THE PRICE OF TOMORROW

Human Behavior as Story



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THE FED SAGA — 04

There is a question that has kept humanity company since long before banks.

Long before coins.

Long before the Federal Reserve.

The question is simple.

How much is tomorrow worth?

Not how much today is worth.

Today is easy.

You can count it.

You can measure it.

You can touch it.

Tomorrow, no.

Tomorrow is a land no one has ever visited.

And yet we spend our lives putting a price on it.

A young man spends five years at college.

He is buying tomorrow.

A family takes out a thirty-year mortgage.

It is buying tomorrow.

An entrepreneur starts a new business.

He is buying tomorrow.

A mother puts something aside for her son.

She is buying tomorrow.

Even someone who saves ten euros.

Even someone who moves to another city.

Even someone who falls in love.

Everyone is buying a version of the future.

The curious thing is that nobody knows the real price.

You find out later.

Always later.

When I worked at Gillette I believed price was one of the most important things in the world.

A package had a price.

An order had a price.

A target had a price.

A promotion had a price.

Then came international management.

Sixty countries.

Thousands of meetings.

Millions of numbers.

And slowly I discovered something.

Price and value are not the same thing.

Never.

A person can pay little for something enormous.

And can pay a great deal for something useless.

This holds for companies.

It holds for markets.

It holds for relationships.

It holds for life.

The trouble begins when we try to put a price on tomorrow.

Because tomorrow does not let itself be appraised easily.

A mistake today can become a success ten years from now.

A victory today can become a disaster tomorrow.

History is full of examples.

People are full of examples.

Many believe money is for buying things.

I am no longer so sure.

I think money is used above all to buy possibilities.

A house is a possibility.

An education is a possibility.

A trip is a possibility.

An investment is a possibility.

Even an insurance policy is a possibility.

You are paying so that an unwanted future will do less damage.

All of the modern economy seems built around a single activity.

Putting a price on possibilities.

And this is where the real show begins.

Because possibilities come with no instructions.

They come with no guarantees.

They come with no receipts.

They come with no refunds.

They can turn into anything.

That is why tomorrow is so hard to appraise.

Imagine two people.

Each receives a thousand euros.

The first spends it right away.

The second invests it.

Who made the better decision?

The correct answer is always the same.

Nobody knows.

Not yet.

The future is the slowest judge in the world.

But it is also the harshest.

It accepts no favors.

It accepts no excuses.

It accepts no appeals.

It hands down the sentence and that's that.

Maybe that is why the Federal Reserve has always intrigued me.

Not for the power.

Power is a fairly common thing in history.

Emperors.

Kings.

Presidents.

Chief executives.

History is full of them.

What intrigues me is the attempt.

Every day some of the best-prepared people on the planet try to establish how much the future ought to cost.

It is an almost poetic task.

And an almost impossible one.

Because the future has no natural price.

We discover it along the way.

A rate goes up.

A rate goes down.

A crisis arrives.

A crisis passes.

A technology appears.

A war breaks out.

A generation changes its habits.

And suddenly yesterday's price is no longer good.

Tomorrow has this bad habit.

It keeps changing the rules.

That is why I distrust anyone who speaks with too much certainty.

Particularly when he speaks about the future.

Intelligent people make forecasts.

Wise people remember that they are forecasts.

The difference is enormous.

Over my life I have met many individuals convinced they knew what was going to happen.

Markets.

Companies.

Countries.

People.

Reality almost always humbled them.

Not because they were incompetent.

But because tomorrow has an unfair advantage.

It exists.

We don't.

We can only imagine it.

Perhaps this is exactly why we place so much value on hope.

Hope is the human way of doing business with the future.

No guarantee.

No contract.

No signature.

Only trust.

In the end, though, the question is not about the Federal Reserve.

It is not about Wall Street.

It is not even about money.

It is about you.

It is about me.

It is about everyone.

Every morning, without noticing, we spend time to buy a version of tomorrow.

Some buy fear.

Some buy security.

Some buy knowledge.

Some buy regrets.

Some buy possibilities.

And so the question becomes unavoidable.

If tomorrow really had a price, how much would you be willing to pay for the future you want?

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We don't sell books. We build relationships.