So, after only a few pages, we have an answer to a profound, age-old philosophical question: Why did the chicken cross the road? Because it maximized his utility. […] Bear in mind that maximizing utility is no simple proposition. […]

In short, getting out of bed in the morning and making breakfast involves more complex decisions than the average game of chess. (Will that fried egg kill me in twenty-eight years?) How do we manage? The answer is that each of us implicitly weighs the costs and benefits of everything he or she does. An economist would say that we attempt to maximize utility given the resources at our disposal; my dad would say that we try to get the most bang for our buck. […]

The concept of cost is far richer than the dollars and cents you hand over at the cash register. The real cost of something is what you must give up in order to get it, which is almost always more than just cash. There is nothing "free" about concert tickets if you have to stand in line in the rain for six hours to get them. Taking the bus for $1.50 may not be cheaper than taking a taxi for $7 if you are running late for a meeting with a peevish client who will pull a $50,000 account if you keep her waiting. Shopping at a discount store saves money but it usually costs time. I am a writer; I get paid based on what I produce. I could drive ninety miles to shop at an outlet in Kenosha, Wisconsin, to save $50 on a new pair of dress shoes. Or I could walk into Nordstrom on Michigan Avenue and buy the shoes while I am out for lunch. I generally choose the latter; the total cost is $225, fifteen minutes of my time, and some reproach from my mother, who will invariably ask, "Why didn't you drive to Kenosha?"

Every aspect of human behavior reacts to cost in some way. When the cost of something falls, it becomes more attractive to us. [...]

This broad view of cost can explain some very important social phenomena, one of which is the plummeting birth rate in the developed world. Having a child is more expensive than it was fifty years ago. This is not because it is more expensive to feed and clothe another [kid] around the house. If anything, those kinds of costs have gone down, because we have become far more productive at making basic consumer goods like food and clothing. Rather, the primary cost of raising a child today is the cost of the earnings lost when a parent, still usually the mother, quits or cuts back on work to look after the child at home. Because women have better professional opportunities than ever before, it has grown more costly for them to leave the workforce. My neighbor was a neurologist until her second child was born, at which point she decided to stay home. *It's expensive to quit being a neurologist.*

Meanwhile, most of the economic benefits of having a large family have disappeared in the developed world. Young children no longer help out on the farm or provide extra income for the family (though they can be taught at a young age to fetch a beer from the refrigerator). We no longer need to have many children in order to ensure that some of them live through childhood or that we have enough dependents to provide for us in retirement. […] The point is that it is now more expensive to have eleven of them than it used to be. The data speak to that point: The average American woman had 3.77 children in 1905; she now has 2.07—a 45 percent drop.

Charles Wheelan, *The Naked Economist*, W. W. Norton, 2010

Question 1 : Explain the underlined sentences. Give a example (not the example of the text !).
Question 2 : If it takes the author 1 hour and 15 minutes to buy a pair of shoes at Kenosha, can you guess how much he is (at least) earning each hour that he works ?
Question 3 : Is it more expensive today to feed and clothe kids ?
Question 4 : Why does it cost more today to have a child than 50 years ago ?
Question 5 : Why is it less profitable to raise a kid today ?
Question 6 : Are people "rationally optimizing individuals" when they decide to have a kid ?

Vocabulaire
game of chess : jeu d'échec
wheigh the costs and benefits : peser le coût et les bénéfices
"get the most bang for our buck" (expression familière) : en avoir le plus possible pour son argent
"pull a 50,000 account" : enlever un budget de 50 000 dollars
to save : économiser, épargner
the latter : le dernier (dans une suite de choses que l'on a déjà mentionnées)
broad : large
plummeting : qui s'effondre
fech a beer : aller chercher une bière
retirement : la retraite