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7.6 Modesty about your perspective

In this section we'll talk a bit more about Zhuangzi slogan of 以明 **yǐ míng** (get clarity) and how it is connected to his skepticism.

We can think of 以明 **yǐ míng** (get clarity) as something like the admonition:

> "Get some perspective. Get a sense of yourself, take on board others' perspectives on your attitudes, especially when you're making judgments about them. Don't be too sure of your own opinion. Listen to others. Try to understand what they're saying. Remember that with any skill there's always going to be some defects, some blind spots."

Zhuangzi's story of the chain of predators and prey.

Zhuangzi, wandering in a field, sees a huge **magpie**. He takes his crossbow in pursuit.

In the grove, he spots the **magpie** about to pounce on **praying mantis**.

Then he notices the **praying mantis** is just about to attack a **cicada**.

And he reflects, "How interesting. Here's this hierarchy of creatures about to attack each other mindless that he, himself is embedded in a predator-prey relation."

And just at that moment, the game warden claps Zhaungzi on his shoulder to **arrest him for poaching**. Zhuangzi runs home and reflects about how we are all bound up in this world of connections, and **how he forgot his own situation even as he reflected on their short-sightedness**.

(Zhuangzi: Chapter 20: 8.)

So Zhuangzi thinks what we need to do is to **always be aware of ourselves as in situations the same ways others are**. Be aware that:

- the views that others have seem just as naturally obvious to *them* as yours seem to *you*.
- it is just as hard for others to make *you* understand their view as you find it hard to make *them* understand your view.

So Zhuangzi has a mildly skeptical attitude about debating, arguing about 辯 **biàn (distinctions)**.

- When we disagree about something, if I convince you, does that show that I'm right? *Not necessarily.*

- What if we had a judge come in to judge which one of us is correct? Would that prove that the one he has selected is the one who is truly right? *Not necessarily.* (See *The Zhuangzi* Ch. 2.12)

So Zhuangzi concludes we should rest in a mild skepticism—a measure of epistemic modesty that helps us appreciate the naturalness of another's view. He doesn't give us positive reasons for thinking our own wrong—for abandoning our commitments. Rather, they are reasons for pusuing commitments in ways that acknowledge and appreciate the natural variety of views. Is there a single correct view? Perhaps, but if there were, it is unlikely it is ours given the plethora of possibilities. Zhuangzi doesn't rule out exchanging and advocating our views with others, only that we do it with a measure of **epistemic humility.**

Keep in mind that other positions are as natural, as convincing, as compelling, to them as yours are to you. Don't confuse your degree of commitment with the real probability of yours being the only right perspective.