SE3910 Review Questions (part 1 of 2)

1. What are potential drawbacks of a single expert review?
2. Suppose you’re tasked to run a Delphi Study to forecast the technical needs for Army vehicles. Write a single question for the first round of the Delphi Study. For this question, in the second round, what question would you pose?
3. What are some reasons that technology advancement is often exponential?
4. Why is an ‘S’ curve often a good prediction for how technology will evolve?
5. Which comes first, the technology or the science? Provide examples to help justify your answer.
6. Explain the argument for a combinatorial perspective on technology that says new technologies are composed of previous technologies.
7. In military acquisition, which comes first the capability need or the technology looking for an application? Provides examples to help justify your answer.
8. Do you agree with Plato’s widely quoted statement that necessity is the mother of invention? Explain why or why not.
9. Write a definition of technology.
10. Making an internal combustion engine that obtains better fuel mileage is an example of: (i) innovation by context, (ii) innovation by development, or (iii) invention? Explain your answer.
11. Does Arthur’s theory of technology evolution utilize the same mechanisms of natural selection and survival of the fittest as the Darwinian theory of evolution for species?
12. Explain the tenets that build Arthur’s theory of technology evolution?
13. How can we test whether Arthur’s theory of technology evolution is valid?  
    Arthur addresses this in Chapter 2 of “The Nature of Technology” (Combination and Structure). In this chapter he stresses the piecewise composition, or modularity, by which technology is developed (evolves). The most straight-forward way to test Arthur’s theory, therefore, is through decomposition. If we can sufficiently decompose technology into a taxonomy of underlying pieces then we increase our confidence in his theory. He gives the example of a hydroelectric power generator which, “combines several main components: a reservoir to store water, an intake system with control gates and intake pipes called penstocks, turbines driven by the high-energy water flow, electricity generators driven by the turbines, transformers to convert the power output to higher voltage, and an outflow system, or tailrace, to discharge the water.”
14. Use the principles from systems architecting to explain the mechanisms defined in Arthur’s theory of technology evolution.  
    Arthur addresses this in Chapter 2 of “The Nature of Technology” (Combination and Structure). The answer lies in Arthur’s view of the modularity of technology and is analogous to how system architecting relies on building up complexity through modular design. In systems architecting we take requirements and map them to solutions which may, themselves, be composed depending on the level of abstraction in the system. The components satisfy requirements and define (expose) interfaces with which they can be connected and interact with other components. By this mechanism, we create abstraction through encapsulation of technology and build complexity by focusing on the interfaces. In this way, systems architecting parallels the mechanisms defined in Arthur’s theory of technology evolution.
15. Explain why there is variety in technologies? Why not just have a single car design? A single vacuum cleaner design? Or a single design for any technology.  
    In “The Evolution of Technology” from lesson 2, George Basalla in Chapter 1 (Diversity, Necessity, and Evolution) discusses this under the heading, “Diversity.” He draws a comparison between the evolution of technology and the evolution of living things, “The variety of made things is every bit as astonishing as that of living things.” He says that necessity and utility alone are insufficient to account for the technological diversity and suggests the “applying the theory of organic evolution to the technical world,” citing deeper assumptions about the meaning and goals of life.
16. Why is it argued that technology is culture-bound? Provide some examples.  
    In “The Evolution of Technology” from lesson 2, George Basalla in Chapter 1 (Diversity, Necessity, and Evolution) discusses this later in the chapter. He says, “We cultivate technology to meet our perceived needs, not a set of universal ones legislated by nature.” He then goes on to describe the cultural drivers to our perception of needs. He draws on the invention of the wheel as an example of cultural influence in the evolution of technology. He says, “A bias for the wheel led Western scholars to underrate the utility of pack animals and overemphasize the contribution made by wheeled vehicles…” He summarizes, “This history of the wheel begain as a search for a significant technological advancement that was produced in response to a universal human need. It has ended with the wheel seen as a culture-bound invention whose meaning and impact have been exaggerated in the West.
17. Suppose the tensile strength of carbon nano-tubes is observed to follow exponential growth that results in doubling every 3 years. If the current tensile strength is x MPA (mega Pascals), then what will the tensile strength be in 3 years? In 6 years? In 12 years?  
    3 years: 2x = 2^(1)x = 2x  
    6 years: 2(2x) = 2^(2)x = 4x  
    9 years: 2(2(2x)) = 2^(3)x = 8x  
    12 years: 2(2(2(2x))) 2^(4)x = 16x
18. What makes a good forecast?  
    From the lecture notes for lesson 3 (Technology Forecasting) reference slides 5, 6, & 7. The following is taken verbatim.  
    **Slide 5:** A good forecast?  
    Accuracy is of course desired – but you won’t know until it happens -> actionability of conclusions makes a forecast successful  
    Quality of underlying data (Currency, Completeness, Potential bias)  
    Quality of analysis that lead to forecast (Qualification of experts, Bias, Balance)  
    **Slide 6:** How Can You Judge a Forecast Before the Fact?  
    Are assumptions specified?  
    Is quantitative evidence included?  
    Does it follow a path of logic?  
    Is the projected rate of improvement comparable to prior rates?  
    If the forecast breaks from the past are substantial reasons offered?  
    Does it provide a basis for rational discussion?  
    **Slide 7:** NSA Advice for better forecasts  
    Evaluate technology in terms of market megatrends (Ever increasing bandwidth, Greater user mobility, Inventions against these trends are less likely to succeed, whereas those that advance it are more likely)  
    Anticipate the interplay of new technologies
19. Name some reasons that most technologies cannot continue to evolve exponentially forever.
20. What is a technology roadmap?
21. What is backcasting?
22. What is a revolution in military affairs? What makes it revolutionary?
23. Does technology provide a decision advantage that has affected the outcome of a war?
24. What are the elements required for a revolution in military affairs according to Krepenivich?
25. What is military doctrine?
26. Why does Hughes argue that technology usually does not affect the outcome of a war?
27. Describe the current revolution in military affairs and how it affects defense acquisition, strategy, and other aspects of the military.
28. What does a lead systems integrator do?
29. How does adoption of a technology affect our environment? Consider a major technology, and explain how it has affected our environment.
30. How does the theory of technology evolution support the outcome of exponential growth in technology?
31. What is Augustine’s Law?
32. What is the difference between forecasting evolutionary technologies and disruptive technologies? What is a disruptive technology?
33. What is the technology readiness level? What does a value of 1 imply compared to a value of 9?
34. How is the technology readiness level used by the DoD?