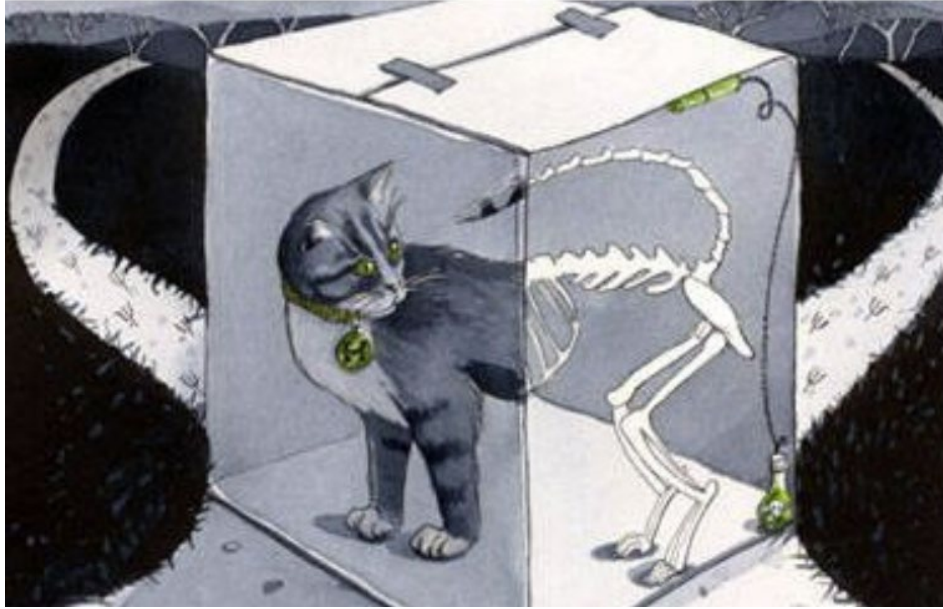


## The DoD Times (Redacted)



### ***Two Things Can Be True. No, Seriously, They Can Be. Seriously.***

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Think of a leader you know personally who you admire. Think about the qualities that you have tried to emulate about him or her. Reflect for a moment why you held that person in high regard. Now, what if I told you that he or she was just charged with harassing a subordinate, or defrauding the government, or retaliating against someone for having reported a deficiency within the organization? What would you say to that? What would be your initial (or perhaps only) reaction?

In all the Foundation's dealings since its inception in January 2022, we have encountered many flawed trains of thought, many non-sequiturs, many false leaps of logic. Amongst those exists the most often-occurring and most difficult concept for many to comprehend; an axiom which can be simply stated as: two things can be true.

At face value, this concept comes across almost painfully obviously, but the human psyche struggles to truly embrace it. Two things can be true. A leader can be good and bad. An organization can be good and bad. An entire military can be good and bad. And again, as most read this, it appears straightforward. Putting that understanding into practice, however, is a different thing altogether.

To illustrate, consider again the brief exercise at the beginning of this article. What did your gut tell you when I told you that the leader you held in such high esteem had been accused of something serious? It is likely that you, like many, grappled with a cognitive disconnect: a good person doesn't do bad things, your brain screams. You may have come across this scenario in real life as well – you worked for or with or alongside someone you had a high opinion of and then, out of seemingly nowhere, came serious accusations. Like most humans, your knee-jerk reaction was, "That's preposterous! I know Person X, and they would *never* do something like that!" And this is where your human brain and its way of thinking are, simply put: flawed.

## The DoD Times (Redacted)

In his now-modern-classic *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman discusses this phenomenon in-depth. Succinctly put, he states that for us humans, we fall into the common cognitive trap of “What You See, Is All There Is,” even coining the mental pitfall with the associated acronym **WYSIATI**. In brief, from a psychological standpoint, it is difficult for us to believe what we don’t see, and/or, difficult to comprehend that something opposite of what we’ve seen could also be true. Two quotes we often come across to illustrate his point:

“In my X years in Organization Y, I never saw {insert wrongdoing here}!”

“I worked with Person X {now accused of some wrongdoing} and found them to be an upstanding leader! Surely those accusations aren’t true!”

But here is the (ironically perhaps) black-and-white fact which alludes to so many: two things can be true. You may have a very high opinion of General X, but they also committed a crime. You may have enjoyed a storied career in the military and never been victimized, but people every day don’t enjoy the luxury you did. People with positive traits like charisma and charm do bad things like violate people and laws – you just may not have seen that other side (and therefore don’t believe it). Organizations like the military can do great things like teach you how to fly planes, or pay you a pension, or provide you with a lifetime of pleasant memories; but they also violate laws, abuse people, and systematically destroy those who speak out against that same “great” institution. You could call it a duality, but it is, in reality, even more complex, more of a *plurality*.

On any given day, within any niche of the military, there are incredible things happening, and also egregious things. A unit may be carrying out critical work in its mission to protect the country, but at the same time allowing sexual assaults to go un-investigated. A prominent military four-star General may be an inspiring example for some, and at the same time a brazen racist. A military may be held in high esteem by the country and the Congress but may also be destroying the lives and careers of those serving in it. It’s all true, all of it. And yes, the examples used here are just as real and just as true.

And so, to the message, which is really a plea: the next time you hear, or are tempted to blurt out, something of a black-and-white flavor, or an assessment which is binary in nature, or something to the effect of “I didn’t see that, so it can’t be true!” we would encourage you to take a brief moment to pause and reflect. Is it really that absurd that it can’t be true, or are you just simply refusing to accept it could be true? In short: have you too succumbed to **WYSIATI**?

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