



## Effective Philosophy with Dr. David Schenk

### Lesson 1: Fundamental Distinctions Used in Philosophy

#### Outline:

##### Fundamental Distinctions used in Philosophy (0:00)

- There are *two major categories* that philosophers use to label claims & questions:
  - *Observational* claims and questions
  - *Conceptual* claims and questions
- There are three sub-categories, or three *fundamental skills*, used in philosophy:
  - *Clear, accurate categories* (distinguishing between kinds of things)
  - *Self-reflection* (paying attention to what you do, think, or the distinctions you make while engaging philosophical questions)
  - *Consequences* (logic; inferential relationships)

##### Conceptual vs. Observational Examples (3:58)

- Dr. Schenk's Coffee Mug Analogy
  - *Observational*: "My life-giving coffee mug is sitting on the coffee cart beside me." Dr. Schenk saw, or observed, the coffee mug sitting on the cart.
  - *Conceptual*: "What does it mean for something to be a coffee cart?" Dr. Schenk asked a question about the meaning of the object.
- Dr. Schenk's Geometric Analogy
  - *Observational*: "How many square objects are in this room right now?" No matter how much geometric work Dr. Schenk does, he must use his eyes to observe the square objects in the room.
  - *Conceptual*: "What is a square to begin with?" One could answer that a square is any 4-sided, equilateral, equiangular polygon, but this claim relies on conceptual evidence, not just looking around a room.
- **Do not confuse your categories!**
  - It is inaccurate to ask a psychologist, anthropologist, or physicist, "What is a square?" Only geometry can answer that question. Confusing your categories leads to errors.

##### Fundamental Skill #1 - Clear and Accurate Categorization (9:00)

- *Accurate and precise categorization is necessary!* If we (as philosophers and humans) are sloppy about fundamental categories (such as conceptual or observational), our arguments will also be sloppy and flawed.
- Dr. Schenk's example of *inaccurate categorization* (10:00):



- Both professors and students fail to distinguish between politics and ethics. They make judgments about a person's moral status on the basis of his or her political status.
- This can lead to polarizing views, such as attitudes towards the Confederate statues in Charlottesville, VA.
- *Metaphysics*, one of Dr. Schenk's greatest loves, is a branch of philosophy that deals with getting the most fundamental categories clear in the first place.

## Fundamental Skill #2—Self-reflection (12:30)

- Self-reflection: Paying attention to what you are doing while you're engaged in various philosophical questions; paying attention to what claims or distinctions you introduce to an argument
- Examples:
  - Observation vs. conceptual claims: Dr. Schenk made a conceptual claim, not an observational claim, when he made the distinction between observational and conceptual claims.
  - The line between observational and conceptual is not observational—it is conceptual.

- Don't fall prey to a failure of self-reflection!

## Fundamental Skill #3—Consequences (Logic) (15:20)

- Dr. Schenk's definitions of logic:
  - Logic: The science of any and all correct reasoning; the science of pursuing correct reasoning
  - Logic is also the study of the consequences, or entailments, of one's own belief commitments.
  - For example, if you are committed to Proposition P, what else does that commitment force you into?
  - Or, if you hold some interpretive strategy for Scripture, what does that force you into regarding the natural sciences?

## Upcoming Essential Philosophy Content (17:50)

- Three major errors in reasoning and how to avoid them: Cultural Relativism, Psychological Egoism, and Skepticism About Truth
- Metaphysics
  - Philosophy of religion, or natural theology (arguments for/against the existence of God)
  - Students are usually more motivated to learn about these questions than other philosophical problems!
  - Arguments for/against God are not simple. Many outside of philosophy believe that arguments for God have been refuted, but this is false. Philosophy of religion is alive and well.
- The Free Will Debate & The Mind/Body Problem