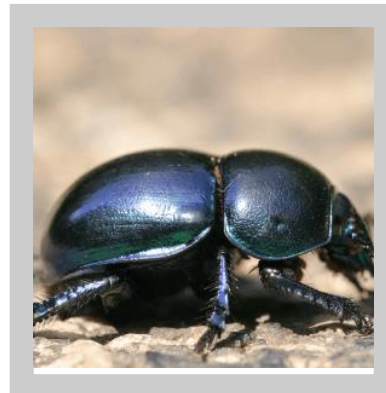


Name _____

Date _____

A Beetle in a Box

In his thought-provoking work *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein uses an easily conceptualized scenario in an attempt to clarify some of the problems involved in thinking about the mind as something over and above the behaviors that it produces. Imagine, he says, that everyone has a small box in which they keep a beetle. No one is allowed to look in anyone else's box, only in their own. Over time, people talk about what is in their boxes and the word "beetle" comes to stand for what is in everyone's box.



Through this curious example, Wittgenstein attempts to point out that the beetle is very much like an individual's mind; no one can know exactly what it is like to be another person or experience things from another's perspective—look in someone else's "box"—but it is generally assumed that the mental workings of other people's minds are very similar to that of our own (everyone has a "beetle" that is more or less similar to everyone else's). However, it does not really matter, he argues, what is in the box or whether everyone indeed has a beetle, since there is no way of checking or comparing. In a sense, the word "beetle"—if it is to have any sense or meaning—simply means "what is in the box." From this point of view, the mind is simply "what is in the box," or rather "what is in your head."

Wittgenstein argues that although we cannot know what it is like to be someone else, to say that there must be a special mental entity called a mind that makes our experiences private, is wrong. His rationale is that he considers language to have meaning because of public usage. In other words, when we talk of having a mind—or a beetle—we are using a term that we have learned through conversation and public discourse (rooted in natural language). The word might be perceived differently in each of our minds, but we all agree that it signifies something; this allows us to develop language for talking about conceptualizations like color, mood, size, and shape. Therefore, the word "mind" cannot be used to refer specifically to some entity outside of our individualized conception, since we cannot see into other people's boxes.

1) Based on information in the passage, Wittgenstein apparently believes that

- I. it is best to think of mental states as nothing over and above the behaviors they produce
- II. the public use of language is responsible for misconceptions about the mind
- III. through the use of precise language, it is possible to accurately describe the shared properties of the mind

- A. I only
- B. II only
- C. I and II only
- D. II and III only
- E. I, II, and III

2) Which of the following literary devices best describes Wittgenstein’s use of the “beetle in a box” scenario?

A. Authorial intrusion, characterized by a point at which the author speaks out directly to the reader.

B. Aphorism, characterized by the use of a concise statement that is made in a matter of fact tone to state a principle or an opinion that is generally understood to be a universal truth.

C. Amplification, characterized by the embellishment or extension of a statement in order to give it greater worth or meaning.

D. Allegory, characterized by the use of symbolic representation to convey the meaning of an often abstract concept.

E. Ambiguity, characterized by the expression of an idea in such a way that it becomes possible to glean more than one meaning from it.

3) Wittgenstein would most likely DISAGREE with which of the following statements?

A. It is impossible to know another person’s thoughts.

B. The mind is a special mental substance.

C. The color green may actually look different to different people.

D. Words do not always accurately represent the things they symbolize.

E. It takes time for public discourse to create a new word with a common meaning.

4) Based on his use of the “beetle in a box” comparison in the passage, it can be inferred that Wittgenstein might similarly compare a room full of people to a

A. deck of cards

B. box of chocolates

C. collection of rocks

D. library of books

E. group of drinking glasses filled with water

5) Explain Wittgenstein’s concept of the mind in your own words.
