowledge or does rhetoric enhance or manage knowledge? And of course, as you're thinking through your own opinions on how to answer that question and looking at how people from, in this case, the Enlightenment period answered that question, always keep in mind how implications for power, who gets it and how much can be informed by how people have answered that question.