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UNIT ONE

Lesson 1

Questions 1–11 are based on the following passage.

This passage is adapted from Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Imp of the Perverse,” published 1845.

In the consideration of the **faculties** and **impulses**—of the *prima mobilia* of the human soul, the phrenologists have failed to make room for a **propensity** which, although obviously existing as a radical, primitive, irreducible **sentiment**, has been equally overlooked by all the moralists who have preceded them. In the pure arrogance of the reason, we have all overlooked it. We have suffered its existence to escape our senses solely through want of belief—of faith;—whether it be faith in Revelation, or faith in the Kabbalah. The idea of it has never occurred to us, simply because of its supererogation. We saw no need of impulse—for the propensity. We could not perceive its necessity.

We could not understand, that is to say, we could not have understood, had the notion of this *primum mobile* ever **obtruded** itself;—we could not have understood in what manner it might be made to further the objects of humanity, either temporal or eternal. It cannot be denied that phrenology and, in great measure, all metaphysicianism have been **concocted** from theory. The intellectual or logical man, rather than the understanding or observant man, set himself to imagine designs—to dictate purposes to God. Having thus **fathomed**, to his satisfaction, the intentions of Jehovah, out of these intentions he built his innumerable systems of mind.

Real evidence would have brought science to admit, as an **innate** and primitive principle of human action, a **paradoxical** something, which we may call perverseness, for want of a more characteristic term. In the sense I intend, it is, in fact, a mobile without motive. Through its promptings we act without comprehensible object; or, if this shall be understood as a contradiction in terms, we may so far modify the proposition as to say, that through its promptings, we act, for the reason

Reading Test

Each passage or pair of passages, some of which are accompanied by graphics such as maps, charts, or graphs, is followed by a set of questions. Read the passage and then choose the best answer to each of the questions.

35 that we should not. In theory, no reason can be more unreasonable; but, in fact, there is none more strong. With certain minds, under certain conditions it becomes absolutely irresistible. I am not more certain that I breathe, than that the assurance of the wrong or error of any action is often the one unconquerable force which **impels** us, and alone impels us to its prosecution. Nor will this overwhelming tendency to do wrong for the wrong’s sake, admit of analysis, or resolution into ulterior elements. It is radical, a primitive impulse—

45 elementary. It will be said, I am aware, that when we persist in acts because we feel we should not persist in them, our conduct is but a modification of that which ordinarily springs from a tendency to defend or resist. But a glance will show the fallacy of this idea.

50 Combativeness has, for its essence, the necessity of self-defense. It is our safeguard against injury. Its principle regards our well-being; and thus the desire to be well is excited simultaneously with its development. It follows, that the desire to be well must be excited simultaneously with any principle which shall be merely a modification of combativeness, but in the case of that something which I term perverseness, the desire to be well is aroused, but a strongly **antagonistic** sentiment prevails.

An appeal to one’s own heart is, after all, the best reply to the **sophistry** just noticed. No one who trustingly consults and thoroughly questions his own soul, will be disposed to deny the entire radicalness of the propensity in question. It is not more incomprehensible than distinctive. There lives no man who at some period has not been tormented, for example, by an earnest desire to tantalize a listener by **circumlocution**. The speaker is aware that he displeases, he has every intention to please; he is usually **curt**, precise, and clear; the most **laconic** and luminous language is struggling for utterance upon his tongue; it is only with difficulty that he restrains himself from giving it flow; he dreads and **deprecates** the anger of him whom he addresses; yet, the thought strikes him, that by certain involutions and parentheses this anger may be **engendered**. That single thought is enough. The impulse increases to a wish, the wish to a desire, the desire to an





Lesson 1 continued:

uncontrollable longing, and the longing (to the deep regret and **mortification** of the speaker, and in defiance of all consequences) is indulged.

80 We stand upon the brink of a **precipice**. We peer into the abyss—we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness and dizziness and horror become merged in a cloud of unnamable feeling. By
85 **gradations**, still more imperceptible, this cloud assumes shape, as did the vapor from the bottle out of which arose the genie in the Arabian Nights. But out of this our cloud upon the precipice's edge, there grows into palpability, a shape, far more terrible than any genius or
90 any demon of a tale, and yet it is but a thought, although a fearful one, and one which chills the very marrow of our bones with the fierceness of the delight of its horror. It is merely the idea of what would be our sensations during the sweeping precipitancy of a fall from such
95 a height. And this fall—this rushing annihilation—for the very reason that it involves that one most ghastly and loathsome of all the most ghastly and loathsome images of death and suffering which have ever presented themselves to our imagination—for this very cause do
100 we now the most vividly desire it. And because our reason violently deters us from the brink, therefore do we the most **impetuously** approach it. There is no passion in nature so demoniacally impatient as that of him who, shuddering upon the edge of a precipice, thus
105 **meditates** a plunge. To indulge, for a moment, in any attempt at thought, is to be inevitably lost; for reflection but urges us to forbear, and therefore it is, I say, that we cannot. If there be no friendly arm to check us, or if we fail in a sudden effort to **prostrate** ourselves backward
110 from the abyss, we plunge, and are destroyed.

Examine these and similar actions as we will, we shall find them resulting solely from the spirit of the Perverse. We perpetrate them merely because we feel that we should not. Beyond or behind this there is no
115 intelligible principle; and we might, indeed, deem this perverseness a direct instigation of the arch-fiend, were it not occasionally known to operate in furtherance of good.

I have said thus much, that in some measure I may
120 answer your question—that I may explain to you why I am here—that I may assign to you something that shall have at least the faint aspect of a cause for my wearing these fetters, and for my tenanting this cell of the condemned. Had I not been thus prolix, you might either

125 have misunderstood me altogether, or, with the rabble, have fancied me mad. As it is, you will easily perceive that I am one of the many uncounted victims of the Imp of the Perverse.

It is impossible that any deed could have been
130 wrought with a more thorough deliberation. For weeks, for months, I pondered upon the means of the murder. I rejected a thousand schemes, because their accomplishment involved a chance of detection. At length, in reading some French memoirs, I found an
135 account of a nearly fatal illness that occurred to Madame Pilau, through the agency of a candle accidentally poisoned. The idea struck my fancy at once. I knew my victim's habit of reading in bed. I knew, too, that his apartment was narrow and ill-ventilated. But I need not
140 vex you with impertinent details. I need not describe the easy artifices by which I substituted, in his bed-room candle stand, a wax-light of my own making for the one which I there found. The next morning he was discovered
145 dead in his bed, and the coroner's verdict was—'Death by the visitation of God.'

Having inherited his estate, all went well with me for years. The idea of detection never once entered my brain. Of the remains of the fatal taper I had myself
150 carefully disposed. I had left no shadow of a clue by which it would be possible to convict, or even suspect, me of the crime. It is inconceivable how rich a sentiment of satisfaction arose in my bosom as I reflected upon my absolute security. For a very long period of time I was accustomed to revel in this sentiment. It afforded me
155 more real delight than all the mere worldly advantages accruing from my sin. But there arrived at length an epoch, from which the pleasurable feeling grew, by scarcely perceptible gradations, into a haunting and harassing thought. It harassed me because it haunted.
160 I could scarcely get rid of it for an instant. It is quite a common thing to be thus annoyed with the ringing in our ears, or rather in our memories, of the burthen of some ordinary song, or some unimpressive snatches from an opera. Nor will we be the less tormented if the
165 song in itself be good, or the opera air meritorious. In this manner, at last, I would perpetually catch myself pondering upon my security, and repeating, in a low under-tone, the phrase, 'I am safe.'

One day, whilst sauntering along the streets, I arrested
170 myself in the act of murmuring, half aloud, these customary syllables. In a fit of **petulance** I remodeled them thus: "I am safe—I am safe—yes—if I be not fool





Lesson 1 continued:

enough to make open confession.”

No sooner had I spoken these words, than I felt an
 175 icy chill creep to my heart. I had had some experience
 in these fits of perversity (whose nature I have been at
 some trouble to explain), and I remembered well that in
 no instance I had successfully resisted their attacks. And
 now my own casual self-suggestion, that I might possibly
 180 be fool enough to confess the murder of which I had been
 guilty, confronted me, as if the very ghost of him whom I
 had murdered—and beckoned me on to death.

At first, I made an effort to shake off this nightmare
 of the soul. I walked vigorously—faster—still faster—at
 185 length I ran. I felt a maddening desire to shriek aloud.
 Every succeeding wave of thought overwhelmed me with
 new terror, for, alas! I well, too well, understood that to
 think, in my situation, was to be lost. I still quickened
 my pace. I bounded like a madman through the crowded
 190 **thoroughfares**. At length, the populace took the alarm
 and pursued me. I felt then the **consummation** of my fate.
 Could I have torn out my tongue, I would have done it—
 but a rough voice resounded in my ears—a rougher grasp
 seized me by the shoulder. I turned—I gasped for breath.
 195 For a moment I experienced all the pangs of suffocation;
 I became blind, and deaf, and giddy; and then some
 invisible fiend, I thought, struck me with his broad palm
 upon the back. The long-imprisoned secret burst forth
 from my soul.

They say that I spoke with a distinct enunciation, but
 with marked emphasis and passionate hurry, as if in dread
 of interruption before concluding the brief but pregnant
 sentences that assigned me to the hangman and to hell.

Having related all that was necessary for the fullest
 205 judicial conviction, I fell prostrate in a **swoon**.

But why shall I say more? Today I wear these chains,
 and am here! Tomorrow I shall be fetterless!—but where?

1

As it is used in line 2, the phrase *prima mobilia* most
 nearly means

- A) existence.
- B) rights.
- C) motives.
- D) errors.

2

The specific human tendency, or propensity, at the
 central focus of the passage is best described as

- A) lying frequently.
- B) living in the past.
- C) inventing illnesses.
- D) perverse behavior.

3

Choose the lines from the passage that provide the best
 evidence for your answer to the previous question.

- A) lines 2-3 (“phrenologists have...propensity”)
- B) lines 6-8 (“In the...it”)
- C) lines 13-16 (“We could...itself”)
- D) lines 26-30 (“Real evidence...motive”)

4

According to the author, the type of people who claim
 to understand the workings of the human mind are
 people who

- A) ignore reality.
- B) see more than others do.
- C) understand better.
- D) are unintelligent.





Lesson 1 continued:

5

Choose the term the author uses to describe the human tendency to do “wrong for the wrong’s sake.”

- A) proposition
- B) perverseness
- C) revelation
- D) phrenology

6

The impulsive tendency, the author reasons, cannot be a function of self-defense because

- A) it occurs only in dangerous situations.
- B) human reason controls physical response.
- C) criminals usually exhibit the tendency.
- D) it sometimes undermines personal safety.

7

As it is used in line 67, the word *circumlocution* most nearly means

- A) speaking in a reluctant tone.
- B) skill in efficient conversation in discussions about art, science, or history.
- C) intentionally dragging out a story by being vague.
- D) accidentally giving away secrets or divulging personal information.

8

The main purpose of paragraph 4 (lines 80-110) is to

- A) provide an example situation in which perverseness manifests.
- B) refute the scientific theories about the cause of human impulsiveness.
- C) relate perverseness to a personal anecdote of the narrator.
- D) explain the fragile psychology of the human mind.

9

The narrator claims that he is

- A) without a conscience.
- B) a master of self-discipline.
- C) guided by his faith.
- D) no match against impulsive behavior.

10

Choose the lines from the passage that provide the best evidence for your answer to the previous question.

- A) lines 174-175 (“No sooner...heart”)
- B) lines 177-178 (“I remembered...attacks”)
- C) lines 183-184 (“At first...soul”)
- D) lines 186-188 (“Every succeeding...lost”)

11

Of the following choices, the overall passage is best described as

- A) the confession of a murderer.
- B) an argument against the legal system.
- C) a scientific report.
- D) a personal narrative.



Lesson 1 continued:

Vocabulary: Context Answers

The following sentences contain vocabulary words used in the reading passage. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence. There may be more than one technically correct answer, but one will better exemplify the italicized vocabulary word than the others will.

- 1) One of the *faculties* that some people lose in old age is their _____.
 - A. savings
 - B. relationships
 - C. memory
 - D. license
 - E. coworkers
- 2) Sophia considered her *innate* desire to help others to be a[n] _____ of her identity.
 - A. indicator
 - B. essential part
 - C. false representation
 - D. unnecessary piece
 - E. criticism
- 3) Winifred had no tolerance for David's *sophistry*, so she pointed out his _____ to everyone in attendance at the debate.
 - A. miscalculation
 - B. ignorance
 - C. excellent argument
 - D. deceptive reasoning
 - E. poor manners
- 4) Rachel was not offended by Ethan's _____ answer; he was often unintentionally *curt*.
 - A. short and impolite
 - B. soft and sweet
 - C. loud and angry
 - D. offensive and thoughtless
 - E. quick and excited
- 5) Microblogging platforms like Twitter require *laconic* writing because each tweet must be _____.
 - A. interesting
 - B. brief
 - C. multifaceted
 - D. beautiful
 - E. accessible
- 6) Every time her older brother *deprecates* her, Sally feels _____.
 - A. better
 - B. upset
 - C. belittled
 - D. pleased
 - E. excited
- 7) *Gradations* of dress colors at the school dance _____.
 - A. changed throughout the night
 - B. meant that most wore the same color palette
 - C. meant that everyone wore either red or purple
 - D. required everyone to wear white
 - E. progressed from deep red to lavender
- 8) Making *impetuous* decisions will not be good for the business; instead, _____.
 - A. consider each option carefully
 - B. act on impulse
 - C. consult with no one
 - D. be willing to change
 - E. arrive at a solution quickly



Lesson 1 continued:

- 9) Attempts to compromise brought out Sandy's *petulance*; she was _____.
 A. pleased when everyone agreed
 B. nervous when the compromise took too long
 C. accepting of change
 D. upset when she did not get what she wanted
 E. glad to facilitate the discussion
- 10) A[n] _____ proved to be the *consummation* of Albert's string of crimes.
 A. arrest
 B. trial
 C. guilty verdict
 D. interrogation
 E. arraignment
- 11) To Allison's *mortification*, her family shouted her name as she walked out onto the basketball court, _____ her.
 A. pleasing
 B. embarrassing
 C. upsetting
 D. cheering for
 E. relieving
- 12) What seemed most ridiculous to Aaliyah was the _____ her friends had *concocted*.
 A. idea
 B. window
 C. photograph
 D. outfit
 E. plan



Lesson 1 continued:

Writing Practice

The underlined portion of each sentence possibly contains a flaw related to pronoun use. Select the answer that best corrects the flaw. Select NO CHANGE if the underlined portion is correct.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1) The host asked each of the party guests <u>to bring their</u> dish to the potluck dinner.</p> <p>A. NO CHANGE
 B. to bring his or her
 C. to bring one's
 D. to brings their</p> | <p>5) The movie's cast members <u>were rehearsing their lines.</u></p> <p>A. NO CHANGE
 B. was rehearsing their lines
 C. were rehearsing our lines
 D. was rehearsing its lines</p> |
| <p>2) I'm not sure; is it both your brothers or just your brother Ken who <u>has skipped</u> a grade?</p> <p>A. NO CHANGE
 B. have skipped
 C. had skipped
 D. are skipping</p> | <p>6) The laundry detergent restored the grass-stained pants to <u>its</u> original condition.</p> <p>A. NO CHANGE
 B. their
 C. it's
 D. the</p> |
| <p>3) That evening, some of the chickens <u>was eaten</u> by a fox.</p> <p>A. NO CHANGE
 B. was ate
 C. have been eaten
 D. were eaten</p> | <p>7) <u>If there are any discrepancies in the paycheck, please make sure to report it to the payroll manager.</u></p> <p>A. NO CHANGE
 B. If there are any discrepancy in the paycheck, please make sure to report it to the payroll manager.
 C. If there are any discrepancies in the paycheck, please make sure to report them to the payroll manager.
 D. If there is any discrepancies in the paycheck, please make sure to report it to the payroll manager.</p> |
| <p>4) Every cat will meow until <u>their</u> owner remembers to feed it.</p> <p>A. NO CHANGE
 B. his
 C. her
 D. its</p> | |



Lesson 1 continued:

- 8) The star swimmer always wins because they have no hesitation when the gun signals the start of the race.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. he or she have
 - C. they has
 - D. she has
- 9) I read a book about the Mafia called *The Valachi Papers* that reveal a series of amazing secrets about the mob.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. *Papers* that reveals a series of amazing secrets
 - C. *Papers* that reveal amazing secrets
 - D. *Papers*, that reveals a series of amazing secrets
- 10) Neither Mrs. Herman, the manager, nor the employees want to give up his or her break to attend the company seminar.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. her
 - C. their
 - D. one's