

Perfect

Mike Watts asked me to say a few remarks about Bill Becker as part of this celebration. He asked us to give him a “roast” before he moves to retirement.

I must admit that I found this “roasting” task impossible to do. That is because Bill is perfect! He is really ideal, faultless, and flawless.

We are at the level of Mother Teresa when talk about Bill. And if you think I’m going to stand up here and roast someone so perfect, someone so saintly, then you are sorely mistaken.

Bill must have learned a great deal from his Catholic upbringing. The priests and nuns who supplied his early and collegiate education provided just the right model and helped make him perfect.

So let me let me enumerate a few ways in which Bill is perfect.

First and foremost, of course, he selected the perfect wife. Anyone who can put up with that the “little angel” for all these years has to be a saint herself. Bill recognized that and married her. So Bill has a perfect insight.

Second, he is the perfect critic. If there is a flaw in your logic, thinking, or attitude, Bill will find it. And he doesn’t just keep it to himself. He is kind enough to tell everyone what your flaws are and does not keep his divine knowledge to himself and remain silent. What a blessing!

Another way to think about this is that a scale from one to ten, Bill is the perfect “10.” Of course the perfect critic in Bill would point out to you that such a rating scale, that is similar to those we use to evaluate teaching, is seriously flawed. One of the problems is that there may not be equal intervals between rating points. But when you’re perfect and on the top end of the scale what is in the middle does not matter.

Third, he is the perfect textbook author. In Bill's case it is business statistics and econometrics texts. The problem is that if only the textbook market was perfect, then surely other professors and their students would recognize the true insights from his books, but alas as we economists know only too well markets are not perfect even if a textbook author is.

Fourth, he is the perfect scholar. Just take a book at his vita—the range, depth, and number of his journal articles. In fact what you can say about Bill is that everything he has written has turned into a journal article that was published somewhere—a perfect record.

Fifth, he is the perfect editor. To be the perfect editor you need fortitude—and Bill has it. Bill was editor of the JEE from 1989 through 2009. Over that period, about 40 manuscripts were published, on average, each year, or about 800 in total. But think about all the manuscripts that Bill had to read that were not published! The JEE has a publication rate of about 14% of articles submitted. That mean Bill likely reviewed about 5,500 articles during his tenure. That is a lot of fortitude. Combine that with being the perfect critic and you and have the perfect editor.

In all this work, Bill has set high standards that us mere mortals cannot hope to achieve. That even applies to “retirement”. He has set up the perfect one. Living in south Florida during the winters and sailing with Sue in the open seas—can anything be more perfect.

So I have failed miserably in the assignment that Mike Watts gave me to roast Bill. It is just not possible to find fault with him.

And to you Bill a sincerely thank you for all you have done to advance economic education, mentor me, and make this a more perfect world.

Bill Walstad

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