Jennifer Falcon  
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Practice Exam

Kitzhaber’s dissertation provides an in-depth historical overview of 19th century rhetorical theory, and the higher education system and its curriculum. His dissertation is credited with initiating the “reevaluation of rhetoric in American education that made the so-called paradigm shift in composition during the 1960s possible” (vii). The importance of this history is the understanding that a change was needed, and came about, as a result of the institutions and disciplines that preferred to focus on the mind. For Foucault, the institutions and discipline is what is referred to as a system. Using Foucault’s concept of systems aids in understanding how Kitzhaber’s dissertation and definition of rhetoric led to making rhetoric more practical and situated within communication. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how using Foucault’s archeological method can lead to a deeper understanding of the systems that created knowledge and therefore our approach to rhetoric, which ultimately leads us to a view of rhetoric as epistemic.

In 1893 a general consensus is reached, and rhetoric is thus defined as “the art of communication” (p. 149). Ultimately, these shifts lead scholars in rhetoric to address the social aspect of writing, the practice of writing, and other areas explored during this transitional phase. Kitzhaber’s contribution of a definition of rhetoric that is linked to language and human communication allows for a different understanding and approach to language. If “language is the medium of human communication,” then rhetoric is the “art which shows how to make this communication most effective” (p. 141). Rhetoric as communication is as significant to the field then, and now, because it moves away from persuasion and allows for rhetoric to be linked and applied to writing and the language that is used to communicate. This definition of rhetoric moves it from being “predominantly abstract” (p. 205) to a discipline that is more concrete, and visible within writing practices implemented in university curriculums. The attention now directed at writing made rhetoric practical, and therefore practiced more easily.

Using Foucault’s concept of a system as an example, Kitzhaber’s definition of rhetoric, like other definitions of rhetoric, is a statement within a system that helps shape discourse and the discipline itself. Kitzhaber’s definition not only shaped rhetoric as a discipline, but also created knowledge within the field of rhetoric.

In Michel Foucault’s *The Archeology of Knowledge* he addresses concerns regarding what makes up a statement, and ultimately how statements of discourse form objects and knowledge. According to Foucault, the approach in which history is analyzed forms “a single pattern” (p. 5), and as a result the history of thought, knowledge, literature, and philosophy are “seeking” and “discovering” more than history. History according to Foucault is content in “abandoning the irruption of events in favour of stable structures” (p. 6). As a result, he argues for an archeological approach to knowledge, because it accounts for analyzing history as it is. Applying Foucault’s archaeological approach allows for scholars in the field of rhetoric to look back on rhetorical theory as it was in its time, and build on it. In order to apply an archeological method to rhetorical theory, then one must understand the systems in which shape knowledge within a discipline. One can infer that Kitzhaber’s historical overview of the field of rhetoric resembles an archeological method. Rather than applying his own understanding of rhetoric and rhetorical theory Kitzhaber views the previous shifts and theories in rhetoric as they were. He provides information about the systems and knowledge created within each system that influences specific shifts or approaches to rhetoric.

Viewing knowledge as created by a system leads to an understanding that the discourse within a system built rhetorical theory. Kitzhaber’s definition of rhetoric can be viewed as a system created by his statement that rhetoric is the art of communication.Awareness of the discourse that makes up a system also aids in understanding the discourse that makes up a theory, or discipline. To better understand the discipline of rhetoric we must take into account the numerous systems that created the knowledge that informs rhetorical theory.

In looking at knowledge as a series of statements created by a system, or numerous systems one can have a deeper understanding of the many factors that influence these systems. In rhetoric this would allow for the field to address multiple views of rhetoric. Applying the lens of Foucault and his appeal to view history not as something linear, but as a series of statements created by systems rhetoric.

Similar to Kitzhaber, Berlin contributes to rhetoric as a system with his definition.

For example, James Berlin in *Rhetoric and Reality* defines rhetoric as a term referring to a diverse discipline that ultimately is made up of major systems that are eventually replaced (p. 3). Rhetoric should be deemed rhetorics. He argues that rhetoric should be plural due to the fact that there always exist a dominant system of rhetorics in play, and other competing systems of rhetorical ideas and theories. He explains this by providing three epistemological categories. The objective theories stem from the outside world. It is the nature of what is real. Truth exists before language. Subjective theories come from within. In the subjective truth is only known internally, and it is not shared through communication. Transactional theories come from the interaction or intersection of the objective and the subjective. Truth forms from that interaction, or intersection. Truth, then, can only emerge from “the material, the social, and the personal” as they interact.

This is a reflection of the epistemic nature of rhetoric. The numerous systems help to define rhetoric and create knowledge.

For this reason Berlin prefers to use epistemology rather than ideology. Ideology refers only to the “conceptions of social and political arrangements” (p. 4) of a time and work to reflect the ideology of a dominant group. Berlin focuses on the epistemology because the rhetorical systems are based on “epistemological assumptions” on nature of reality, nature of the knower, and the rules for discovery and communication (p.4). These assumptions are what he believes hold a greater influence of the rhetorical systems of the past, and ultimately the future. He argues that instead of looking back at the ideologies that influenced rhetorical systems we need to look at the epistemology. In the conclusion to *Rhetoric and Reality* Berlin explains that rhetoric moving in the direction of epistemic accounts for its role as “a method of discovering and even creating knowledge” (p. 197). He goes on to add that this knowledge is “frequently within socially defined discourse communities,” which is not vastly dissimilar from Foucault’s view of discourse creating objects. According to Foucault, an object is formed by way of discourse. He makes something an object of discourse, and discourse makes/shapes the object. The formation of an object by limiting it through defining what the object is talking about, authorities of delimitation, and finally the systems that classify or otherwise specify an object.

In the specific case of rhetoric as Kitzhaber and Berlin address the discipline we see that the discourse surround rhetoric created not only a discipline, but also the shifts in the curriculum that make up how rhetoric is taught. The importance of this Berlin’s particular understanding of rhetoric is that it pushes the field forward so that we can focus on rhetorics, and what it means to approach the field of rhetoric in this way. If you understand that there are multiple systems that create knowledge, then you are able to see these statements for what they are, which allows for scholars to see the areas that need improvement by filling in the research gaps.

References

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