

The Critic as a Useful Enemy

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by Conor Friedersdorf

Reihan Salam has [nice things to say](#) about Will Wilkinson:

Will is one of the best, most trenchant libertarian critics of U.S. conservatives and conservatism. He's the kind of thinker who keeps you on your toes by identifying and dismantling muddled thinking. I happen to think there's something to be said for incompletely theorized agreements and muddling through, which is why we don't always see eye to eye. But I know that engaging with Will's work has made me sharper. With enemies like Will, who needs friends?

It's all true. And that kind of attitude toward political discourse helps to explain why Mr. Salam is one of my favorite writers, though I'd go even further, and say that if ideological allies permit you to persist in muddled thinking too readily or regularly, who needs enemies?

As Mr. Wilkinson leaves The Cato Institute, along with Brink Lindsey, another sharp liberal libertarian critic of the right, the libertarian think tank remains staffed with a lot of first-rate thinkers doing exceptional work; but it's lost two exceptional in-house safeguards against group think. That important role is among the most undervalued in Washington DC.