

Why don't builders meet their deadlines? With M*I*n K*nd*ra

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Abstract. Diego Gambetta and Gloria Origgi describe Italy as a country in which there is a widespread preference for promising high quality goods and delivering low quality goods. Builders are presented as an example. Gambetta and Origgi make proposals regarding why there are these preferences. I was going to ask, why don't they just try being builders for a while? But metaphorically speaking, they are builders, which makes explaining the problems they face easier.

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Have you ever had this experience: you promise to deliver high quality goods in exchange for high quality goods and you keep your side of the promise but the other party does not? And have you ever had this experience: you observe people who promise high quality goods in exchange for high quality goods and both parties deliver low quality goods and both continue with the relationship? Diego Gambetta and Gloria Origgi build a paper around these experiences, describing Italy as a country in which there is a widespread preference for exchanges where both parties promise high quality and deliver low quality. They even inquire into why this is the case, suggesting that it is natural and that certain factors, such as love of one's craft, move a few people from the natural condition (2013: 17-18). They do not have the disposition they associate with this condition.

One of Gambetta and Origgi's examples is builders who do not meet deadlines they agreed to. I was going to propose that Gambetta and Origgi try being builders for a while, delivering exactly what they promise, and see what happens. But in a loosely metaphorical

sense they are builders. They start with common experiences and they use various skills, such as in formulating economic models and presenting key features of situations, to turn an initial idea into something more worked out.

They also make some references to literature, in a prestigious sense of the word, such as a distinguished Czech novel and the writings of Albert Camus. But if they were builders for me, I suspect I would say, “This bit is not quite right for me and that bit is not quite right, and there is too much of this and not enough of that, and these references to literature are nice but actually can you instead do all this in the style of Milan Kundera?” I presume they would soon decide to work at a lower level, so as to prevent being pushed to extremes. They deliver lower quality goods, such as not quite what was promised on a deadline day, and then the client decides to push for better work or they don’t, and if they do, the level of the current paper is probably as good as the client can get, before pushing energies are exhausted. They may thus appear to be closer to nature but this is actually a late adaptation in order to solve a problem, an adaptation which appears to converge with the dispositions of some children. But I presume the mainstream economist would not approach the question like this. I guess they would construct a model in which it is rational for all builders to underdeliver, whatever experiences of clients they have. Anyway, here is some material for the literary project.

1

In February 1948, an event occurred which no history book records. The communist leader Klement Gottwald is on the balcony of the Baroque palace in Prague, addressing a crowd of hundreds of thousands in Old Town Square. Mama is within the crowd. She is much younger then, but she is still Mama. And she is not listening. She is observing the Baroque palace and her mind is moving towards a conclusion, like a slow train docking in a station.

Mama recently tried to get her bathroom redone. But Mama has a lot of difficulty with builders. They never seem to follow her instructions. She is struck by the beauty of the Baroque palace. The experience of beauty prevents her from attending to the speech. Silence envelopes Mama, as she concentrates on the architecture, although within there is the grinding and puffing of the train as it comes to a halt. What is she doing wrong? Someone, she concludes, knows how to manage builders.

2

Bibi and Banaka, a seventh rate Japanese novelist, are discussing a question.

“That always happens to me,” says Bibi. “Why?”

Suddenly Tamina enters the café. “My socks are all wet,” she complains, laying down her umbrella.

Banaka observes the umbrella. The ribs of the umbrella do not close in the European way. Then Banaka addresses the question. “Builders are like women,” he says.

“Builders are like women,” Bibi repeats

“Like women,” echoes Tamina, unaware of the question: why don’t builders meet their deadlines? There is a hole in her sock. She looks down at her toenail and wonders whether to paint it.

References

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