

## • Reading Comprehension 8 Level 12

**Directions:** Read the passage. Then answer the questions below.

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" which 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.

### Questions

- 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 everybody.
  - 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) As used in paragraph 3, which is the best synonym for **discourse**?
- A. exchange
  - B. conversation
  - C. announcement
  - D. knowledge
  - E. setting
- 5) 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

## Answers and Explanations

1) **C**

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “Wittgenstein uses an analogy 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.” Since Wittgenstein sees a problem with thinking about the mind in this way, we can infer that he thinks that mental states—which are also known as states of the mind—are best thought of as nothing over and above behaviors. Using this information, we can see that Wittgenstein apparently believes that it is best to think of mental states as nothing over and above the behaviors they produce. This supports **option (I)**. In paragraph 3, the author paraphrases Wittgenstein writing, “to say that there must be a special mental entity called a mind that makes our experiences private, is wrong.” In explaining why Wittgenstein feels this way, the author writes, “Part of the reason...is because he considers language to have meaning because of public usage.” We can see that Wittgenstein explains the public’s misconception about the mind by citing public use as a cause. Using this information, we can infer that Wittgenstein apparently believes that the public use of language is responsible for misconceptions about the mind. This supports **option (II)**. In paragraph 2, the author paraphrases Wittgenstein writing, “the mind is simply ‘what is in the box’, or rather ‘what is in your head.’” Next Wittgenstein’s argument is cited in paragraph 3, when the author writes, “we cannot know what it is like to be someone else.” Since, according to Wittgenstein, we cannot know what it is like to be someone else, or be in someone else’s head, this means we can only know what it is like to be in our own minds. Because we use words and language to describe experiences, we can assume that there is no language to describe the experience of being in someone else’s mind, since we can’t get there to see for ourselves. Using this information, we can infer that Wittgenstein does not believe that through the use of precise language, it is possible to accurately describe the shared properties of the mind. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

2) **D**

In paragraph 1, the author references a curious scenario used by Wittgenstein: “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 symbolic representation, Wittgenstein is able to convey the meaning of a very abstract concept; “the problems involved in thinking about the mind as something over and above the behaviors that it produces.” An *allegory* is a literary device characterized by the use of a symbolic representation to convey the meaning of an abstract concept. Using this information, we can see that the literary device that best describes Wittgenstein’s use of the “beetle in a box” scenario is an allegory. This means **(D)** is correct. *Authorial intrusion* is characterized by a point at which the author speaks out directly to the reader. At no point in the passage, does the author speak directly to us. Instead, the author paraphrases and quotes work written by the famed philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Using this information, we can see that the literary device that best describes Wittgenstein’s use of the “beetle in a box” scenario is not authorial intrusion. This lets us know that **(A)** is incorrect. *Aphorism* is 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. The “beetle in a box” scenario does not constitute a concise statement, because it is a scenario that is extrapolated and referred to multiple times throughout the passage. Also, it does not state a principle or an opinion that is generally understood to be a universal truth. Using this information, we can see that the literary device that best describes Wittgenstein’s use of the “beetle in a box” scenario is not aphorism. This means **(B)** is incorrect. *Amplification* is characterized by the embellishment or extension of a statement in order to give it greater worth or meaning. The “beetle in a box” scenario is not embellished in any way. Instead, we can see that it is a more simplified scenario that Wittgenstein uses to help explain “the problems involved in thinking about the mind as something over and above the behaviors that it produces.” Using this information, we can see that the literary device that best describes Wittgenstein’s use of the “beetle in a box” scenario is not amplification. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Ambiguity* is characterized by the expression of an idea in such a way that it becomes possible to glean more than one meaning from it. The “beetle in a box” scenario is not an idea expressed in such a way that it becomes possible to glean more than one meaning from it. In fact, the beetle in a box scenario is a more specific (less ambiguous) way of explaining a difficult idea to conceptualize. Using this information, we can see that the literary device that best describes Wittgenstein’s use of the “beetle in a box” scenario is not ambiguity. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

3) **B**

In paragraph 3, the author summarizes Wittgenstein’s argument writing, “the word [mind] we have learned can only ever mean ‘whatever is in your box’ (or ‘whatever is in your mind’) and cannot therefore be used to refer specifically to some entity outside of our conception, or in the case of the word ‘mind,’ a special mental substance.” From this selection, we can see that Wittgenstein does not believe that the mind is a special mental substance. Since we are looking for the statement that Wittgenstein would most likely disagree with, we know that **(B)** is correct. In paragraph 2, the author summarizes Wittgenstein’s argument writing, “no one can know exactly what it is like to be another person or experience things from another’s perspective.” If no one can know what it is like to be in another person’s head—experience something from another person’s perspective—then this means it is impossible to know another person’s thoughts. Using this information, we can see that Wittgenstein would most likely agree with the statement that it is impossible to know another person’s thoughts. Since we are looking for the statement he would most likely disagree with, **(A)** is incorrect. In paragraph 2, the author summarizes Wittgenstein’s argument writing, “no one can know exactly what it is like to be another person or experience things from another’s perspective.” This means that the way that one person visualizes the color green, might be different from how someone else visualizes that color, since “no one can know exactly what it is like to...experience something from another’s perspective.” Using this information, we can see that Wittgenstein would most likely agree with the statement that the color green may actually look different to everybody. Since we are looking for the statement he would most likely disagree with, **(C)** is incorrect. In paragraph 3, the author summarizes Wittgenstein’s argument about the limits of language writing, “the word we have learned can only ever mean ‘whatever is in your box’ (or ‘whatever is in your mind’) and cannot therefore be used to refer specifically to some entity outside of our conception.” This means that words are only agreed upon signifiers, through “public discourse” according to Wittgenstein, and they stand in for individualized conceptions in each of our heads. Since this means that one word can be conceptualized differently by many separate individuals, Wittgenstein would most likely agree with the statement that words do not always accurately represent the things they symbolize. Since we are looking for the statement he would most likely disagree with, **(D)** is incorrect. In paragraph 1, the author summarizes Wittgenstein’s argument about how language comes to

signify an entity writing, “Over time, people talk about what is in their boxes [in their minds] and the word ‘beetle’ comes to stand for what is in everyone’s box.” Here the word “beetle” is just used as a specific example that makes sense in the larger context of the allegory used throughout the passage. Using this information, we can extrapolate Wittgenstein’s beetle example here to infer that he believes that any new word would require time spent in a public discourse to develop a commonly accepted meaning. This means Wittgenstein would most likely agree with the statement that words do not always accurately represent the things they symbolize. Since we are looking for the statement he would most likely disagree with, (E) is incorrect.

4) **A**

**discourse** (*noun*): communication or thought by words, talk or conversation.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, “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.” We can use context clues to help arrive at a close definition for *discourse*, as it’s used in this sentence. Here we learn that humans also develop common meaning for words through conversation. The previous sentence, “His rationale is that he considers language to have meaning because of public usage,” shows us that we have learned meaning through “public usage” which could include exchanging words in a variety of ways. Since discourse means communication or thought by words, talk or conversation, we know that in addition to conversation and talking, people can exchange ideas through the written word. Based on this, a synonym for discourse must allow for a general exchange of ideas in various modes. Using all of this information, we can see that the best synonym for discourse, as it’s used in paragraph 3, is exchange. Therefore (A) is correct. In paragraph 3, the author writes, “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.” If we replace the word “discourse” with *conversation*, we end up with a repetitive sentence. It would not make sense for us to say, “we have learned through conversation and public conversation,” so we can see that the best synonym for discourse, as it’s used in paragraph 3, is not conversation. This means (B) is incorrect. An *announcement* is a public or formal notice. Usually it is a one-way vocalization of information, meaning there is no exchange of ideas. For this reason, we can see that it would not make sense to say that we have acquired mutual understanding of words based on public announcement, since this is not quite the same as conversation and exchange which both imply communication back and forth using written or vocalized words. This means that the best synonym for discourse, as it’s used in paragraph 3, is not announcement, so (C) is incorrect. *Knowledge* means acquaintance with facts, truths or principles. It does not imply any exchange of words or ideas. For this reason, we can see that it would not make sense to say that we have acquired mutual understanding of words based on knowledge, since knowledge isn’t necessarily exchanged from person to person. This means that the best synonym for discourse, as it’s used in paragraph 3, is not knowledge. Therefore (D) is incorrect. *Setting* encompasses the surroundings or environment of anything. It does not imply any exchange of words or ideas. For this reason, we can see that it would not make sense to say that we have acquired mutual understanding of words based on public setting, since setting only implies the place where a thing resides. This means that the best synonym for discourse, as it’s used in paragraph 3, is not setting. Therefore (E) is incorrect.

5) **B**

Chocolates look different on the outside, like people’s faces or heads, so we can see that this is an adequate comparison on a superficial level. They even come in various shades of color, which we could interpret as race. In addition, like Wittgenstein’s “beetle in a box” example, there is no way to tell what is on the inside of a chocolate; it could be caramel, vanilla, chocolate, or even nothing. To find out would be to compromise the integrity of the chocolate, destroying it (much like what would happen if we tried to break open someone’s head to see what was going on in the mind). We can see that a chocolate is a comparable example to someone’s head, and the mind that resides somewhere inside. Using this information, we can tell that 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 box of chocolates. Therefore (B) is correct. While a single card can only be viewed one side at a time, all we have to do is flip it over to know everything about it. This is because cards do not contain anything inside of them. Cards do not contain the same level of depth as Wittgenstein’s “beetle in a box” example. For this reason, we can see that based on his use of the “beetle in a box” comparison in the passage, it cannot be inferred that Wittgenstein might similarly compare a room full of people to a deck of cards. This means (A) is incorrect. The outside of a rock gives a good indication of what is found inside. This is because the outside of a rock is usually of a similar quality to what is on its inside. A collection of rocks does not contain the level of depth as Wittgenstein’s “beetle in a box” example. For this reason, we can see that based on his use of the “beetle in a box” comparison in the passage, it cannot be inferred that Wittgenstein might similarly compare a room full of people to a collection of rocks. This means (C) is incorrect. A book is somewhat similar to a “beetle in a box” because the outside is not the same as what’s inside. Unlike what’s in a person’s mind, however, the outside of a book gives some indication of what’s inside. People’s faces or heads do not always give an indication of what’s going on in their minds, so this is not necessarily the most similar comparison. In addition, books can be opened and explored quite easily, without compromising their integrity. We cannot do this when we want to explore the mind. We can see that based on his use of the “beetle in a box” comparison in the passage, it cannot be inferred that Wittgenstein might similarly compare a room full of people to a library of books. So, we can rule out choice (D). A drinking glass filled with water is somewhat similar to a “beetle in a box” in that what’s on the inside is different from what’s on the outside. What’s not similar, however, is that we have access, quite easily, to what’s on the inside. The water can be viewed through the glass itself, we can see it directly from the opening above, and we can taste it without compromising the integrity of the glass. We cannot do any of these things to better understand, or to get to the matter of what goes on in a human’s head. Using this information, we can see that based on his use of the “beetle in a box” comparison in the passage, it cannot be inferred that Wittgenstein might similarly compare a room full of people to a group of drinking glasses filled with water. This means (E) is incorrect.