

A Letter

To My Granddaughter's Granddaughter

Warsaw, 2010

My Dear Girl,

You were born in the *fin de siècle*, at the end of the 21st century; I was born in the middle of the 20th. I graduated from high school in 1967, and you in 2107. It's hardly strange that the questions on the final exam were different. There's been a lot of water under the bridge, and look how quickly it flowed! Time separates us, and it connects us.

The future is the past. The past is the future.

In the years that are your past, but that still remain my future, a good many of the things that could have happened did happen. The reason it turned out this way, and not otherwise, is explained by my coincidence theory, the theory of development that is no longer something new in your time, but rather something obvious. However, many of the things—good and bad—that could have happened, didn't. This is the difference between us. We have a completely different relation to before and after.

Things could have happened, but didn't. This means that one of the critical elements, from the blend of circumstances that determine what happens, was missing. Sometimes this was just a matter of luck, but deliberate human action was decisive more often. In any case, words were always important. They have meaning, a great deal of it.

It's amazing how many things were supposedly impossible but happened anyway. In my day, we didn't have enough imagination. With unpredictable things, imagination makes more difference than knowledge, because we don't have any knowledge to go by yet.

All of us, including you, are the outcomes of a future that might well not have happened. As you can see from your viewpoint, we took advantage of most of our chances, but we missed a few. You live in a completely different world that's still on the move, but that could have been even happier, more beautiful, and richer. There must be a lot of flowers, but there could have been even more, couldn't there?

When I gaze far into the future, I see—because I know—how much is possible. When you peer into the past, in turn, you surely see—because you know so much more, even though you're not majoring in economics—how many chances were missed. The loss is irreversible, or at least it will remain so for another hundred years.

But it doesn't matter. The next hundred years will pass. Write a letter to your granddaughter's granddaughter (maybe she'll study economics). Tell her to read *Truth, Errors, and Lies: Politics and Economics in a Volatile World* and check to see where we were right and where we were wrong. And tell her to be sure to send us an e-mail, or whatever they call it then, in 2210.

I'm glad that you're majoring in APS. I always said that interdisciplinary studies have a colossal future. You'll understand a lot, and see even more, and you'll have a chance to help development along. Everybody should do all they can.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Albert Einstein said that a scientist tells himself a story and then uses an experiment to check whether it is true or not. In physics, an experiment can verify the correctness of a hypothesis—although not all hypotheses—at once. Some were not confirmed beyond question until the early 21st century, and even in the early 22nd century some will surely be comprehensible to only the very few. Development economics can only be verified on the historical scale, and this has sometimes been very costly. Remember: it's better to be right while there's still time.

I've told my story. You've read this book, and you have all the facts verified, classified, and interpreted at a touch, or a click, or a voice command, so check for yourself! I hope that you'll be happy when you see that I was right.

Being right is just as nice as being lucky.

I hope that you and all those around you will be right, and that even more so, you'll be lucky!

Always and eternally yours,

gwk

P.S. I'm enclosing a thousand euro, because something tells me you haven't got a thing to wear. Buy yourself something nice!

:~)

