

Daily Reading Comprehension & Critical Reasoning

Two RC passages (English-as-Language) and two CR passages (Argumentation). Read each carefully and answer based on what is stated or implied.

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PASSAGE 1 (RC) — THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF JUDICIAL PROOF (PHILOSOPHY OF LAW)

Q1-5

READ CAREFULLY AND ANSWER Q1-5 BASED ONLY ON THE PASSAGE.

Contemporary legal systems rest on an epistemic foundation rarely examined with the rigour it deserves. The courtroom presents itself as a theatre of truth-seeking, yet its standards — beyond reasonable doubt in criminal matters, balance of probabilities in civil ones — derive from no coherent theory of knowledge but have evolved through centuries of procedural accretion. This matters because the gap between what a verdict asserts and what the evidence establishes is obscured by the ceremonial weight attaching to legal judgments. A criminal conviction does not say that the defendant committed the act; it says that twelve citizens, constrained by evidentiary rules that exclude much of what would ordinarily inform belief, could not identify a reasonable path to acquittal. These are profoundly different epistemic claims, and collapsing them has consequences. The philosopher Susan Haack argues that legal proof is a species of ordinary empirical inquiry, differing from scientific investigation not in kind but in the institutional constraints placed upon it. On this view, the exclusionary rules of evidence are not epistemically neutral conveniences but active distortions of the inferential landscape. They do not make verdicts more reliable; they make them differently unreliable, trading certain kinds of error for others in accordance with value judgments about what kinds of mistakes are more tolerable. This is a frankly political observation dressed in procedural clothing. The adversarial system compounds the difficulty. Parties present evidence not to discover truth but to win; counsel's obligation runs to the client, not the tribunal. The jury must construct a coherent narrative from a record selectively assembled by parties with contrary interests, each suppressing the unhelpful and amplifying the advantageous. Epistemologists of testimony note that we ordinarily treat the sincerity and competence of speakers as background assumptions that calibrate our credence; the adversarial setting systematically disrupts both. What remains is not evidence in the philosopher's sense but a curated spectacle whose relationship to the underlying facts is mediated by rhetorical strategy. To acknowledge this is not to despair of legal truth, but to understand that legal proof is a social technology designed to produce finality, not certainty.

1. Which of the following most accurately captures the author's primary contention about the relationship between a criminal verdict and the truth of the matter it adjudicates?

- ☐ **A.** A verdict is an institutional conclusion shaped by procedural constraints, and therefore asserts something categorically different from — and weaker than — a claim about what actually occurred.
- ☐ **B.** Verdicts are reliable approximations of truth because the exclusionary rules of evidence are carefully designed to filter out unreliable material, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ **C.** The adversarial system is epistemically superior to inquisitorial systems because it subjects every claim to rigorous cross-examination.
- ☐ **D.** Legal proof and scientific proof are identical in their epistemic structure, differing only in the formality of the institutional setting.

2. The author's characterisation of evidentiary exclusionary rules as 'frankly political' is best understood as meaning that these rules:

- ☐ **A.** Are ineffective at achieving any legitimate legal purpose and should be replaced by an open-door approach to evidence, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ **B.** Were introduced by legislators to protect powerful interests at the expense of ordinary defendants.
- ☐ **C.** Embody value judgments about which categories of error are socially more acceptable, rather than being neutral instruments for maximising the accuracy of fact-finding.
- ☐ **D.** Reflect the political biases of the judges who formulated them rather than any principled concern for justice.

3. The passage's discussion of the adversarial system is primarily intended to illustrate which broader claim?

- ☐ **A.** The sincerity and competence of witnesses are the only variables that determine whether a verdict corresponds to the facts.
- ☐ **B.** Defence counsel's duty to their client is ethically incompatible with the court's interest in discovering the truth of contested facts, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ **C.** Juries are inherently incapable of processing contested expert evidence and should be replaced by panels of trained adjudicators.
- ☐ **D.** The institutional design of legal proceedings compromises the epistemic conditions under which evidence is ordinarily interpreted, producing a record that is shaped by strategy rather than probative value.

4. What tone does the author adopt when asserting that 'legal proof is a social technology designed to produce finality, not certainty'?

- ☐ **A.** Sober and analytical — presenting a structural limitation of legal institutions without implying that the institution is therefore illegitimate or worthless.
- ☐ **B.** Polemical and reformist — urging readers to campaign for radical changes to the evidentiary system.
- ☐ **C.** Pessimistic and despairing — suggesting that the gap between legal truth and factual truth cannot be bridged, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ **D.** Ironic and satirical — mocking the pretensions of the legal system to arrive at true conclusions.

5. An argument that directly challenges the author's central thesis would most plausibly claim that:

- ☐ **A.** Attorneys in adversarial systems are bound by professional codes of conduct that prevent them from suppressing material evidence.
- ☐ **B.** Courts in common-law jurisdictions have historically been more accurate in their verdicts than those in civil-law jurisdictions.
- ☐ **C.** The beyond-reasonable-doubt standard was introduced specifically to align legal proof with the epistemological standards of natural science, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ **D.** The institutional constraints on legal evidence, far from distorting fact-finding, are calibrated responses to well-documented human cognitive biases that would otherwise produce less reliable verdicts.



READ CAREFULLY AND ANSWER Q6-10 BASED ONLY ON THE PASSAGE.

The laws of thermodynamics did not merely describe the steam engine; they were, in a significant sense, produced by it. When Sadi Carnot published his *Reflections on the Motive Power of Fire* in 1824, he was not conducting a disinterested inquiry into heat. He was trying to understand why French steam engines were less efficient than English ones, and whether theoretical limits existed on the work extractable from a given quantity of fuel. The science that resulted — formalised as the second law of thermodynamics and the concept of entropy — was shaped by the contingent priorities of industrialising capitalism. This is not a dismissal of thermodynamics as ideology; the laws are real and powerful. It is an observation about how questions get posed, what counts as a satisfying answer, and which phenomena become scientifically visible. Entropy, as developed by Clausius and Kelvin, was simultaneously a technical quantity and a cultural object. When William Thomson, later Lord Kelvin, extrapolated the second law to the cosmos and announced the Heat Death of the Universe — the inexorable dissipation of all useful energy into a featureless equilibrium — he was doing cosmology through the lens of a world-historical anxiety about exhaustion. The Victorian imagination was saturated with images of decline: cooling civilisations, running-down social energies, industrial fatigue. Entropy gave this sensibility a scientific warrant. Historians debate the direction of influence, but the most defensible position is that the causal arrow ran in both directions simultaneously. The science was real, yet the meaning extracted from it — a universe tending irreversibly toward disorder — was never merely read off the equations, which support multiple interpretations. Among them is Boltzmann's statistical reading, reframing entropy not as cosmic fate but as a probabilistic tendency of large ensembles of particles. Boltzmann's mechanics was initially resisted not primarily on empirical grounds but because it threatened to dissolve the certainty of thermodynamic doom into a matter of overwhelming but finite probability. A universe that might spontaneously un-mix itself was a less satisfying myth than one condemned to ruin. Thermodynamics thus illustrates a general feature of scientific development: the acceptance of a theory depends not only on its empirical adequacy but on whether the world it describes is one that scientists and their societies are prepared to inhabit.

6. The author's claim that thermodynamics was 'produced by' the steam engine is best interpreted as the view that:

- ☐ A. Thermodynamic laws are social constructions that have no validity beyond the industrial societies that created them.
- ☐ B. The industrial context shaped which questions thermodynamicists asked and which kinds of answers were recognised as scientifically satisfying, without rendering the resulting science false or merely ideological.
- ☐ C. Carnot's findings were directly dictated by the practical requirements of British industrialists who commissioned his research.
- ☐ D. The steam engine was an accidental catalyst for thermodynamics, and without it the laws would have been discovered through pure mathematical reasoning, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.

7. According to the passage, what was the primary reason for the initial resistance to Boltzmann's statistical interpretation of entropy?

- ☐ A. Boltzmann's mathematics contained errors that were only corrected after his death, making the theory empirically unreliable in its original form, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ B. It replaced the image of an inevitable cosmic doom with a probabilistic tendency, making thermodynamic fate logically deniable and therefore less emotionally and culturally compelling.
- ☐ C. The statistical approach required experimental apparatus that did not exist in the nineteenth century, so it could not be tested.
- ☐ D. Boltzmann's framework contradicted Carnot's original calculations about the maximum efficiency of heat engines.

8. The phrase 'entropy gave this sensibility a scientific warrant' most nearly implies that:

- ☐ A. Scientific concepts derive their authority exclusively from their cultural resonance rather than from empirical verification.
- ☐ B. Victorian scientists intentionally distorted the concept of entropy to serve the political interests of industrial elites.
- ☐ C. The second law of thermodynamics was originally formulated as a metaphor for social decline and only later acquired scientific content, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ D. The Victorian cultural preoccupation with decline and exhaustion found in the concept of entropy a framework that made those anxieties appear grounded in objective natural law.

9. Which of the following best describes the author's position on the debate over whether science shaped Victorian culture or Victorian culture shaped science?

- ☐ A. The author sides with the scientific community's traditional view that empirical adequacy alone determines which theories achieve acceptance.
- ☐ B. The author concludes that cultural forces were decisively more influential than empirical findings in shaping the reception of thermodynamics, on the facts as presently stated.
- ☐ C. The author treats the question itself as a false binary and argues that scientific development and cultural mood are mutually constitutive processes operating simultaneously.
- ☐ D. The author defers judgment on this question, presenting both sides without committing to any resolution.

10. The broader argument of the passage is most compatible with which of the following methodological claims about the history of science?

- ☐ A. The most significant advances in science occur when researchers deliberately insulate their inquiries from the cultural pressures of their time.
- ☐ B. Scientific laws should be evaluated purely on their internal logical consistency and their power to predict experimental outcomes, independent of their historical origins.
- ☐ C. Understanding a scientific theory requires situating it within the social and economic context that generated the questions it answers, without thereby reducing the theory to mere ideology.
- ☐ D. Thermodynamics is unique among sciences in being shaped by external factors; most scientific theories develop through purely internal disciplinary logic.

PASSAGE 3 (CR) — SHOULD ALGORITHMIC NEWS CURATION BE REGULATED? (MEDIA ETHICS)

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q11-15.



The dominant means by which citizens in contemporary democracies encounter news has shifted decisively from editorial gatekeeping — in which trained journalists select, verify, and contextualise stories — to algorithmic curation, in which software ranks content according to signals of engagement such as clicks, shares, and dwell-time. Advocates of algorithmic curation argue that it democratises information by allowing each user to encounter the stories most relevant to her interests and circumstances, moving beyond the paternalistic assumption that a small editorial elite should decide what the public needs to know. They further contend that algorithms are merely mirrors: they reflect pre-existing public preferences rather than manufacturing them, and that blaming them for sensationalism or polarisation is akin to blaming a shop window for what customers choose to buy. On this account, regulating the curation algorithm is tantamount to regulating taste, which is inappropriate in a liberal society committed to pluralism and free expression. Critics, however, argue that this framing fundamentally mischaracterises the relationship between algorithmic curation and public preferences. Unlike a passive mirror, algorithms are trained on optimisation targets — typically engagement — that consistently reward content evoking strong emotional reactions: outrage, fear, and tribal identification. Over time, they do not merely reflect preferences but actively reshape them, escalating users' appetite for emotionally charged content while systematically downranking calm, nuanced, or uncertain reporting. Furthermore, because the same underlying logic governs what hundreds of millions of people see each day, the stakes of algorithmic curation extend far beyond individual personalisation: they implicate the shared informational commons on which democratic deliberation depends. If the informational diet of a citizenry is determined by a small number of private firms optimising for commercial engagement, rather than by public-interest standards, the epistemic foundations of collective self-governance erode. Critics therefore conclude that platforms exercising editorial control through algorithmic curation should be held to public-interest obligations analogous to those traditionally imposed on broadcasters. The core question is whether platforms are neutral conduits or active editors, and that question carries profound constitutional and democratic consequences.

11. Which of the following best states the main conclusion of the critics of algorithmic news curation?

- ☐ A. A small number of private firms currently determine the informational diet of a majority of citizens in democratic societies, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ B. Algorithmic curation consistently rewards emotionally provocative content over calm and nuanced reporting.
- ☐ C. The informational preferences of citizens are actively shaped by algorithmic systems rather than merely reflected by them.
- ☐ D. Platforms that curate news algorithmically exercise editorial power and should therefore bear public-interest obligations analogous to those placed on broadcasters.

12. The advocates' argument that algorithms merely reflect pre-existing public preferences depends most critically on which unstated assumption?

- ☐ A. User behaviour signals such as clicks and dwell-time accurately and stably represent users' genuine informational preferences rather than responses conditioned by prior algorithmic exposure.
- ☐ B. Editorial gatekeeping by traditional journalists reliably served the full diversity of public interests in earlier media environments, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ C. Liberal societies must prohibit any restriction on the information that private actors may choose to distribute to willing audiences.
- ☐ D. The commercial incentives of media platforms and the informational needs of democratic citizens are fundamentally compatible.

13. Which of the following, if true, would most seriously weaken the critics' argument that algorithmic curation erodes the epistemic foundations of democratic deliberation?

- ☐ A. Broadcast regulators in several countries have failed to prevent sensationalism in programming subject to public-interest mandates.
- ☐ B. Many users explicitly prefer personalised news feeds and report lower satisfaction with editorially curated front pages.
- ☐ C. Studies tracking citizens' actual news consumption across sources show that algorithmically curated feeds produce higher exposure to politically diverse viewpoints than self-selected subscriptions did before curation.
- ☐ D. Some algorithmic platforms have experimented with incorporating editorial signals such as source credibility into their ranking systems, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.

14. The advocates compare algorithmic curation to a shop window reflecting what customers choose to buy. Which of the following best identifies the flaw in this analogy?

- ☐ A. It compares a commercial transaction involving goods with a civic activity involving information, treating them as ethically equivalent without justification, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ B. The analogy ignores the fact that shop windows are typically regulated by consumer protection laws while news platforms are not.
- ☐ C. A shop window displays goods passively without altering customer desires, whereas an algorithm actively ranks content in ways that systematically escalate users' appetite for emotionally charged material.
- ☐ D. It assumes that all users interacting with an algorithm are doing so voluntarily and with full knowledge of how the system operates.

15. Which of the following scenarios most closely parallels the logical structure of the critics' argument that algorithmic curation should be regulated like broadcast media?

- ☐ A. A privately owned water treatment company that decides alone what chemical composition the public water supply should have ought to meet the same safety standards as a public utility because the public depends on its decisions for health.
- ☐ B. A large bookshop with extensive stock should be required to display titles from minority publishers in prominent positions to ensure diversity of reading.
- ☐ C. A newspaper editor who decides which letters to publish must follow journalistic ethics codes because editorial choices are never purely private.
- ☐ D. A private rail company that controls the only line between two cities must set ticket prices subject to regulatory approval because the service is essential, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.

PASSAGE 4 (CR) — MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES AND THE EROSION OF JUDICIAL DISCRETION (CRIMINAL JUSTICE)

Q16–20

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q16–20.



Mandatory minimum sentencing laws, which require judges to impose pre-specified terms of imprisonment regardless of the individual circumstances of the offence or offender, were adopted in many jurisdictions primarily as a response to public and political pressure for uniformity, severity, and the elimination of what critics of judicial discretion called unwarranted leniency. Proponents of mandatory minimums argue that they serve three distinct purposes. First, they ensure equality before the law: when sentence length is fixed by statute, similarly situated defendants receive similar punishment, removing the possibility that socially advantaged defendants benefit from sympathetic judicial attitudes while disadvantaged defendants bear heavier sentences for comparable conduct. Second, proponents contend that mandatory minimums produce deterrence: knowledge that a given offence will attract a fixed, severe penalty increases the expected cost of crime and thereby reduces its incidence. Third, mandatory minimums neutralise the exercise of prosecutorial discretion in plea bargaining, since defence counsel and prosecutors alike know that conviction carries a non-negotiable floor, which reduces the scope for deals that may not reflect the public interest. Critics of mandatory minimums challenge each of these rationales. On equality, they argue that the formal equality of a fixed sentence conceals substantive inequality: because prosecutors retain complete discretion over which charge to bring, mandatory minimums do not eliminate sentencing disparity but merely shift its locus from the judge to the prosecutor, where it is less visible and less subject to appellate review. On deterrence, critics point to evidence that most offenders do not engage in careful cost-benefit calculation at the moment of offending, and that certainty of detection is a far stronger deterrent than the severity of punishment once detected. On plea bargaining, critics argue that mandatory minimums actually distort the process by creating enormous pressure on defendants — particularly those who are innocent or marginally culpable — to accept guilty pleas to lesser charges in order to avoid the catastrophic risk of the mandatory floor, leading to mass plea-bargaining that bypasses the trial system entirely. The debate thus exposes a tension at the heart of criminal justice between the democratic value of legislative control over punishment and the constitutional role of independent courts in adjudicating individual cases.

16. Which of the following is an assumption on which the proponents' deterrence argument depends?

- ☐ A. Mandatory minimum sentences are enforced consistently across all geographic jurisdictions without variation in prosecutorial practice.
- ☐ B. Judges exercising discretion systematically impose lighter sentences on defendants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.
- ☐ C. Prosecutors bring the most serious available charge in every case rather than selecting charges strategically to manage caseloads.
- ☐ D. Potential offenders have sufficient knowledge of the mandatory minimum penalty before committing the offence to factor it into their decision.

17. Which of the following, if true, would most directly weaken the proponents' equality argument for mandatory minimum sentencing?

- ☐ A. Judges in jurisdictions without mandatory minimums impose sentences that vary significantly depending on the nature of the crime.
- ☐ B. Data show that Black defendants face mandatory minimum charges at more than twice the rate of White defendants charged with functionally identical conduct.
- ☐ C. Mandatory minimum laws are passed by elected legislatures that are themselves accountable to a diverse electorate.
- ☐ D. Public confidence in the criminal justice system increased in surveys conducted after mandatory minimums were introduced in several states.

18. Which of the following, if true, would most strengthen the critics' argument about plea bargaining under mandatory minimum regimes?

- ☐ A. Defence attorneys in mandatory minimum jurisdictions report spending less time preparing for trial and more time negotiating plea agreements, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ B. Post-exoneration reviews in mandatory minimum jurisdictions find that a disproportionate share of wrongful conviction cases involved defendants who had pleaded guilty to avoid the mandatory floor.
- ☐ C. Rates of recidivism among offenders sentenced under mandatory minimums are no lower than among those sentenced at judicial discretion.
- ☐ D. Prosecutors in mandatory minimum jurisdictions report that charging decisions are made faster and with less inter-office consultation.

19. The critics argue that mandatory minimums shift sentencing disparity from judges to prosecutors. Which of the following most accurately identifies what this argument assumes?

- ☐ A. Prosecutorial charging decisions are less subject to oversight and appeal than judicial sentencing decisions, so the relocation of disparity reduces accountability rather than eliminating it.
- ☐ B. Judges with full discretion will always exercise it in ways that are more equitable than the outcomes produced by prosecutorial charging decisions.
- ☐ C. The elimination of formal discretion at one stage of the criminal process necessarily increases the exercise of informal discretion at every other stage, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ D. Prosecutors who bring mandatory minimum charges are motivated primarily by personal bias rather than by legitimate assessments of case strength.

20. Which of the following reasoning structures is most closely parallel to the proponents' argument that mandatory minimums produce equality by fixing the sentence in law?

- ☐ A. A government that publishes the maximum fine for each traffic offence prevents courts from imposing fines that exceed the statutory ceiling.
- ☐ B. A university that fixes grade boundaries at identical percentile thresholds for every course ensures that students with the same raw score always receive the same grade, regardless of which department assessed their work.
- ☐ C. A professional sports league that applies a uniform salary cap to all teams removes the competitive advantage that wealthier owners would otherwise have, on the facts as presently stated, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary.
- ☐ D. A tax authority that sets a flat income-tax rate ensures that every taxpayer pays the same percentage of earnings regardless of their circumstances.

