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A 'Liberalitarian' Purge at Cato?

By [Daniel Foster](#) 

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That's what Dave Weigel [suspects](#):

The libertarian Cato Institute is parting with two of its most prominent scholars. Brink Lindsey, the institute's vice president of research and the author of the successful book *The Age of Abundance*, is departing to take a position at the Kauffman Foundation. Will Wilkinson, a Cato scholar, collaborator with Lindsey, and editor of the online Cato Unboard, is [leaving on September 15](#); he just began blogging politics for the *Economist*.

I asked for comment on this and was told that the institute does not typically comment on personnel matters. But you have to struggle not to see a political context to this. Lindsey and Wilkinson are among the Cato scholars who most often find common cause with liberals. In 2006, after the GOP lost Congress, Lindsey [coined the term](#) "Liberalitarians" to suggest that Libertarians and liberals could work together outside of the conservative movement.

I won't speculate on what's going on at Cato. But, as much as I respect Brink Lindsey, both he and Wilkinson often expressed contempt for conservatism and conservative libertarians — Cato's base, as it were — that probably didn't help their causes. In Lindsey's case, it was tempered by a kind of anthropological aloofness; in Wilkinson's, less so.

American libertarianism is queer in that it can admit both rationalists and conservatives in the [Oakeshottian senses](#). Reading Wilkinson it becomes clear that he is a classic rationalist. He derives his libertarianism *a priori* — a set of propositions on a chalkboard. Contrast with, for example, the average tea partier, who gets his as a uniquely American historical inheritance — a full-blooded tradition. Like most rationalists, Wilkinson thinks this is not just silly and sentimental but pernicious (one of his biggest bugaboos is [patriotism](#)).

And so, holding the same set of basic principles, but with different reasons, sends these two kinds of libertarians in two very different directions: the rationalists off toward liberalitarianism; the conservatives toward the classic Buckley-*National Review* fusionism.

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