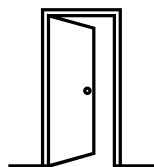


FROM  
NARROW-  
BLINDED  
— TO —  
OPEN  
MINDED



An Alternative Approach for  
Improved Decision-Making

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I'M RIGHT AND YOU'RE WRONG?

BUT I HAVEN'T SAID ANYTHING...



# Introduction

## I'm Right and You're Wrong

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“Hatred is an affair of the heart; contempt is that of the head.”

—Arthur Schopenhauer

### **Narrow-Blindedness**

In the montage of my Irish experience, from growing up in an Irish Catholic family to summers with family in Ireland, workdays in Cork, and academic pursuits in Dublin, I've come to understand that growing up in an Irish milieu is akin to mastering a unique set of cultural codes. Undoubtedly, this holds true not only for Irish immigrants in Canada but also for those who have traversed the Atlantic to the United States or ventured down under to Australia.

Irrespective of the geographical setting, a consistent thread weaves through the fabric of Irish identity—the art of disagreeing with wit. The skill is not so much rooted in malice but in a playful sharpness that suggests one might be missing something in their thinking. The ability to engage in quick-witted banter is as ingrained in the Irish psyche as the love for Barry's tea, the graceful insertion of swear words mid-conversation, the peculiar practice of unmarried couples sleeping in separate rooms when visiting parents, the sheer delight in England's defeats in any sporting event, the fervor for

hurling (coupled with its inherent violence), the devotion to Taytos and full Irish breakfasts, the pursuit of craic and good-natured slagging, and the fortitude of names with complex pronunciations that leave others flummoxed. In essence, discussion, debate, and disagreement are not just conversational tools in Ireland; they are integral to the Irish way of thinking.

It wasn't until later in life that the true value and wisdom of this constant, thoughtful construction of arguments and the ensuing healthy discussion and debate in the Irish psyche became apparent to me. For some reason I am envisioning a spirited discourse between two old Irish men in a pub right now, puffing on their pipes, passionately debating modern politics and economics.

A fundamental and enduring benefit of this social acceptance of open discussion, debate, and disagreement in Ireland is the fortification against what I term "narrow-blindness." Throughout this book, you'll frequently encounter this phrase, so let me provide some context. The term "narrow" by itself isn't inherently negative; a narrow or hyper-focused approach often leads to virtuosity in various fields, as evidenced by historical figures like Bach, Mozart, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, and da Vinci. However, when applied to the task of understanding multifaceted matters, an excessively narrow approach can result in severe blindness—a blindness that causes one to miss opportunities. This myopic perspective, which is generally absolute or extreme, hinders perception and judgment, putting the perceiver in a position akin to a hippo traversing a tightrope over a field of nails in pitch-black darkness. It is a perilous and costly endeavor!

Narrow-blindedness, as I see it, distinguishes itself from the more common term "narrow-mindedness." The latter involves an unwillingness to accept anything unusual or different. However, in my experience, the core of our human disposition lies in our innate eagerness and willingness to draw as close to "the truth" as possible. Fundamentally, I believe we desire knowledge, and most individuals are open to embracing the unusual or different if it propels us toward a deeper

understanding of truth. The difficulty often lies in the lack of a proper toolset or approach to navigate alternative routes. Instead of refining our approaches or toolsets to better manage the barrage of information we receive, we find ourselves paralyzed and often in confrontation with alternative views.

I characterize the term “narrow-blindedness” as the act of forgoing the opportunity to see something unexpected by becoming “lost” in our preexisting perspectives. The analogy extends seamlessly into our daily thinking and logic, a concept I’ve observed and ruminated on for well over a decade.

The root of this tension, in my estimation, stems from an ingrained false belief that we must exude supreme confidence in being “right” in our assessments, and that those who disagree with us must be unequivocally wrong. To explore this dynamic, I’ve embarked on a decade-long social experiment; a form of ethnography, I suppose. The ongoing experiment has been a fascinating exploration. Although, I must admit my wife has caught on to my endeavors, prompting a notice that my line of questioning is off-limits at family events.

## **A Tipping Point**

My fascination with the concept of narrow-blindedness traces back to a convivial gathering of close friends, a genial bunch who possess remarkable senses of humor and do not take themselves too seriously. This eclectic group, with backgrounds spanning engineering, mining, business, science, military defense, and education, never fails to spark thought-provoking conversations. It all began over cocktails with a question that resonates deeply: If you could instantly solve one problem facing humanity, what would it be? So, dear reader, take a moment to set this book aside (but not for too long—we have much ground to cover) and ponder your answer, perhaps envisioning the type of beverage you’d be sipping while thinking about this question. For the record, I was enjoying my favorite—an old-fashioned.

Some might suggest global food security, living wages, human rights, economic poverty, or political governance—all valid perspectives in my mind. But what if a singular, targeted solution could simultaneously impact and maybe even solve multiple challenges? How would we measure such an impact? The cocktail-fueled query got me contemplating the greatest advances in human civilization and the barriers or costs that accompanied such progress. Given my background in accounting and tax, I habitually ponder the costs of our choices.

As I sat engrossed in the insightful responses from people I deeply admire, my good friend Doug, author of two best-selling books, put the spotlight on me, asking what I thought. I responded, “Contempt is the biggest problem facing society.”

Cue a smirk from Doug, followed by, “Typical Ed answer. What do you mean by that?”

My train of thought at that moment was humanity’s inability to veer away from firmly held beliefs to move toward compromise, and that such unwillingness to see an alternative route is the paramount challenge of our time. We spend considerable time committed to a specific stance or direction (potentially spouting nonsense to justify it) because we lack the tools to pause and consider a course correction—an alternative route. Using half-baked logic, we delude ourselves into believing our direction is unequivocally correct, prompting us to dismiss divergent views as worthless.<sup>1</sup> Take a look at modern political discourse—a breeding ground for contempt, where each side sees their views as benevolent and the opposing side as rooted in nonsense, with a dash of evil. This does little to solve grand problems and squanders valuable opportunities for positive change.

Contempt, in simple terms, is the belief that we are categorically right, and those who disagree are categorically wrong and perhaps daft for not seeing it our way. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt links contempt to the enjoyment people derive from scandals—both provide a sense of moral superiority.<sup>2</sup> It’s almost like pointing out others’ failings helps us bond over shared ground and overlook our own hypocrisy.

Unfortunately, many have not taken heed to the insights of Buddha, who so wisely proclaimed, “It is easy to see the faults of others, but difficult to see one’s own faults.”

Contempt isn’t an anomaly; it’s pervasive. It crept into 1980s sitcoms and has firmly embedded itself in our social media accounts. Algorithms in our daily lives fuel this fire, encouraging us to feel contemptuous and morally superior. Social media and news outlets capitalize on these emotions to keep us coming back for more, fostering shock, polarization, and, you guessed it, contempt. Kudos to the marketers for fueling the contempt train!

Fixing everything by waving a wand and saying, “No more contempt!” would be nice, but that is perhaps unrealistic. So, what’s a workable solution? I propose a toolbox, or rather an approach to identify fractures in logic and strategies for course correction—better ways of thinking, talking about ideas, and taking action. Contempt, after all, is the byproduct of sloppy thinking, reluctance to share perspectives, and a lack of proactive measures to course correct. Therefore, at the heart of this book is a mission to extinguish what I term narrow-blinded thinking; and in doing so I hope that we can dial down the associated contempt levels. It’s time for a more thoughtful journey. All aboard!

## **Unraveling the Costs of Narrow-Blindedness**

The crux of the matter is, hastily branding something as categorically wrong, without giving it careful consideration, can lead to significant costs. Pause for a moment and reflect on the harm or hurt you’ve seen stemming from mislabeling and misjudgments in relationships, business dealings, public policy, and contempt in key leadership roles. Chances are, you can recall at least one instance and the associated costs.

Having seen much of the world over the course of many years, I’ve witnessed the profound costs of narrow-blindedness and the extensive

negative impact of its fallout, comparable in size and scale to a global pandemic. Hence, the thesis of this book is: Narrow-blindedness is toxic. It fosters poor decision-making and results in dreadful and costly outcomes on multiple levels.

Think back to those uncomfortable moments you've had with family members, friends, or colleagues, as one of them regaled you with their absolutist perspective. It's as if they were delivering a theatrical monologue, leaving you in a bewildered silence, trying to politely hide your pained expression. The air was quickly sucked out of the room, prompting feeble attempts to shift the discourse to mundane subjects such as the day's weather, because rarely does anyone summon the courage to unravel the tightly wrapped package of biased views presented before them.

The canvas of this scene is painted with the hues of rigid opinions, the brushstrokes of awkward silences, and the splashes of attempts to redirect the conversation. Instead of giving space to a wide palette of diverse ideas, this scene is stifled by the dull shades of narrow-blindedness.

Many of us have witnessed firsthand what happens when contentious topics, such as current politics, government regulation, tax policy, or environmental planning, are injected into a conversation. These exchanges become intensely charged and typically unfold in a predictable, confrontational fashion. They resemble a well-rehearsed theatrical performance of "I'm right and you're wrong." Picture the setting: a conversational stage where the spotlight hones in on a spicy topic, introduced with a metaphorical drumroll. Enter the protagonist, a strong-minded and vocal individual who fearlessly wades into the murky waters of dialogue ready to put on a carefully crafted performance. Their act—a concoction of pseudo-evidence, an abundance of (over)confidence, and skillfully woven rhetoric—sets the stage for what is about to unfold.

As this charismatic orator passionately presents their perspective, the audience has a spectrum of reactions. Some, perhaps out of fear, a



desire to avoid awkwardness, or the inclination toward pseudo-agreement, nod in apparent support. It's a silent ballet of conformity as much of the audience is cowed by this forceful performance.

However, just when the atmosphere seems saturated with consensus, there comes a disruptive chord. Someone in the crowd, with furrowed eyebrows, offers a response laced with hostility followed by a barrage of heated counterarguments. The bottle comes uncorked. In that moment, the dormant tension erupts into a full-fledged confrontation. Contempt, now revved up on both sides, permeates the air like an electric charge of intolerance, crackling with the anticipation of verbal combat.

Let the games begin. The stage transforms into an arena of gladiators, each armed with their arsenal of beliefs and convictions. The conversation, once a calm and respectful sea, is now a tempest of conflicting ideas, where the clash of opinions rings like thunder and the waters roil with high waves of impassioned discourse and mean-spirited words.

In these instances, does anyone's opinion truly change? Probably not. In fact, entrenched views don't merely stand their ground; they fortify themselves, becoming even more impervious. Conversations clouded by contempt make it even less likely that we'll consider alternative routes.

## **The Rot in the Logic-Carcass Is All around Us**

A sizable reduction of narrow-blinded thinking, absolutism, and contempt emerges as a key first step in the broader quest to improve our lives; as well as the broader efforts to alleviate poverty and hunger, enhance health and well-being, provide superior education and clean water, refine energy policies, increase employment, and spur economic growth. It underpins and encompasses comprehensive reforms in industry, education, and infrastructure, the development of sustainable cities, the cultivation of responsible consumption practices,

conflict reduction, and initiatives for positive transformations in climate, water, and land ecosystems—take your pick.

The nefarious and hidden toll of narrow-blinded thinking manifests in a plethora of detrimental ways. Take a moment to think about how narrow-blinded thinking has impacted your life, business, and/or community. Remember what A.A. Milne wrote in his book *Winnie-the-Pooh*: “Did you ever stop to think, and forget to start again?” From time to time, I am guilty as charged. When delving into complex topics like the costs of narrow-blinded thinking, it’s all too easy to lose one’s way and forget to consider the grave costs. Here are a few examples, or rather reflections, on the layers and costs associated with narrow-blindedness. These might motivate us on our journey.

1. Cultivating and nurturing meaningful connections is paramount to fostering healthy relationships in all areas of our lives. The costs of adopting a narrow-blinded approach to these connections can be far-reaching, affecting not only our relationships with spouses, friends, children, and spiritual communities, but also contributing to broader societal issues. The detrimental consequences of harboring contemptuous attitudes become glaringly apparent in the alarming rise of divorce rates, heightened family conflicts, and the surge of religious fanaticism. By having a set of tools that guides a more expansive and open-minded perspective, we can actively work toward creating connections to encourage understanding, empathy, and collaboration.
2. Our interaction with and impact on the natural environment is profoundly influenced by the lens through which we perceive the nonhuman world—comprised of water, animals, and plants. Adopting a narrow-blinded stance to this interaction shapes our behaviors in ways that have significant cost implications for environmental well-being. Humans’ disdain for the natural environment manifests in seemingly inconsequential actions such as consumption choices, disposal activities, and how

we engage with and perceive animals and our waterways. An approach that encourages us to examine these decisions more carefully might reveal the profound impact of our cognitive processes on the environment and the intricacies of how our thinking influences choices related to purchasing or abstaining and consuming or avoiding.

3. Business activities shaped by narrow-blinded thinking have a significant impact on many communities. Many commercial entities hold a singular view that stems from a profit motive. In such instances, commercial gain has been the priority, and all other considerations are viewed with contempt, sometimes at the expense of the environment and the community. Even though there is a growing emphasis on holistic corporate evaluations and a broader understanding of the impact of business operations on society, there's greater need still to develop an improved symbiotic relationship between businesses and communities. As stakeholders increasingly demand accountability and transparency, a renewed way of thinking about venturing activities could aid in the trajectory of business operations; one that is regarded as responsible and integrated, and embodies the evolving roles and landscape of businesses within the social fabric of society.
4. The impact of narrow-blinded thinking comes into clear focus when examining how some leaders guide and oversee their communities. Such influence permeates various aspects of governance, ranging from the formulation of policies to critical decisions regarding trade, bank rates, and strategic investments. The costs incurred due to a one-sided perspective can manifest in policies lacking foresight, financial decisions prioritizing short-term gains over long-term stability, and strategic investments neglecting the broader implications for the community and the environment. Offering an approach

for leaders to critically assess their decisions may provide an off-ramp from these sorts of policies and actions that fail to address the complexities of contemporary challenges. It could also help leaders make better trade decisions, where a narrow focus on immediate gains may result in missed opportunities for fostering equitable international relationships and promoting global stability.

## The Crazy Professor

The irony of a university professor embarking on a journey to address the cost of narrow-blindedness is not lost on me. Surrounded by scores of studies illustrating the impact of narrow teaching practices on student outcomes, I'm well aware that we professors might have a penchant for peddling nonsense and sprinkling a dash of contempt into the mix. The title of this chapter echoes through the hallowed halls where academics essentially declare from their ivory towers, "I am right, and they are wrong." It's shocking, indeed. Despite their four-to-six-year PhD pilgrimage into a specific niche, some professors seem to believe they hold the keys to the universe—a PhD about everything, anyone?

To set the record straight, this book is no run-of-the-mill professorial pontification. Instead, it is a collection of lighthearted stories and a sprinkle of research findings, all orbiting the nucleus of the book's core idea: We need strategies for tackling the most pressing problem of our generation, the narrow-blinded thinking that only leads to the abyss of contempt. The good news is that I have found another route. And here's the kicker—I've road-tested these tips myself, in my consulting gigs and with my students. Let me tell you, success followed.

Narrow-blindedness and its more serious form, contempt, love to play peek-a-boo in the realms of education, business, politics, and

international work. And let's quash the notion that this is merely an American pastime—it is a global issue. Having traversed through Ireland, Canada, the US, and forty other countries for education and work, I've seen the unmistakable footprints of narrow-blindedness and contempt in Asia, Australasia, Europe, South-Central America—you name it.

But you might wonder, is the outcome of narrow-blinded thinking, which fuels contempt, truly such a colossal problem? According to Arthur Brooks, the virtuoso Harvard social scientist, musician, and columnist, it's grim. In his *New York Times* article from March 2019, he suggested America's biggest woe isn't inclusivity or intolerance but—you guessed it—contempt, and our inability to see alternative perspectives.<sup>3</sup> I prefer to see narrow-blindedness and contempt as a tax—an unnecessary burden on our collective intellect and not one that funds particularly good results. Yet, fear not, for this book is your semi-comedic guide to a tax deferral strategy. Follow along to learn how to navigate the maze, dodge the pitfalls, and find the levity in our journey to a world where narrow-blinded thinking and contempt are relics of the past.

## **Context Before We Set Out**

Generally speaking, I don't believe that people inherently resist the idea of embracing an alternative perspective. Instead, I believe this perceived resistance often stems from a lack of understanding about how to process and make sense of the unfamiliar. It's a matter of having the right tools to avoid narrow-blindedness, or not knowing how to respond in a way other than rejection.

Unfortunately, this lack of comprehension sets off a chain reaction. It begins innocuously enough with mere disagreement, visible facial contortions, and disengagement, but swiftly descends into the flurry of finger pointing and ad hominem attacks. The escalation of hostilities continues unabated until an impasse is reached and someone exits the conversation with a few rude parting words—whispers

under the breath about the other person being a total varmint. Does this sort of mudslinging event sound familiar? If it does, rest assured, you're not alone in experiencing this all-too-predictable interaction. The toll it takes, both emotionally and socially, can be quite significant.

Narrow-blinded thinking is not merely a failure to grasp the logic of something different; it is neglecting to judiciously process alternative perspectives. The aftermath of such thinking breeds an unwavering conviction that the perceived "other" is the root of the problem. This mindset has become an escalating pandemic, evident in the growing difficulty of engaging in political discussions, in both familial and social spheres, without seemingly inevitable conflict.

Unfortunately, it feels like the days of civil discourse, healthy debates, and constructive discussions are gone. Instead, expressing a viewpoint divergent from the collective consensus feels akin to inciting a protest or spurring a riot. Metaphorically, if not literally, individuals in conflict engage in acts of looting, vandalism, and, in extreme cases, causing harm to others. All these actions serve as a loud proclamation: "I am right, and you are wrong. And we don't need to work through this together."

Even I must confess to falling into this thinking culvert, albeit without the physical manifestations of protests, graffiti, or riots. Witnessing firsthand the detrimental consequences of this divisive approach to thinking, and grappling with the associated costs, prompted me to embark on the writing of this book.

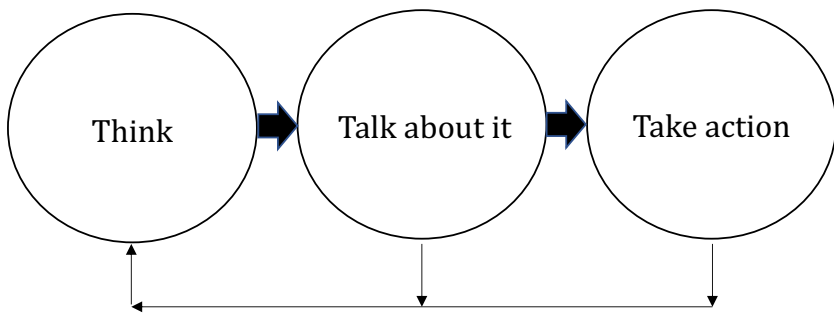
To be clear, my intended audience for this book is not confined solely to traditional students; rather, it is aimed at a diverse array of individuals eager to learn. This includes current or aspiring leaders, educators, business owners, politicians, and even the uncle who is at risk of being disinvited from Thanksgiving dinner. The mission is clear: to dismantle the barriers erected by narrow-blinded thinking by mapping an alternative route of open-minded, constructive, and logical thinking.

## A Road Map for the Reader

Narrow-blindedness and its close companion, contempt, are serious issues. Despite the gravity of the subject, I've opted for a somewhat lighthearted and humorous approach. Why? Perhaps it's rooted in my satirical personality, as I view much of life through the lens of comedy—a hat on a hat. I've always found enjoyment in a good comedic piece, recognizing that great comedy often carries a thread of truth. Moreover, I believe comedy serves as a bridge between differing opinions and conflicts, whether it's found in a comic strip or a joke delivered by a stand-up comedian. Even when I'm the target of a joke, I appreciate the inherent truth at the core of comedic expression.

Following Einstein's cue on the importance of simplicity, I present a simple drawing outlining the flow of this book on overcoming narrow-blinded thinking for the purpose of positive impact. As you navigate through the book, keep in mind the overarching framework or route is the 3T model: think, talk about it, and take action. You're free to explore the chapters in any order you prefer, as each section will clarify a specific facet of the 3T model.

**Figure 0.1**



The 3T model to combat narrow-blindedness and contempt.

While the concept of the 3T may seem straightforward, its implementation can prove remarkably challenging. However, with a bit of guidance, rest assured even you can apply these techniques effectively. The key is to balance and link the three. Often, there's an abundance of talk without corresponding action—a domain where the hypocritical armchair coach thrives. On the other hand, some are eager to expound their views without first engaging in careful analysis or thoughtful consideration. I am arguing for equal parts of all three.

I firmly believe in George Washington Carver's assertion that "Education is the key that unlocks the golden door to freedom." My goal is to provide individuals, including students, politicians, and business leaders, with a framework to reshape their thinking, enabling them to identify, assess, and capitalize on new opportunities. I harbor this goal because I want to see a reduction in this escalating trend of looking down upon and disparaging those with differing views. Narrow-blinded thinking and contempt contributes to increased polarization, rendering compromise as elusive as finding a unicorn in our backyard. While the prospect of discovering a unicorn in my backyard would be welcomed, I'm not holding my breath.

Whether you choose to utilize one, two, or all the tools presented in these chapters is entirely at your discretion. Some may resonate more with you or prove more effective than others.

I now present a new route or path for you. Enjoy.



## About the Author

EDWARD GAMBLE has been an accounting and tax professor in the US for more than a decade. Currently he works at the University of Vermont, but he has also been a faculty member at Montana State University and a research fellow at the Initiative for Regulation and Applied Economic Analysis. Edward's PhD is from Lancaster University Management School (England), his MBA is from University College Dublin (Ireland), his Masters of Taxation is from Villanova University Law School (USA), and his undergraduate degree is from McMaster University (Canada). Edward is also a Chartered Professional Accountant (Canada).

Dr. Gamble's research examines accountability to improve venturing practices. This includes research in the areas of performance measurement, internal controls, social and environmental audits, fraud, social impact measurement, and tax policy.

Edward immigrated to Canada as a child from Ireland. He is a Canadian, Irish, and US citizen. To date he has worked and traveled extensively around the world in the regions of Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, South America, Central America, and North America.

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