

Taking and Getting Perspective

As far as we know, humans are the only animals that can perform the amazing feat of mentally putting themselves into another being's situation. It is so natural to us, that we do it automatically regardless of whether our assumptions about that other being prove accurate or not. (For more on this and other perceptions regarding the minds of others, consider Nicholas Epley's *Mindwise*).

Romances break up because one party assumes that the other party *must* have meant A, when no, the other party meant Z. The temptation to believe one's own "wisdom" when attempting to *take another's perspective* is overwhelming. We confidently assume that the other party not only could not have meant Z, but we also assume the other party is now lying about it. Knowing that people lie to protect themselves, we assume that that other party *must* be lying because, after all, he/she clearly *must* have meant A. This circular argument invests us in our ability to *take* another person's perspective, and prevents us from *getting* that person's actual perspective.

To *get* (rather than take) perspective, one has to engage in honest conversation. If the conversation is likely to be awkward or if we assume the person is likely to lie, we avoid the very mechanism by which we can *get* the other person's true perspective.

There are other complicating factors, as well. Sometimes, the person in question is not fully conscious of whether they meant A, Z, or something in between. Sometimes, there are unknown factors that contribute to the person implying A, but really meaning Z—factors he is keeping from you to protect, or even to serve, the very person who is calling him a liar.

As martial artists, we inherit instructional methods and techniques that help us master self-defense. We assume (or our instructors assume) that we understand the movements and are performing them correctly. That assumption is an attempt to *take* the perspective of the founder of the art. After all, we cannot *get* the perspective of the founders because, mostly likely, they haven't been around for quite a while. In order to honestly *get* their perspective, we need to read their writings or historical writings about them. We need to study their techniques as they were originally put into photos or drawings, rather than the way they appear today. We need to understand how a technique may have morphed over the years, and we may even want to reverse-engineer our current method back to its earlier format. These efforts may, in fact, have come close to getting the founder's perspective, but we can never *interview* that founder. As a result, we must still *take* the founder's perspective, but take it from our now more educated point of view.

We may choose to practice an updated, more modern version of a martial art, but if we don't know the older art—the art closer to the founder's original intent—we are refusing to use history to learn. Once we understand the history, we can make more intelligent, more informed choices—choices that rest upon a closer approximation of truth rather than our personally *taking* (i.e. assuming) a founder's perspective, and being self-centeredly satisfied with it.

There are certain martial arts that I favor, and certain martial arts that I think are not worth my training efforts, but I never assume that because I currently believe they meant A, that they could not have originally meant Z.