



This is your brain on drugs

Once upon a time, George Will had a reputation as the thinking person's conservative. No more. He's not only a climate denier, but a couple of weeks ago [he smeared Elizabeth Warren with a kind of red-baiting](#) that I haven't seen since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Now he's at it again, sort of. And what says speaks volumes about what remains of the conservative mind. His [October 28 column](#) has him in right-wing enforcer mode, attacking Mitt Romney for being an unprincipled flip-flopper. That's true, of course: Romney seems to have stripped his mind of the concept of actual belief entirely, to be fully free to adopt whatever pose works at the moment.

But for our purposes, it is the nature of Will's critique that reveals so much:

Republicans may have found their Michael Dukakis, a technocratic Massachusetts governor who takes his bearings from "data" (although there is precious little to support Romney's idea that in-state college tuition for children of illegal immigrants is a powerful magnet for such immigrants) and who believes elections should be about (in Dukakis's words) "competence," not "ideology."

The unattributed scare quotes around "data" are Will's, not mine. How contemptible it is, as far as Will is concerned, that an elected official might *actually use data* making a decision. We can't have *that*.

Will's observation that there actually is no evidence for Romney's position is an afterthought because that isn't the point. The point is that anyone who seeks to look at data is held in contempt by a conservative "intellectual." (Scare quotes mine, proudly).

Clearly, data can't get you everywhere. Presidents have to make tough decisions, often in the absence of the information they want, and usually those decisions involve hard value choices and difficult setting of priorities. Fair enough.

But Will's critique isn't "yes, it's good to use data, but what will you do when it conflicts or can't answer a values question?" Instead, he contemptuously sneers at the very idea of data itself. It's an emotional spasm, a pose, a revelation of the conservative id, a beautiful reflection of how [postmodernism has taken over the American Right](#).

[John Stuart Mill once called](#) the Conservatives “the stupid party.” George Will seems to be doing his best to justify the epithet.