THE THEATRE OF TWO HANDS:

How the Left/Right Divide Was Built to Keep You

Arguing With the Other Audience Member

While the Stage Managers Never Change

Science to Sage | Karen Elkins

"The argument between left and right is real. The belief that winning it would change anything fundamental — that is the illusion."

Picture a theatre. Two sides of the audience face each other across the aisle, each convinced the other side is the problem. They argue. They point. They post. They cancel. They feel the deep, warm satisfaction of righteous anger at people who are clearly, obviously, dangerously wrong.

Meanwhile, on stage: the same play. Same actors in different costumes. Same script with different catchphrases. Same ending — which is to say, no ending. Just the next season's renewal.

This is not cynicism. This is stagecraft. And it is the most successful political technology in modern history.

ACT ONE: How the Stage Was Built

The left/right spectrum did not emerge organically from human nature. It was architectured. The terms themselves come from the seating arrangement of the French National Assembly in 1789 — those who sat to the king's left favoured change; those to his right, tradition.

What began as a seating plan became a cage. Every complex human question — about economics, culture, identity, science, spirituality, community — compressed into a single axis. Left or right. Pick a team. Wear the jersey.

The compression is not accidental. A one-dimensional spectrum cannot hold the full complexity of human thought. That is precisely its value to those who deploy it. Complex thinkers are difficult to manage. Team members are not.

THE SPECTRUM ITSELF IS THE MANIPULATION

A person who thinks in terms of left and right has already accepted the most important constraint — that these are the only two directions available. Up is not on the menu. Neither is out. Neither is: who built this theatre and why are they not in it?

ACT TWO: The Mirror Arguments — Same Play, Different Costume

Below are the core arguments as each side frames them. Read them together and notice something remarkable: each side is the exact psychological mirror of the other. Same emotional architecture. Same certainty. Same blind spots. Different vocabulary.

ON FREEDOM

LEFT SAYS	RIGHT SAYS
Freedom means freedom from poverty, discrimination, and corporate power. The unregulated market enslaves. True liberty requires protection of the vulnerable.	**Freedom means freedom from government control, taxation, and state interference. Regulation enslaves. True liberty requires the individual to be left alone.**

WHAT NEITHER SIDE IS ALLOWED TO ASK: Who owns the corporations AND the regulatory bodies? Who funds both parties? Who benefits when these two definitions of freedom cancel each other out indefinitely?

ON THE MEDIA

LEFT SAYS	RIGHT SAYS
The media is controlled by right-wing billionaires and corporate interests who suppress progressive voices and manufacture consent for the powerful.	**The media is controlled by a liberal elite that suppresses conservative voices, dismisses traditional values, and manufactures consent for progressive ideology.**

WHAT NEITHER SIDE IS ALLOWED TO ASK: Both are partially correct. The media is controlled. The question of who controls the controllers is the one neither side is given airtime to ask.

ON THE ECONOMY

LEFT SAYS	RIGHT SAYS
Wealth inequality is the root cause. Tax the rich, fund the commons, redistribute power. The market is not neutral — it is structured to serve capital.	**Government interference is the root cause. Cut taxes, free the market, let innovation drive prosperity. State power is not neutral — it serves those who control it.**

WHAT NEITHER SIDE IS ALLOWED TO ASK: Both are describing real mechanisms of the same machine. A machine that continues operating regardless of which party is nominally in charge. The machine is not left or right. It is above both.

ON SCIENCE

LEFT SAYS	RIGHT SAYS
Science is being suppressed by fossil fuel interests, religious conservatives, and right-wing think tanks. Follow the science — it is being buried.	**Science is being captured by government funding, ideological capture, and institutional groupthink. Question the science — it is being weaponised.**

WHAT NEITHER SIDE IS ALLOWED TO ASK: Both are observing real phenomena. Science can be suppressed AND captured. Funding shapes findings. Institutions protect consensus. The question 'who funds the science?' is not left or right. It is just good epistemology.

ON TRADITION VS PROGRESS

LEFT SAYS: Tradition is a euphemism for the preservation of privilege. Progress dismantles unjust hierarchies. The past must be examined and corrected.

RIGHT SAYS: Progress is a euphemism for the erasure of meaning. Tradition carries accumulated wisdom. The past must be honoured and learned from.

WHAT NEITHER SIDE IS ALLOWED TO ASK: Both contain profound truth. Traditions can encode both wisdom and injustice simultaneously. Progress can liberate and destroy simultaneously. The person who can hold both is the one the binary cannot capture — and therefore the one neither side can recruit.

ACT THREE: The Stage Machinery — How the Argument Never Ends

THE PENDULUM

Every few years, the side currently losing becomes the side currently winning. Power swings. Policies reverse. The other team celebrates. And the structural conditions — the concentration of wealth, the erosion of sovereignty, the expansion of surveillance — continue in the same direction regardless of who won. The pendulum swings. The ratchet only turns one way.

The honest question: Notice: Which problems got solved when your team was in power? Which ones survived the transition intact?

MORAL LICENSING

Each side grants itself permission to do what it condemns in the other by framing its own version as righteous. Censorship is wrong — unless it's our censorship of dangerous ideas. Violence is wrong — unless it's punching fascists. Propaganda is wrong — unless it's countering misinformation. The content changes. The structure of the self-exception never does.

The honest question: Notice: What does your side permit itself that it would condemn if the other side did it?

THE OUTRAGE CYCLE

Outrage is not a spontaneous human response to injustice. It is a produced commodity. Media organisations, political campaigns, and social media algorithms have all independently discovered the same fact: outrage drives engagement more reliably than any other emotion. Anger is the product. You are the market. Both sides run the same factory with different raw materials.

The honest question: Notice: How do you feel after an hour of political content? Informed and empowered — or furious and exhausted? Which of those states produces clearer thinking?

CANCEL AS CONTROL

Cancellation operates identically across the political spectrum despite each side believing it is a weapon exclusively of the other. The function is identical: enforce ideological conformity, punish deviation, silence the voice that does not fit the tribal consensus. Left cancels rightward drift. Right cancels leftward drift. The space for independent thought narrows from both directions simultaneously.

The honest question: Notice: The person most difficult to cancel is the one who cannot be placed on the spectrum. Which voices are impossible to locate on the axis? Those are often the most interesting ones.

RIGHTEOUS EXHAUSTION

Both sides share the same emotional state beneath the argument: the deep, grinding fatigue of people who are trying very hard to fix something and cannot understand why it isn't working. The frustration is genuine. The righteousness is genuine. The diagnosis — that the other side is the problem — is the one thing both sides agree on, and the one thing that guarantees nothing structurally changes.

The honest question: Notice: If the other side disappeared tomorrow, which of the fundamental problems would actually be solved?

ACT FOUR: Who Benefits from the Infinite Argument?

This is the question the theatre is designed to prevent. Not because it is unanswerable — it is straightforwardly answerable — but because answering it requires looking up from the argument and at the stage.

THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

Conflict is the product. Your attention is the inventory. A resolved conflict is a cancelled show. An unresolved conflict is a thirty-year franchise with guaranteed renewal. Both sides of the media landscape profit from the existence of the other side. Fox needs MSNBC. MSNBC needs Fox. A population that agreed on anything would be catastrophic for ratings.

THE POLITICAL CLASS

Politicians on both sides share more with each other than with their voters: job security, donor relationships, institutional belonging, and the shared understanding that the game continues regardless of outcomes. Losing an election is not losing a livelihood — it is moving to the other side of a revolving door that leads to consulting, lobbying, and speaking fees. The argument keeps them employed. Resolution would not.

THE FUNDRAISING APPARATUS

Nothing raises money like the other side winning. Every election loss is a fundraising opportunity. Every outrage is a donation prompt. Both parties have discovered that a permanently energised, permanently threatened base is more financially productive than a satisfied one. Your fear is their revenue model.

THE SURVEILLANCE AND SECURITY STATE

Every escalation of political conflict — every riot, every extremist, every threat, real or amplified — justifies expanded monitoring, expanded powers, expanded budgets. The conflict does not need to be manufactured. It simply needs to be maintained at the precise temperature that justifies the expansion without triggering actual revolution. This is a known and documented management technique.

THE EXIT — There Is a Door

None of this means the issues are not real. Poverty is real. Injustice is real. Environmental destruction is real. Cultural erosion is real. These are not theatre.

The theatre is the proposition that engaging in the left/right argument is how those things get addressed. The evidence of the last century suggests otherwise.

LOOK VERTICALLY, NOT HORIZONTALLY

The relevant power is not to your left or right — it is above the argument. The question is not 'which team should win' but 'who owns both teams, who funds both teams, and what do both teams consistently fail to address?'

FIND THE CONSENSUS OF THE IGNORED

Across the political spectrum, ordinary people agree on more than they are shown. They do not want war. They do not want poverty. They do not want their children poisoned or their communities hollowed out. The consensus exists. The theatre exists to prevent you from finding it.

RESIST THE OUTRAGE HARVEST

Your anger is a resource someone else is mining. This does not mean your anger is wrong — it may be entirely justified. It means: choose where it goes. Directed anger is power. Harvested anger is fuel for someone else's engine.

HOLD COMPLEXITY

The person who can say 'the left is right about this, the right is right about that, and neither has asked the most important question' cannot be recruited. Cannot be cancelled into silence. Cannot be predicted. Complexity is not indecision. It is sovereignty.

The left and right hands of the same body have been pointing at each other for so long that nobody is looking at what the body is doing.

Both audiences are right about what is wrong. Both are wrong about where the problem is located. And both go home each night vindicated, exhausted, and unchanged — ready for tomorrow's performance.

The show runs as long as the audience stays in their seats.

Stand up. Look at the stage. Ask who wrote the play.

“Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.”

Science to Sage — Exploring the deeper architecture of the universe.