

The sense consciousnesses are called other-cognizers or other-knowers because they understand objects other than the perceiving subject. Some schools posit self-cognizers that observe these other-cognizing consciousnesses. A self-cognizer is a special type of subtle, nonmistaken, direct perception. For example, when a visual consciousness sees blue, that consciousness is an other-cognizer that perceives the object blue. At the very same time, a corresponding consciousness arises and apprehends that visual consciousness. The sense consciousness, the other-cognizer, looks outward, and simultaneously the self-cognizer looks inward. The visual consciousness sees blue, and the self-cognizer perceives the visual consciousness looking at blue. The same applies to the other senses; every other-cognizer has a self-cognizer. In contrast to a primary consciousness, which is always accompanied by the five omnipresent secondary consciousnesses, a self-cognizing consciousness is called a solitary apprehender. A self-cognizer does not have any accompanying secondary consciousnesses when it is looking inward at the consciousness itself. It is solitary. Because a self-cognizer does not have any accompanying mental factors, it is not a main mind. However, a self-cognizer is not a mental factor either. A self-cognizer is always nonmistaken. It is always direct perception, never conceptual thought.

Bhāvaviveka does not believe in a self-cognizing consciousness, and nor do the Vaibhāṣikas or the Prāsaṅgikas. All the other schools say that a self-cognizer is the only way we can account for the subjective side of memory. Memory is always drawn from experience. First we experience something, and from that we have a memory. There are two kinds of memory. One is objective, where you remember an object and recall, “I saw this.” The other is subjective, where you remember the sense consciousness itself or its way of apprehending the object and recall, “I saw this.” Memory of the subject, or perceiver, signals the existence and functioning of a self-cognizer. Without a self-cognizer we could not remember the subjective experience. For example, sometimes we remember feeling happy or sad in the past. This memory exists because a self-cognizer apprehended the consciousness that experienced happiness or sorrow. Otherwise, how could we prove that we experienced happiness? This is how the other schools account for memory. At some point we may need to consider how the Prāsaṅgikas account for memory, but we will leave it for now. It is enough to note that those who accept a self-cognizer say it is a nonmistaken direct perception.