**Chapter Nine Introduction Video Transcript**

Chapter 9, Rhetoric and Modernity, begins by putting rhetorical theory into its proper historical context.

So we notice from chapter 8, we move on from the end of the 19th century. Rhetoric status as an academic study was perhaps at its lowest point since ancient Greece. Scientific thinking was on the rise and the intellectual effort to apply scientific standards to the resolution of all issues rendered rhetoric obsolete. An ambitious student in your shoes, choosing an area of study at the end of the 19th century would probably reject rhetoric for education in the sciences, business, or engineering. Might sound familiar to today. However, as the 20th century progressed, the hope for progress through science and technology gave way to what Steven Pinker called the trial of modernity.

What is modernity?

Basically, for us, what's important to think about is that modernity is defined as the ascendancy of science, but also the failure of science that kind of live up to most of its most lofty promises. So think back to our history classes, the first half of the 20th century was marked by unfathomable human tragedy. Two terrible world wars, civil wars all over the world, and genocides produced some of the most violent moments in human history. So not only was the promises of science not the solution, but it also seemed to be a culprit or a cause of many of these same tragedies, many of these same forces of turmoil. The 20th century tragedy challenged humanity's enlightened understanding of human progress. Again, the definition of enlightened, if you recall from Chapter 8, is super helpful here. Enlightened, meaning lit up or brightened, related to this idea that over time, the human condition got better and better. Humanity progressed, got better over time. But between the years, 1900 and 1945, that seemed to not be the case. So we're kind of positioning the study of rhetorical theory into this context marked by kind of new levels of cynicism and new levels of doubt. So in the ashes, especially of World War II and the dropping of the atomic bombs in Japan, modernity was tested and found wanting. Modernity didn't work. The embrace of science and technology looked like a Faustian bargain threatening the Civil War, a deal with the devil. And the future looked no better as the dawn of the Cold War and the nuclear age offered a pessimistic and bleak prediction for the future of humanity. The social upheaval of the 20th century affected the practice and theory of rhetoric, as you might imagine. So this chapter is focused, it's a bit of a shift from chapter eight. Chapter eight, we looked at Italian lawyers and English Duchesses and Irish actors and a few Scottish preachers. In Chapter 9, we shift to disenchanted Marxists, socialists, and pacifists. We focus on those disenchanted Marxists, socialists, and pacifists, in part because they were traumatized by the first half of the 20th century. And for us, they were keen on finding a way to redress science's weaknesses, kind of restore the hope in human progress that was reflected but unfulfilled in the Enlightenment. So that quest led many to rediscover the vitality and potential of the classical tradition and the tools of public argument for redressing the 20th century's demands.

The new approach discussing human values was required, one that was suited specifically to resolving perennial moral problems, such as how to govern justly, and recognize the importance of kind of everyday argument, marketplace arguments as we describe them in the chapter, were incredibly relevant for some of the most important thinkers in chapter nine. So in this search for a new rhetoric and a new rationality, interest revived in such foundational components of the rhetorical tradition as argumentation and the audience and kind of the social, historical, cultural, political conditions under which productive rational debate can occur. So for you, as you're reading through Chapter 9, be thinking about how rhetoric was reborn. It was on the operating table about to pass away, but it was resuscitated after the Enlightenment. Be thinking about why, because as we explore the answer to that question in Chapter 9, I think we can have some valuable insights into our own day and into the sources and some of the solutions for enhancing productive conversation in our day and age today.