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Econ 163—Bethany College

**Questions from *The Economic Naturalist***

The purpose of this document is a reference so you can verify a question you’ve come up with for the “Proposed Questions” assignment isn’t already in the book. You should reference to list to verify ***none*** of your proposed questions have already been covered (either exactly repeated or repeated with only trivial differences).

**Introduction**

* Why do keypad buttons on drive-up ATMs have Braille dots?

**Chapter 1**

* Why does a freezer light come on when you open the refrigerator but not when you open the freezer?
* Why can laptop computers, but not most other appliances, operate on any country’s electrical standard?
* Why do twenty-four-hour convenience stores have locks on their doors?
* Why is milk sold in rectangular containers, while soft drinks are sold in round ones?
* Why are aluminum soda cans more expensive to produce than necessary?
* Why are newspapers, but not soft drinks, sold in vending machines that allow customers to take more units than they pay for?
* Why are the fuel filler doors on the driver’s side of some cars but on the passenger’s side of others?
* Why are almost all cabs in Manhattan yellow sedans, while most cabs in Ithaca are minivans in a variety of colors?
* Why are the portraits on coins done in profile while those on paper money are in full face?
* Why are DVDs sold in much larger packages than CDs, even though the two types of disc are exactly the same size?
* Why do women’s clothes always button from the left, while men’s clothes always button from the right?

**Chapter 2**

* Why do many bars charge patrons for water but give them peanuts for free?
* Why do many computer manufacturers offer free software whose market value exceeds the price of the computer itself?
* Why does a mobile phone sell for only $39.99, while a spare battery for that same phone sells for $59.99?
* Why are the most expensive apartments in a high-rise building in India those on the upper floors, while the most expensive ones in a low-rise building are those on the lower floors?
* Why do many people buy larger houses when they retire and their children leave home?
* Why are the hotel prices in Sharm El Sheikh lowest during periods of highest occupancy?
* Why do color photographs sell less than black-and-white ones?
* Why do new cars costing $20,000 rent for $40 dollars a day, while tuxedos costing only $500 rent for about $90?
* Why do many cleaners charge more for women’s shirts than for men’s?
* Why have Hindi-language movies been attracting much larger audiences in recent years?
* Why did golf driving ranges spring up all over the suburbs of Washington, D.C. in the early 1990s?
* Why are brown eggs more expensive than white ones?
* Why would Hallmark give away free “nonoccasion” greeting cards?
* Why do film processing stores give you a second set of prints for free?
* Why do the most popular books and CDs sell for less than the least popular entries, whereas we observe the opposite pattern for movie ticket prices?
* Why don’t top-ranked private universities charge a higher tuition than many of their lower-ranked counterparts?

**Chapter 3**

* Why do female models earn so much more than male models?
* Why have top earners’ salaries been growing so much faster than everyone else’s?
* Why are people who repave driveways paid only half as much in the suburbs of Dallas as in the suburbs of Minneapolis?
* Why are servers paid more than assistant chefs as high-end restaurants?
* Why are CEOs of large tobacco companies willing to testify under oath that nicotine is not addictive?
* Why are the least productive workers in a work group within a firm typically paid more than the value of what they produce, while they most productive workers are paid less?
* Why do leave tips for some services but not for others?
* Why do many fast food restaurants promise a free meal if you are not given a receipt at the time of purchase?
* Why does a worker’s wage often rise more quickly over time than his or her productivity?
* Why do employers sometimes offer wages that are higher than necessary to attract the quality and quantity of labor they wish to hire?
* Why do most companies conduct background checks before extending an employment offer, whereas most MBA programs conduct background checks only after applicants are accepted?
* Why do independent musicians, especially the most talented ones, favor free music-sharing programs, while established star performers tend to oppose them?
* Why do taxi drivers quit early on rainy days?
* Why has it become more common to hire a professional to change a flat tire?
* Why do companies hire temporary management consultants at premium rates rather than hiring full-time managers at much lower salaries?
* Why might an electric utility keep an expensive outside attorney on permanent retainer, when it could hire that same attorney for less than half the price?
* Why might a patient with a sore knee be more likely to receive an MRI exam if he has conventional health insurance than if he belongs to an HMO?

**Chapter 4**

* Why are hotel minibar prices so exorbitant?
* Why is it more expensive to transfer funds between banks electronically than send a check through the mail?
* Why might an appliance retailer hammer dents into the sides of its stoves and refrigerators?
* Why does Apple sell its black laptop computers for $150 more than for otherwise identically configured white ones?
* Why are concerts so much cheaper if you purchase series tickets?
* Why do airlines charge much more for tickets purchased at the last minute, while Broadway theaters follow the opposite practice?
* If a “cup” is supposed to be eight ounces, why is the smallest cup of coffee listed on the Starbucks menu a “Tall,” which contains twelve ounces?
* Why are round-trip airfares from Kansas City to Orlando lower than round-trip airfares from Orlando to Kansas City?
* Why do so many restaurants offer free refill on beverages?
* Why do VCRs have so many features when the average person doesn’t use a majority of the features found on even the simplest machines?
* Why do budget airlines change for onboard meals (which are typically free on luxury airlines), while luxury hotels charge for Internet access (which is typically free at budget hotels)?
* Why do many amusement parks not charge extra for their most popular rides, even though there are always long waiting lines for them?
* Why do rental car companies impose no penalty for canceling a reservation at the last minute, whereas both hotel and airlines impose significant cancellation charges?

**Chapter 5**

* Why do physicians tend to overprescribe antibiotics?
* Why do women endure the discomfort of high heels?
* Why do so many supermarkets, even those in small towns, stay open twenty-four hours a day?
* Why do retailers put Christmas decorations on display in September?
* Why do cherries that grow on trees in public parks get eaten “too soon”?
* Why does the practice of check splitting cause people to spend more at restaurants?
* Why does an accident in the northbound lanes of a divided highway cause a traffic jam in the southbound lanes?
* Why do hockey players vote unanimously for rules that require helmets, even though, when left to their own devices, they almost invariably skate without them?
* Why do many schools require students to wear school uniforms?
* Why have many high schools abandoned the practice of naming a valedictorian?
* Why do bureaucrats favor the passive voice?

**Chapter 6**

* Why is it sometimes illegal for an island homeowner to prevent strangers from using his dock?
* Why is the law of trespass often suspended along waterfront property?
* Why did Native Americans living in the Pacific Northwest define an enforce private property rights in land, while those living on the Great Plains did not?
* Why does the law grant ownership of a piece of land to someone who has occupied it legally for at least ten years?
* Why are whales in danger of extinction, but not chickens?
* Why is pollution a more serious problem in the Mediterranean Sea than in the Great Salt Lake?
* Why did the fall of the former Soviet Union spell gloom for aficionados of Caspian Sea caviar?
* Why aren’t there any top-ranked for-profit universities?
* If we have Blockbuster Video, why don’t we have Blockbuster Book?
* Why do workers vote for politicians who favor workplace safety regulations, even though, when left to their own devices, they almost invariably choose less safe jobs paying higher wages?
* Why does the Fair Labor Standards Act make it illegal for consenting adults to work overtime at whatever wage they choose?
* Why were superthin models banned from Madrid’s annual fashion week?
* Why do most states enforce mandatory kindergarten start dates?
* Why are child safety seats required in cars but not in airplanes?
* Why are seat belts required in cars but not in school buses?
* Why do pleasure boats have more limited collision safety equipment than automobiles?
* Why is it legal to drive while eating a cheeseburger or drinking coffee but not while talking on a cell phone?
* Why isn’t the use of radar detectors illegal in all fifty states?
* Why do taxicab fees have both a fixed component and a variable component, instead of charging a higher rate for each mile traveled?
* Why is the taxi fare from John F. Kennedy Airport (JFK) to any destination in Manhattan a flat rate of $45, while most other cab rides in the city are metered fares?

**Chapter 7**

* Why do stock analysts seldom recommend selling a particular company’s stock?
* Why do producers sometimes put the phrase “As Seen on TV” in print ads and on some product packages?
* Why do lawyers spend more on cars and clothing than college professors with the same income?
* Why is there so much mathematical formalism in economics?
* Why do humanities professors, who should be more adept than most in their use of language, often write so unclearly?
* Why do “almost new” used cars sell for so much less than brand-new ones?
* Why are Australian films so successful?
* Why does the rookie of the year in baseball often have a less successful second season?
* Why does the strategy of firing the leader of an organization that performs poorly seem misleadingly attractive to organization officials?
* Why do managers tend to overestimate the efficacy of blame and underestimate the efficacy of praise?
* Why do stores post signs in their windows saying that guide dogs are permitted inside?

**Chapter 8**

* Why is text messaging more common in most Asian countries than in the United States?
* Why is the proportion of aluminum cans recycled in Brazil much higher than in the United States?
* Why do movie theaters in Korea and many other Asian countries have reserved seating, whereas American movie theaters generally have open seating?
* Why do American multiplexes generally allow customers to watch more than one movie for a single ticket, whereas Asian multiplexes allow only one movie per ticket?
* Why have U.S. men been so unsuccessful in international soccer competition? And why have U.S. women fared so much better?
* Why is the unemployment rate so much higher in Germany than in the United States?
* Why do consumers in the United States pay more than double the world price of sugar?
* Why are automobile engines much smaller in Europe than in the United States?
* Why do new luxury cars account for a higher proportion of automobiles sold in Singapore than in the United States?
* Why are pedestrians fined for jaywalking in Rome but not in New York?
* Why does the DVD format used in the United States differ from those used in Europe and elsewhere, while CD formats are the same in all countries?
* Why do Japanese couples spend more on wedding parties than their American counterparts?

**Chapter 9**

* Why does Cornell University have a reputation for a high suicide rate among students when its actual rate is well below the national average for university students?
* Why do real estate agents often show clients two nearly identical houses, even though one is both cheaper and in better condition than the other?
* Why does Victoria’s Secret offer multimillion-dollar jewel-studded bras that no one every buys?
* Why are some brands of ice cream sold only in pint containers, while others are sold only in half gallons?
* Why is it impossible to find a hotel room in the host city on Super Bowl weekend?
* Why are more firms outsourcing custodial work?
* Why are people more likely to return cash to a store when given too much change by a cashier than to return a piece of merchandise for which they were not charged?
* Why did a New Jersey telecommunications company give its employees a “free” BMW rather than an equivalent bonus in cash?
* Why don’t more people wear Velcro shoes?
* Why did kamikaze pilots wear helmets?
* Why does women’s clothing at U.S. retailers come in numbered sizes (2-14), as opposed to the measured sizes in which men’s clothing is available?
* Why do most department stores place men’s fashions on the lower floors and women’s fashions on the higher floors?
* Why do baseball managers wear uniforms?
* Why does Target promote prescription drugs sold at its in-store pharmacies so heavily?
* Why does social courtesy sometimes lead to inefficient outcomes on one-lane bridges?

**Chapter 10**

* Why has the average age of the first marriage increased?
* Why is it easier to find a partner when you already have one?
* Why is coyness often considered an attractive attribute?
* Why do people living in rural areas marry younger than those in urban areas?
* If polygamy benefits men and harms women, as is commonly assumed, why do predominately male legislatures prohibit it?
* Why might so many military marriages dissolve after ten years?
* Why are physically attractive people also more intelligent than others, on average?
* Why might a man who prefers brunettes be likely to marry a kinder, healthier, prettier, more intelligent woman than a man with a preference for blondes?
* If attractive people are more intelligent than others, and if blondes are considered more attractive, why are there so many jokes about dumb blondes?

**Chapter 11**

* Why do animal rights activists target fur-wearing women but leave leather-clad bikers alone?
* Crouching Talent, Hidden Costs: Will special effects drive the world’s most talented choreographer from the market?