

# A Libertartarian Purge?

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The Cato Institute has parted ways with Brink Lindsey and Will Wilkinson, who were, in *Slate* columnist David Weigel's **terms**, "among the Cato scholars who most often find common cause with liberals." Weigel writes that "you have to struggle not to see a political context to this," claiming that Lindsey coined the term "libertartarian" to denote libertarians who advocated a fusion with the liberal movement to achieve their goals. Wilkinson had promoted this libertartarian ideal, especially on his always-interesting blog, **The Flybottle**.

Daniel Foster at *National Review* tries to **connect the dots**: "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."

Lindsey's brand of libertartarianism, especially, proscribed conservative priorities and values to such an extent that it almost seemed, to me at least, to exclude almost all movement libertarians. Take, for instance, Lindsey's 2007 **denunciation** of libertarian hero Ron Paul. Lindsey claimed that Paul's conservative personal viewpoints ("his xenophobia, his sovereignty-obsessed nationalism, his fondness for conspiracy theories, his religious fundamentalism") indicated that Paul had a "crudely authoritarian worldview."

Paul, to say the very least, is far from an authoritarian, as anyone with a passing knowledge of anarchist-tinged brand of politics will tell you. In criticizing him for having what are in Lindsey's estimation backward values, Lindsey has somehow forgotten the fundamental tenet of libertarian ideology: that diverse worldviews are easily compatible when the government stays out of personal affairs. Paul may be a "religious fundamentalist" but he wouldn't have the state impose his fundamentalism on anyone else.

Or take Lindsey's recent contribution to the **cover story** in the libertarian *Reason* magazine. After reciting the list of socially conservative positions the Tea Party seems to espouse, Lindsey concludes that it is not useful for libertarian purposes, provoking his co-contributor Jonah Goldberg to note: "Lindsey is supposed to be making the case for freedom, and yet so much of his uncharacteristically intemperate essay simply reads like he has chosen sides in the culture war and thinks that a host of political and policy questions should therefore be settled."

Ron Paul, of course, is one of the very few libertarian officeholders with any national cachet at all. And the Tea Party is the most dynamic anti-big government political movement in modern American politics. For better or for worse, Ron Paul and the Tea Parties represent the best things going for the libertarian movement of which Cato is a key institution. That Lindsey is not able to find common cause with best successes of libertarianism in the national arena suggests that Cato is probably wise to want to distance its brand from Lindsey's libertartarianism, if that is in fact what it is doing.

Libertarianism is clearly more marketable to conservatives, even social conservatives, than it is to liberals. And if libertarians are afraid of conservatives' social positions, all they need to assuage their fears is a belief in their professed ideology—that small government will mean less involvement in people's personal affairs.