

## His Burning Pants

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*I* John Perry has helped us to see more clearly the special nature of some beliefs about ourselves.<sup>1</sup> When I look over and see a man with his pants on fire, I am alarmed. I shout, “Drop and roll!” But my alarm becomes panic, shock, or dropping and rolling when I realize that I am looking in a mirror.

When I first looked in the mirror, I formed a belief about someone—in fact, about me. But I acted as I might toward almost anyone but me. My subsequent discovery of the mirror led to a belief about myself that motivated a particular kind of action—action that is appropriate for me to preserve myself rather than action of the sort that I might do in the attempt to help someone else.

We shall call the second more intimate type of belief about myself “*self-attributive*” belief. This is not a particularly good name, because before my big realization I saw myself in the mirror and attributed the property of *having burning pants* to me. I just didn’t “realize” that it was me. Getting clearer about the nature of this *realization* will be the point of this paper. But meanwhile we need a name for the special beliefs about the self that result from such realizations, and although “self-attributive” is not very good, neither is anything else.

Perry’s discussion has made it clear that no purely descriptive belief, of the sort

(B) The man with property *F* has burning pants,

can be identified with self-attributive belief. Unless *F* is filled out by expressions involving “I”, “here”, or “now”, there is always the possibility that one can accept (B) and yet not accept

(C) I have burning pants

(at least for a short time). My self-attributive belief is not reducible to any descriptively characterizable belief lacking “I”, “here”, or “now”.

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\*The writing of this paper has been supported by a grant from the Syracuse University Senate Research Fund.