

4.2.3.3.1.2.2.3.2. *The Explanation of How We Posit Our Own System, Which Does Not Accept [Autocognition]*

[Opponent:] Even the Acārya Candrakīrti accepts that from a merely nominal point of view there is such a thing as autocognition, the subjective aspect experiencing itself.

[Reply:] This claim flies directly in the face of instances in the *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya* in which [Candrakīrti] says that, though autocognition does not exist even nominally, memory can still arise.¹⁰⁷⁹ For example, after refuting the existence of any form of autocognition and memory that exist by virtue of their own characteristic, he says:

[Opponent:] But from the point of view of worldly parlance ('*jig rten gyi tha snyad*) . . .

[Reply:] Even according to that, it is impossible for memory to possess autocognition as its cause.¹⁰⁸⁰

and also: "I will show in this way how memory arises without autocognition."¹⁰⁸¹

Well, how does memory arise in our own system if there is no autocognition even nominally? Let me take the meaning of what is extensively taught in the *Madhyamakāvātāra* root text and its *Bhāṣya* and put it in a somewhat more easily understandable form.

Subject: indefinite¹⁰⁸²

Predicate: even though the subjective appearance that is internally directed and devoid of dualistic appearances does not experience itself, there is nonetheless a reason for why a memory arises that thinks "I have previously seen this blue lotus"

Reason: because (1) the eye consciousness that previously perceived the blue lotus and the later memory of it are not inherently different; (2) one can, by seeing one's own eye consciousness, say "I see"^{with}; and (3) due to the fact that both the object seen by the previous eye consciousness and the object remembered by the memory are the same object, such a memory arises. [423]

This perfectly establishes it.

The glorious Śāntideva explains it in a like manner. In the *Bodhicaryāvātāra* he says, first citing the opponent's position:

If autocognition did not exist,
How could consciousness remember?¹⁰⁸³

He gives the answer that the pervasion is uncertain, [that is, that just because there is memory does not imply that there must be autocognition,] as follows.

Even though there is no autocognition that experiences the subject, [lit. that which possesses the object, that is consciousness,] there does not occur the fault that it is incorrect for the memory of that subject to arise. When a memory of form arises, that memory does not occur at the expense of the subject, [that is, at the expense of losing memory of the consciousness that apprehended the form,] for both object and subject are remembered in an associated way, as when we say, "I have seen this form before." When at a later time we remember the object and subject in an associated way, it does not necessarily follow that the subject need have been experienced when previously the object was experienced. For example, if a mouse bites a [hibernating bear] during wintertime, although the poison of the mouse abides within the body [of the bear], at that time he experiences the bite but does not experience the poison. At a later time, when [the bear] hears the sound of thunder [and awakens from his hibernation], there arises a memory and he thinks, "previously, when I was bitten, poison must have entered my body." Therefore, even though the poison was not experienced when it previously entered, later, the memory of the bite elicits the memory that poison must have entered. Likewise, even though the object-possessor may not have been experienced when the object was previously experienced, later on it nonetheless is possible for the memory of the object to elicit the memory of the object-possessor, [that is, of the consciousness that earlier had perceived that object]. This is what [Śāntideva himself] accepts. He continues in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*:

From its relationship to the experience of what is other, [that is, the object,] gzhan myong ba dang 'brel pa las, dran 'gyur byi ba'i dug bzhin no,
 [The object possessor] comes to be remembered, like the poison of the mouse.¹⁰⁸⁴

This must be analyzed. Even in the Prāsaṅgika system it is necessary to accept that all of the [five] sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness (*vid shes*) exist. If these consciousnesses establish, [that is, verify,] their own existence, it would contradict our refuting autocognition. Were it necessary, on the other hand, that they be established as existing by other consciousnesses (*shes pa don gzhan*), there would ensue the fault that [the process of existential verification] would be endless: [424]

How could their existence be known? 6.72cd 'di yi yod pa gang gi shes par 'gyur, ma bzung ba yang yod ces byar mi rung,
 It is not fitting to say they exist if they are not apprehended.¹⁰⁸⁵

So how do we escape from such a fault, [that is, from the fault of either accepting autocognition or of giving up the idea of existential verification,] that seems to apply similarly to our own position? **This point is extremely difficult to understand. Nonetheless, I will mention the stainless opinion of my omniscient, glorious, and holy master [Tsong kha pa].** The *Prasannapadā* says:

Because the determination of the number of valid cognitions depends on the perceived [objects that those valid cognitions apprehend], and because the nature of the two valid cognitions is posited in such a way that it corresponds to the nature of the kinds of perceived [objects] . . . ¹⁰⁸⁶

As it says, the number of valid cognitions is determined by the number of perceived [objects] (*gzhal bya*).¹⁰⁸⁷ Only by virtue of the arising within valid cognitions of the aspects of the perceived [objects] is the nature of the perceiving valid cognitions posited. These words refute that, apart from this method of establishing such valid cognitions, there is any separate method, such as their being established by autocognition.

[Opponent:] Then what does it mean to say that valid cognitions are established as existing merely by the fact that the valid cognitions establish the perceived [object]?

[Reply:] In this regard, let me first analyze a source of doubt that could occur to another. The meaning of such an explanation is that the eye consciousness that apprehends blue is established as existing by the perception of blue on the part of eye consciousness that apprehends blue. Therefore, it is necessary to accept that the eye consciousness that apprehends blue establishes the existence of the eye consciousness that apprehends blue. If this is so, then it is necessary to accept that the eye consciousness that apprehends blue establishes the eye consciousness that apprehends blue. Do not think, however, that because this is so, ^{sngon po gzhal bas} it is necessary to accept that it *cognizes (rig)* it or that it *understands (rtogs)* it. Were that the case, then it would be necessary to accept [425] that the eye consciousness is both what cognizes and what is cognized by the eye consciousness. If this were so, all of the problems demonstrated during our refutation of the realists' belief in autocognition likewise would apply as well to us, [statements like]: "it is not correct for the subjective aspect that is devoid of all dualistic appearances and is of the same nature as the consciousness [it perceives] to itself experience itself because, no matter how much thought one gives it, the image of the cognized [object] and cognizing [subject] never appear differently, so that all actions and their doers would become identical."¹⁰⁸⁸

If that [eye consciousness] *understood* itself, then it would be necessary to accept it as either a direct understanding (*dnegos rtogs*) or an indirect understanding (*shugs rtogs*), and we cannot accept it as either. You may be wondering what fault there is in accepting the proposition that "in the process of ^{indirectly} (*shugs kyis*) the aspect of the object appearing to that consciousness, that consciousness is itself established." Well, [if that were so, that is, if a consciousness understood itself indirectly in the process of directly understanding its object,] then it would follow, absurdly, that the equipoised gnosis of the Mahāyāna path of seeing that realizes reality understands itself, the gnosis,

possessor of the object, in the process of directly understanding reality. Why are we urged not to accept that? [If we do,] it would follow, absurdly, that the reality, the perceived [object], in regard to which that gnosis is considered a cognitive valid cognition (*rig shes tshad ma*),¹⁰⁸⁹ would not be a strict non-affirming negation (*med dgag*), the mere negation of true existence, being instead an affirming negation (*ma yin dgag*). This is because in the process of making the mere negation of true existence its direct object, it affirms a positive object, the gnosis, as a mental object. It would also follow, absurdly, that the word *truthlessness* indirectly affirms as its expressed [meaning] (*brjod byar*) *the mind* that understands truthlessness. That is why [Tsong kha pa's] *Great Exposition of the Prajñāmūla* says:

[Hypothesis:] Then even the *existence* of essencelessness must be understood indirectly, hence being established by a cognitive act (*rig shes*).

[Reply:] Were that so, then the words *the sprout is essenceless* would have to indirectly teach the *existence* of essencelessness, for the mind that follows [the hearing of] those words indirectly understands its existence. Therefore, it would be an affirming negation that indirectly affirms another phenomenon apart from the mere negation of the object to be refuted, thereby prohibiting its being a nonaffirming negation.¹⁰⁹⁰

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Try to interpret that passage [and still maintain that the understanding of emptiness indirectly understands anything like the mind that is cognizing it or even the *existence* of the emptiness itself]. If the cognitive act that understands essencelessness were to establish the existence of the subject, [that is, of the cognition itself,] indirectly in the process of directly understanding the essencelessness, then what need is there to say that it would also indirectly understand the existence of the essencelessness [and hence, as Tsong kha pa has clearly stated that the latter does not take place, how could the former]. If the direct understanding of an object indirectly establishes the existence of the object possessor, then it would be contradictory to claim that it did not indirectly establish the existence of the object itself. If you accept that, then, as it is necessary to definitely accept, as the Lord himself has repeatedly said, that the existence of essencelessness is established by a nominal valid cognition and not by a cognitive act, [and as your position violates this, your attempt at] setting forth the Madhyamaka's own system collapses once again.

To accept that a consciousness *x* directly understands itself is to misconceive the position of this system because it would follow, absurdly, that every cognitive valid cognition would be both a valid cognition that analyzes the ultimate and a valid cognition that analyzes the nominal. If, by the power of taking as its direct object the negation of true existence, the existence of the consciousness itself is directly understood, then, by the power of taking the

negation of true existence as a mental object, a positive phenomenon, [the existence of the consciousness,] would be affirmed, hence degenerating the status [of emptiness, reality,] as a nonaffirming negation. To sometimes accept that all direct understandings must have [their objects] appear to them (*rnam par shar bas khyab pa*), and on other occasions to accept that every consciousness is directly understood by autocognition is to have a major problem with one's memory.¹⁰⁹¹ As the *Great Exposition of the Avatāra* [of Tsong kha pa] says: [427]

Were it as others believe, that is, that a valid cognition is established by a valid cognition, without allowing that a valid cognition be established simply by the establishment of its perceived [object], then a valid cognition could be established independently of the perceived [object].¹⁰⁹²

So, to claim that the author of the *Great Exposition* accepts that a valid cognition is established by itself, by a valid cognition, either directly or indirectly, is to completely misinterpret [his intention].

What we advocate is as follows. The eye consciousness apprehending blue establishes the existence of the eye consciousness apprehending blue. How does it establish it? We do not claim that it establishes it by virtue of its perceiving the blue. **The eye consciousness apprehending blue, by virtue of its perceiving blue, leads directly to a consciousness that remembers the apprehension of the blue by the eye consciousness apprehending blue.** It is that very consciousness which remembers the apprehension of blue by the eye consciousness apprehending the blue that eliminates both the reification that "blue does not exist" and that "the eye consciousness apprehending blue does not exist," so that it is a valid cognition which can lead to the ascertainment that these *do* exist simply by one's turning one's mind to the matter (*blo kha phyogs pa tsam*). Hence, the memory consciousness itself is a valid cognition in regard to the existence of the eye consciousness. When this later memory consciousness remembers the blue, it does not do so at the expense of making the *apprehension of the blue* its object. It is a memory that, thinking "I have seen blue," picks out the apprehension of the blue. Hence, it is a memory of **both the blue and the apprehension of the blue.** Therefore, even though the eye consciousness apprehending blue establishes the eye consciousness apprehending blue in dependence on the perception of the blue, it is not established by the eye consciousness apprehending blue [directly, in an autocognitive way]. Likewise, even though the eye consciousness apprehending blue perceives the blue, the eye consciousness apprehending blue is not a valid cognition in regard to the *apprehension* of blue by the eye consciousness apprehending blue. Instead, it is the consciousness that remembers the apprehension of blue by the eye consciousness apprehending blue that is a valid cognition in regard to this [apprehension]. [428]

The nonaffirming negation that is the mere negation of true existence is perceived by the *āryan* trainees' equipoised gnosis understanding reality in a way that resembles water mixed with water, [the object, emptiness, and the gnosis appearing to be inseparable]. It does not at all perceive either the *existence* of the truthlessness nor the existence of the gnosis itself. Nonetheless, the later memory consciousness that remembers the understanding of reality on the part of that gnosis establishes the *perception* of reality by that gnosis, and hence it also establishes the gnosis. Therefore, *in dependence on* the cognitive act, both the existence of the cognitive act and the existence of reality are established, but the cognitive act itself does not establish the existence of the cognitive act and the existence of reality. That is why the *Great Exposition of the Prajñāmūla* says:

Without depending upon any other intervening valid cognitions, based on the power of the cognitive act, there can arise a mind that is in direct opposition to the misapprehending mode of the reification that misapprehends essencelessness to be nonexistent. Because that very [mind] eliminates that reification, [we say that] based on the cognitive act the reification is eliminated. It is not that the cognitive act [itself] cuts through the reification, however.¹⁰⁹³

From such citations, together with their examples [in the *Great Exposition of the Prajñāmūla*], the way of positing the later memory consciousness as a valid cognition is extensively explained. Then, in the *Great Exposition of the Avatāra*, the way of establishing a valid cognition by means of establishing the perception of the perceived [object] by a valid cognition is explained. One ought to know how to explain [these points] by fitting together these two explanations.

In the *Exposition of the Avatāra* it says:

The apprehension of blue is established by the very establishment of blue. For example, it is similar to the fact that the subject, [that is, the consciousnesses that apprehends the object,] is remembered by that very memory of the object; and that memory does not arise due to the subject experiencing itself, as others accept.¹⁰⁹⁴

And also: "In this way [we see that] the apprehension of blue is not established by autocognition as others accept, but is instead taught as being established by the valid cognition of direct sense perception."¹⁰⁹⁵ Even though [Tsong kha pa says this], he is not claiming that the apprehension of blue perceives itself, and that the direct perception that apprehends blue is a valid cognition in regard to the existence of the apprehension of blue. [The meaning] of the previous [citation] we have already explained. The latter one means that "the existence of the apprehension of blue is taught as being established *in dependence on* the direct perception which apprehends blue."

Likewise, nonconceptual mistaken consciousnesses such as the sense consciousness to which two moons appear or to which imaginary hair appears, as well as the conceptual mistaken consciousnesses such as the apprehension of sound as permanent and the apprehension of a self, are all valid cognitions in regard to the portion of their appearance; that is, in regard to the appearance of the two moons and the appearance of sound as permanent.¹⁰⁹⁶ Hence, these consciousnesses' perception of such appearances establish the existence of these consciousnesses in a way similar to the preceding [case of nonmistaken valid cognitions]. However, in the case of those still on the path of training, though reality directly appears to their equipoised wisdom that directly understands reality, the portion of the appearance, that is, the direct appearance of reality to those gnoses, is not the object of those gnoses. This is because, if the portion of the appearance were their indirect object, it would contradict that reality appears *directly*, and if it were the direct object, there would have to exist the appearance of duality within that [gnosis], because that [appearance] is a conventional object different from that gnosis. If that were so, [that is, if a dualistic appearance existed therein,] then it would contradict that [the gnosis is equipoised on reality] the way water mixes into water, for, except for the mind of a perfect Buddha, it is impossible for a single mind to be the [430] common locus of those two, [that is, it is impossible for a single mind to directly cognize both the ultimate truth and the conventional truth]. Nonetheless, the memory of reality directly appearing to that gnosis establishes: (1) the existence of the gnosis, (2) the existence of reality, and (3) the portion of the appearance that is the appearance of reality. This concludes the exposition of how we reject autocognition.

¹⁰⁹⁶ As we shall see later, according to dGe lugs pa exegesis, this is one of the uncommon tenets of the Prasangika school, namely, that every consciousness, whether mistaken or not, is a valid cognition, that is, correct, in regard to what appears to it. Which is to say that, though it may be mistaken in regard to the object it is perceiving, it is nonetheless valid in regard to the appearance itself. In other words, that things are actually appearing to it in this false way is indisputable. That things exist as they appear to is not.