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# INTRODUCTION

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*Everything hangs on one's thinking.*

Seneca (4 B.C.E. – 65 C.E.)

*Man is disturbed not by things, but by the views he takes of them.*  
Epictetus (55 - 135 C.E.)

**S**TORIED CENTURIES AGO, the Italian city-state of Venice adopted a Moor as its favored son. While this was unprecedented, it was not unwarranted. He was an acclaimed commander with many victories; high social standing was his despite humble origins; and a noblewoman whose love for him matched her fair beauty was his consort.

Above all, the popular benediction held that the Moor was endowed with a noble mind. For everyone knew him to be true in intention, steadfast in duty, and romantic in affection. If he also was prideful, and bore insecurity about his race in a city notorious for its prejudice, nevertheless his hard-won position seemed unassailable.

But human nature is inevitable, and the Moor's adversaries weren't only on the battlefield. Indeed, some Venetians envied his ability, others resented his authority, and many frowned upon his unconventional marriage. Yet, ironically, his worst foe was in his own ranks. Belying honest appearances, the Moor's trusted ensign and esteemed standard bearer through numerous battles was in truth a villain whose cunning hid his malevolence, and whose ambition had long since suffocated his conscience.

Thus he insinuated in the Moor's mind that his spouse had been unfaithful. Although this was a lie, the insecure Moor eventually believed it. Finally overcome by jealousy and rage at the imagined betrayal, he strangled her to death with his own hands even as she tearfully pleaded her innocence. Only then, when it was too late, did he realize the truth before killing himself in a paroxysm of remorse.

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Sound familiar? While Shakespeare's *Othello* is one of the more dramatic versions of this sort of tragedy, its variations have unraveled in life and art throughout human history with the regularity and seeming inevitability of the seasons. Essentially they are cautionary tales about how illusion can wreck our lives if we aren't careful. And the illusion starts with what we *think*...