Attitudes, self-ascriptions, and introspection

ABSTRACT: In this paper, we critically address Robert Gordon’s (2007) recent attempt at explaining self-ascriptions of propositional attitudes without an appeal to introspection. In particular, after explaining Gordon’s proposal for how we make such self-ascriptions and for how we can explain their impressive reliability, we show that his position is ultimately untenable. We then provide a different explanation for how we can self-ascribe such attitudes and go on to show that we can do this without any real reliance on introspection.

AUTHORS: Brad Armour-Garb and P.D. Magnus
Department of Philosophy, University at Albany SUNY
pmagnus <at> fecundity.com
https://www.fecundity.com/job
This draft was posted online June 30, 2016.

KEY WORDS: propositional attitudes, self-ascription, introspection, Gareth Evans, Richard Moran, Robert Gordon, expressing, ascent routines, belief, metaethics

Introduction

People regularly answer questions about their propositional attitudes. Moreover, they are fairly reliable at this. For example, if someone is asked whether she believes that Mickey Mouse has a tail, she can quickly answer if she does. Only under rare circumstances would we say that she was wrong if she sincerely asserted that she did believe that Mickey Mouse has a tail. But this raises some questions. How do people readily make such self-ascriptions? And what explains their impressive reliability?

Gareth Evans provides a widely influential answer to these questions for the attitude of belief. He writes, “I get myself in a position to answer the question whether I believe that p by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether p” (Evans 1982, p. 225). His idea is that when he considers whether he himself presently believes p, he neither looks at whether his past behavior betrays a belief that p (as he might do if considering whether somebody else believes something) nor does he reflect on the contents of his own mind to determine whether p is already among his beliefs. Instead, he considers whether or not p, and he judges that he believes that p if his evidence sufficiently favors p.

This pattern is extended by Richard Moran (1988) and Robert Gordon (1995, 2007) to mental states and attitudes beyond belief. Gordon (1995, 2007) calls the general pattern an ascent routine (henceforth, an ‘AR’). In the case of belief, speakers are in a position to utter "I believe that p" just in the case they would be in a position to utter "p". So there is an AR which leads from the latter to the former. In general, an AR “allows a speaker to self-ascribe a given propositional attitude (PA) by
deploying the process that generates a corresponding *lower level* utterance” (2007, p. 153, italics original). Alvin Goldman (2006) and Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich (2003) object to extending the pattern, arguing that it does not work when applied to attitudes other than belief.

The most recent defense of ARs (Gordon 2007), relies on a distinction between expressing and self-ascribing an attitude. We begin (in section 1) by explaining how Gordon appeals to this distinction, but go on to argue (in sections 2 and 3) that Gordon’s use of the distinction is untenable. Nevertheless, we argue (in section 4), ARs can be given for attitudes besides belief.

A key feature of Gordon’s appeal to ARs, a feature shared with Evans’ and Moran’s accounts, is that answering a question about one’s current attitudes does not involve introspection on that very attitude. To determine what one now believes, one does not check for the belief in the inventory of one’s mind. Instead, one turns one’s attention to other things. We ultimately argue that self-ascribing any propositional attitude has a similar structure, which we think matches the phenomenology of considering "Do I Φ that p?". It never involves introspecting upon the act of Φing itself. However, we are neutral on the question of whether it involves introspection on other things.

Gordon contends that there is “an algorithm for generating, for each propositional attitude type, including hope, a corresponding type of lower level utterance that may be used as input to an ascent routine” (2007, p. 156). We do not hold that there is a general algorithm. Different propositional attitudes involve different ARs, and there is no general recipe for cooking up all of them. Yet we consider several cases and argue that, for each of them, there is an AR that is available.

Before offering our positive argument, however, we consider and evaluate the details of Gordon’s most recent defense of ARs.

Note that Gordon appeals to ARs for the stronger conclusion that such self ascriptions involve no reliance on introspection, as part of his radical Simulation Theory (henceforth, ‘ST’). His aim is not only to explain how we can reliably self-ascribe propositional attitudes without introspection, but also how we can explain and predict the behavior of others. With respect to ST, this is a key difference between Gordon and Goldman: Goldman (2006) thinks that the means by which we arrive at self-ascriptions of propositional attitudes involves introspection. By contrast, Gordon (1995, 2007) contends that no introspection (no “recognition”) is needed. Since we are neutral on the general question of whether introspection ever occurs, we are not committed to any particular version of ST. Insofar as we show that self-ascription that one Φs does not require introspection upon Φ, though, our result is a welcome one for advocates of radical ST.

1. Early Gordon and Ascent Routines

Like Evans (1982) and Moran (1988), Gordon (1995) proposed that we answer the higher level question about our beliefs by answering the lower level question about the world. For example, a given speaker could answer whether she believes that Mickey Mouse has a tail by attempting to answer the lower level question of
whether Mickey Mouse has a tail and then semantically ascending to assertorically utter “I believe [do not believe] that Mickey Mouse has a tail.” So her self report of belief does not require or involve introspection. This was and remains central for Gordon— that we do not answer such a question by reflecting on our inner states, by introspecting. The means by which we appear to self ascribe beliefs thus provides the general model of an Ascent Routine (AR).

Goldman (2006) and Nichols and Stich (2003) object to the proposal (from Gordon 1995) on grounds that it does not generalize and explain the self-ascription of attitudes other than belief, such as hope. To determine whether or not ”I believe that p”, the ascent is from whether or not ”p”. But they do not find lower level questions about the world that would answer the higher level question about other attitudes. The appeal to ARs does not work in general, they charge, and so they dismiss Gordon’s account.

Gordon (2007, p. 156) identifies a general assumption which both drove his earlier theorizing and which was central to Goldman’s and Nichols and Stich’s objections. He calls it “Constraint C”, that the lower level utterance about the world and the higher level utterance about the speaker are not utterances of the same sentence type. In Gordon (2007), he jettisons Constraint C and argues that an AR can be employed where the lower level utterance and the higher level utterance are of the same sentence type. For example, a speaker can ascend from ”I hope that p!” (uttered one way) to ”I hope that p” (uttered in another way). In elaborating this, Gordon appeals to a distinction between a given speaker expressing an attitude and that speaker self-ascribing, attributing, or reporting that she is in or possesses that attitude. He claims that a given utterance of “I hope the team won!” can function as an expression of the speaker’s hope and that an assertoric utterance of “I hope the team won” can function as a self-ascription of that attitude.

Gordon’s new move is that the way in which we come to be able to self-ascribe a propositional attitude is by doing whatever is done to generate the non-ascriptive, expressive utterance. He explains, “[w]hen I actually intend to be attributing to myself the hope that the team won, my brain calls into play the same processing that gives rise to the non-ascriptive ’I hope the team won!’” (2007, p. 161, italics original). So, Gordon’s idea is this: We come to be able to self-ascribe, or attribute, (e.g.) our hope that the team won by engaging in whatever psychological process is used to get us to express our hope that the team won— provided, of course, that we have the concept of hope. Gordon contends that when we utter “I hope the team won!”, in the expressive way, what we say is probably right about ourselves. It follows that if we engage the same psychological process that is used in expressing our hope as part of our self-ascriptions of our hopes, then our self-ascriptions would be reliable. So the AR, from expression to ascription, is meant to account for the general reliability of self-ascriptions.

2. Gordon on Expressing versus Reporting

If we are to follow Gordon and distinguish expressing an attitude from reporting on it, we need to know more about this distinction and, more generally, about the expression relation that he is positing. But Gordon (2007) says little about how we
are to understand these acts. Nevertheless, there is a vast literature from metaethics which seems to concern this very distinction. In general, expressivists about ethics take *expressing an attitude* to involve conveying, or communicating, that you are in a state of mind without saying that you are in that state of mind. Following Blackburn (1984) and Jackson and Pettit (1989), when assertorically uttered in the right context, “Snow is white” expresses your belief that snow is white. By contrast, rather than expressing your attitude, when assertorically uttered in the right context, “I believe that snow is white” reports on your attitude and is true if, and only if, you genuinely possess that belief. Metaethicists—some of them, anyway—contend that we can apply this distinction to the ethical attitudes. They propose distinguishing the view that ‘Act A is wrong’ reports a certain pro-attitude against act A (e.g., the speaker’s disapproval of performing act A) from the view that it expresses a certain pro-attitude against A. The former captures subjectivism and the latter expressivism.¹

Gordon’s use of this distinction—expressing versus reporting on—does not quite fit either the expressivist’s or the subjectivist’s view. On Gordon’s view, utterances of (e.g.) “I hope that p” can serve to express an attitude but also to report that the speaker is in that attitude. Perhaps Gordon will claim that what is central to the distinction is whether a speaker uttering one of these sentences is saying that she is in the relevant state of mind, where by *saying* he means *asserting*. So the difference between expressing your hope versus reporting on that hope (e.g., when you utter “I hope the team won”) might turn on whether or not you are asserting what you are uttering. If you are asserting the sentence, then you are reporting on your attitude; if you are not asserting, but are nevertheless uttering that sentence, then you are not reporting on but are, rather, expressing that attitude.

This makes sense, at least regarding a condition for reporting, but it does not shed light on the sense in which an utterance of “I hope the team won!” manages to express the speaker’s attitude. Indeed, as we will see below, the real problem seems to be that it is just not clear in what sense a speaker uttering "I φ that p", for attitude φ, expresses that attitude. To see this, we begin with Gordon’s (2007, 158-9) discussion of desire and will then turn to his discussion of hope.

### 2.1 Gordon on Desire

When discussing desire, Gordon considers a child of age 2 who is trained to use (and, so, utter) “want banana!” or “I want banana” without having the concept of desire. According to Gordon, the child uses the utterance as a means for performing the act of requesting or demanding a banana and “is expressing its desire, but not (also) ascribing it” (2007, p. 159). So, this is supposed to be a case in which the child expresses her desire without self-ascribing her desire, given (i) that she is

---

¹ By contrast to expressivists, subjectivists hold (roughly) that (1) “Murder is wrong” means the same thing as (2) “I disapprove of murder”. Since (2) is a factual statement, it has truth conditions. So, for the subjectivist, (1) and moral claims generally have truth conditions—just not the truth conditions that objectivists think that they have. By contrast, if expressivists are right, a sentence like (1) does not have truth conditions at all.
performing the act of requesting or demanding a banana and (ii) that the 2-year-old speaker lacks the concept of desire.

But this contention, that the child who is performing the act of requesting or demanding a banana expresses her attitude by uttering what she does, seems wrong. To be sure, when you perform the act of demanding (or requesting), this suggests—and others will likely conclude—that you want what you have demanded. But requesting or demanding something is performing one type of act and expressing an attitude is performing another type of act. Importantly, these are two acts, not one. Moreover, since one can demand without desiring, demanding must be separate from expressing desire.

Gordon is right that when a child of age 2 utters "I want banana!", as a request or a demand for a banana, she typically will desire the banana. But this is very different from claiming that when she so utters, when she performs the act of requesting or demanding, she is also performing the act of expressing her desire. Gordon has confused doing something that suggests that one is in a state with expressing that one is in that state. Therefore, it remains unclear in what sense someone who utters "I φ that p", for attitude φ, manages to express the attitude, φ.

2.2 Gordon on Hope

Gordon’s other example of a case in which he alleges that we express our attitude by using that very attitude verb in a non-ascriptive way involves hope. The example that he provides makes use of a sentence that is uttered with the force of an exclamation, “I hope the team won!”. Good examples of exclamatory utterances would be “Hoorah!”, which seems to express (or convey or signal) happiness (or approval), and “OK!” or “Alright!”, which might express acceptance. In these cases, part of what makes the utterances non-ascriptive is that they are non-declarative and do not possess truth-conditions. But Gordon’s example—regarding ‘hope’—does not seem to be non-declarative and does seem to possess truth conditions. So it does not seem expressive or, more importantly, non-ascriptive.

For one thing, unlike an utterance of “I want banana!”, which the child uses as a request or a demand for a banana who does not possess the concept of desire, it is not clear how one can use “I hope that p!” to perform an act without possessing the concept of hope. Let us leave that aside, for now.

According to Gordon (2007, p. 161), “when I say ‘I hope the team won!’ what I say is probably right about myself, even though I mean to be talking only about the outcome of the game.” But if the speaker is “talking only about the outcome of the game”, as Gordon contends, then in what sense is an utterance of “I hope the team won!” an expression of the speaker’s attitude, as Gordon claims that it is? How can the speaker be expressing his attitude if he is talking only about the outcome of the game? If it makes sense to describe one who is expressing as “talking about” anything then if the speaker is genuinely expressing his attitude, his hope, it seems that he is talking about himself after all.

If the speaker, when he utters what he does, is talking only about the outcome of the game, then Gordon’s idea might be that when the speaker utters “I hope the team won!”, he is conveying something like that it would be good if the
team won, which is different from reporting on ones’ attitude. The problem is that if this is right then it seem that the speaker is genuinely asserting—he is asserting that it would be good if the team won—but that is incompatible with Gordon’s claim that he is expressing his attitude rather than asserting something. Of course, a speaker who utters such a sentence will generally manage to convey his enthusiasm about the team, and a hearer will likely conclude that if the speaker is being sincere, he hopes that the team won, but it is not yet clear in what sense the speaker who utters such a sentence is expressing that attitude, viz. hope.

As we have seen, Gordon’s idea is that an utterance of “I hope the team won!” can express one’s hope rather than report on it. If that were the case, then that sentence, as uttered, would not be in the indicative mood. But this raises the question: In what mood is it? It is clearly not an imperative, for the speaker is not demanding anything, nor is it in the interrogative mood, since the speaker is not asking anything. There is a grammatical mood, different from the standard ones, which might fit the bill—the optative mood, which expresses a wish, hope, or desire by the use of a modal verb. Although English does not recognize the optative mood, other languages (e.g., Hindi and Cheyenne) do. In English, the subjunctive form of a verb is sometimes used in what we might think of as “optative expressions”, as might be found in a sentence like “God help us!”. And modal verbs can also be used to convey (or signal) hopes to form optative sentences as in "May you have a long life!". But Gordon’s target sentence is not an optative sentence and ‘hope’ is not classified as an optative expression, a modal verb. Hence, we cannot see how an utterance of “I hope the team won!” manages to express the speaker’s hope, rather than reporting that she is in that state (or, as we have seen, asserting something that is only about the outcome of the game). To be sure, the speaker aims to convey her enthusiasm for the team (and can succeed in so conveying), by exclaiming what he does, but this seems to be a far cry from merely expressing his attitude. Hence, it is still not clear in what sense an utterance by a speaker of “I φ that p” manages to express, rather than to report on, the speaker’s attitude, φ.

3. Further Worries

As we have seen, Gordon’s view is that speakers sometimes use mental state-involving sentences to express, rather than to report, those states. We argued in section 2 that this cannot be "express" in senses which are familiar from metaethics or the philosophy of language. One might defend Gordon by insisting that he means something different by "express". So let’s suppose, for the sake of argument, that speakers sometimes use mental state-involving sentences to express in some other way—the way that Gordon intends. We argue that Gordon’s account still fails, for two reasons. (We give these reasons briefly and elaborate on them below.) First, the reasons he gives for thinking that uses of mental state-involving sentences are expressive overgeneralize. They apply to obvious perceptual reports just as well as to sentences about mental states. Second, this other sense of “express” does not make sense for all attitudes in all contexts.
3.1 Gordon and Overgeneralization

On Gordon’s account, it may be unclear when ordinary adults utter "I want a banana" whether they are expressing or reporting their desire. This is why, in elaborating the distinction, he considers children who are just beginning to learn the words (and, eventually, the concepts) involved. When such young children utter "I want banana" (or just "Banana!") , they are demanding that adults provide them with a banana. The children are, in Gordon’s sense, expressing their desires. He argues that this cannot be a report, because the children lack the necessary concept of desire, which, as we have seen, would be required to report a mental state. Gordon writes,

their verbal expressions would, if construed as ascriptions, be quite accurate, the children needn’t have the concept x wants (desires) that p. Actually, they needn’t even be capable of interpreting ‘I (want that p)’ as having a subject-predicate syntax. If they do not have the concept, then they cannot be applying it. (2007, p. 159)

Gordon goes on to cite psychological research that young children only use propositional attitude verbs in the first person and in the present tense. They lack the ability to use them with other subjects, within the scope of negation, or within the scope of a modal operator. He argues, "This is good evidence that at this early age they did not have the conceptual resources to ascribe the corresponding attitudes, whether to others or to themselves" (2007, p. 163).

Since we are here allowing Gordon’s argument to define a bespoke sense of "express", we take these conditions to be sufficient for concluding that such children are expressing rather than reporting something. Yet consider a child who learns to identify dogs. The child sees a dog, points, and says "Dog!". There may be a period when the child can reliably ostend in this way, but before she can discourse about the absence of dogs, about the presence of dogs elsewhere, or about possible dogs — that is, before she can use the word ‘dog’ in the scope of negation or modal operators. By parity of reasoning, Gordon’s argument leads us to conclude that the child lacks the concept dog and, as a consequence, she cannot report the presence of a dog but is expressing something by uttering "Dog". Yet it seems obvious that the child is reporting the presence of a dog, even though her ability to deploy the word ‘dog’ is limited. This ostensive act, after all, is the paradigm case of a report: The child points and says "Dog" in the presence of a dog. The tribesman points and says "Gavagai". It follows that Gordon’s peculiar sense of "express" is compatible with something being a report, even though his argument requires that the acts be mutually exclusive.

3.2 Gordon and Under Generation

Gordon’s central move requires that the same string of words can be used to either express or report on a propositional attitude such that we can ascend or move from the former to the latter. (This is his rejection of Constraint C.) He marks this distinction by using italics and an exclamation point, so that "I fear that p!" is non-ascriptive, while "I fear that p" is ascriptive (Gordon 2007, p. 160). Yet it is not clear
to us that we ever utter this sentence in a non-ascriptive way— that is, in the italicized rather than in the unitalicized way. How could we tell that we were doing so? If we can’t, why suppose that the italics mark any genuine difference?

Of course, we can express fear without declaring anything. Imagine Jesse, who is afraid of mice, who opens a cupboard when a mouse scurries out from behind a peanut jar. Jesse shrieks and pulls away. He has expressed fear rather than explicitly reporting it. He might do the same with other utterances (such as "A mouse!" "Eek, a mouse!") and perhaps even with utterances that includes fear-related words ("Scary mouse!" or "No, I fear it!"). However, none of these sentences could be used to explicitly report a propositional attitude. They at most indicate his fear of mice or of this mouse, but not his fear that some outcome will obtain.

Suppose that Jesse utters a sentence using propositional language, like "I fear that it will bite me." This is fear not of the present object but of an eventuality or a possibility. It is not clear what psychological change could happen between his first and second utterance of this sentence if he were first to utter it in a non-ascriptive and then in an ascriptive way. This suggests that there is no difference between his saying it (as it were) in italics and in a regular typeface. Phenomenologically, we feel fear in the face of a fearsome thing. The mouse shows up as scary. It requires some reflection to figure out what exactly one is afraid will happen, and often this is epistemically indeterminate.²

With fear, there is always a gap between the raw fear of a thing and the reflective fear that some outcome will occur. Because of this gap, any use Jesse makes of "I fear that the mouse will bite me" reports his specific fear that the mouse will bite him. Although some instances of the schema "I Φ that p" might be used for something besides reporting — for expressing in Gordon’s sense — the distinction is not tenable for all Φ, for all p, and in every context. This counterexample is enough to disprove Gordon’s formula, which requires that there be an AR from "I Φ that p!" to "I Φ that p" for all cases.

4. Reporting on our attitudes

Gordon (1995, 2007) argued that, when considering whether one holds a particular propositional attitude, one does not introspect upon one’s mental state to recognize the attitude. In considering whether one believes that p, one does not turn the mind’s eye toward the belief or check the contents of the belief box; instead, one considers the evidence that is relevant to p. The objection that forced Gordon (2007) to appeal to expressing in the way that we have criticized so far was that this account does not generalize to other propositional attitudes. Although Gordon’s expressive view fails, that does not mean that we should accept an alternative according to

² The same point applies to an utterance of ‘I fear that it bites’, as said when looking straight at a mouse. Unlike in our other example, this involves fear of a present, extant object. Even so, the speaker uttering this sentence is talking about a potentiality (or a possibility)—that the mouse might bite or, perhaps, that it seems to have the potential to bite. As with our previous example, in the present one, it is not clear what psychological change could happen between his first and second utterance of this sentence if he were first to utter it in a non-ascriptive and then in an ascriptive way.
which self-ascriptions of propositional attitudes are all based on introspection. We contend that the introspection view fails in at least two respects. First, determining whether one \( \Phi \)s that \( p \) does not involve directly introspecting on one's \( \Phi \)ing. If it involves introspection, it is introspection on something else (e.g., on how one would assess certain outcomes). Second, insofar as it has special authority, self-ascription is partly a practical matter rather than a matter of reporting a pre-existing condition.

We doubt that there is a general formula for what one does in evaluating whether one \( \Phi \)s that \( p \), for all propositional attitudes, \( \Phi \). In this, we differ from both an introspectionist view (that for all \( \Phi \) and \( p \), that evaluating whether one \( \Phi \)s that \( p \) involves introspecting as to whether one has the attitude \( \Phi \) toward the proposition that \( p \)) and Gordon’s own view (that for all \( \Phi \) and \( p \), that it involves ascending from a purely expressive use of "I \( \Phi \) that \( p \)" to an attributive use of the same sentence uttered without any appeal to introspection). As such, we cannot provide a general argument that the introspection view fails for all attitudes. What we can do is argue that it fails in important cases and suggest how one might move forward with other cases.

Belief is the clearest. If you are asked if you believe that \( p \), the typical way to answer is to consider whether the evidence that is available to you favors or is against the proposition that \( p \). This is the idea originally posed by Evans (1982) and also advanced by Moran (1988). Moran notes that "determining what I believe exhibits a peculiar shiftiness. The more I try to focus directly on what I think or feel about something, the less definite or constant my state of mind becomes. If we picture what I am doing here as tracking down an inner state, then it can seem like a search whose object mysteriously changes as my introspective gaze is directed upon it" (Moran 1988, p. 139-140). The problem with the introspection view, as Moran goes on to note, is that it presumes that a question of what you now believe is reporting on an inner state that is already fixed. Reporting a belief is not merely reporting. Instead, it is also making a commitment, which can (and should) be responsive to your current assessment of what the world is like.

4.1 Beyond belief

Judging fear—deciding whether you judge something to be fearful—is somewhat more complicated than judging belief. When one judges that one fears that \( p \), one typically judges that there is a non-negligible chance that \( p \), that \( p \) is not assured, and that \( p \) is (or would be) scary. The first features, that there is a non-negligible chance

---

3 Of course, you might not actually consider evidence when judging that you believe such-and-so. Maybe you considered evidence already and remember what your considered judgment is. Maybe you misremember, and make a confident announcement in error. But those are cases of remembering, and are still not cases of introspecting upon your belief.

4 We add the second feature, that \( p \) is not assured, because it seems to us that one cannot fear that \( p \) if one knows, or is aware of the fact, that \( p \) will happen. Of course, you can be afraid of things which you know will arrive (e.g., you can be afraid of the dentist, as you await his arrival in the room), but that is fear of, not fear that. We are focused on the latter.

One may add the further conjunct, that one has the possibility that \( p \) in mind. If someone asks you whether you are afraid of an imminent danger that you had not considered before, you might
that p but that p is not inevitable, are claims about what the world is like. Evaluating them is a matter of assessing what you believe. The final feature, that p would be scary, might be understood in a couple of ways. When Jesse is afraid of the mouse, the phenomenology is that the mouse shows up to him as a fearsome thing. So scariness could be taken to be a claim about the world; then it is a judgment in response to evidence in the way that belief is. Alternately, one might hold that scariness should be understood subjectively. The prospect of a mouse bite being scary to Jesse would consist in his disliking that outcome or having the attitude, which might be expressed by (non-assertorically) uttering "Boo mouse bites!" when contemplating the possible occurrence of such an event; he would evaluate the scariness of an outcome by considering how much he would dislike it. Considering how much he would dislike an outcome might be taken to involve introspection, but, if so, it is introspection on his disvaluing the outcome rather than directly on his fear.

Before moving on to consider other attitudes, we pause to consider a brief objection to what we have said about judging fear. Here’s the objection: In order for you to determine whether something is (or would be) scary, it seems that you have to determine whether you fear that thing, but that would appear to make our proposal, regarding self-ascriptions of fear, circular. Our response is fairly straightforward. ‘Scary’ is, in a sense, ambiguous. We sometimes use the word to mean just that we fear something—that it scares us. In this sense, it is understood subjectively. But, as we intimated, above, it can also be used to mean that something has the feature (or the attribute) of scariness. To see the difference, consider a case in which someone surprises you, and you scream. In that case, you might say “That was scary”. Of course you do not mean that the person is scary; you mean to be talking about yourself and your reaction upon being startled. By contrast, suppose that you look at a picture of Charles Manson and remark, "He’s scary". In that case, you mean to be attributing scariness to him.\(^5\) We intend the latter sense of ‘scary’, not the former sense, in our proposal for self-ascriptions of fear. But to determine whether something (e.g., some state of affairs, given a ‘that’-clause for it) is scary in that sense—whether it seems to possess the attribute of scariness—does not require that you determine whether you fear it. Hence, no such circularity arises.

Having addressed that possible objection, we turn to contemplate self-ascriptions of a couple of other attitudes. Something similar to our proposal for self-ascriptions of fear can be said about self-ascriptions of other attitudes, like hoping and intending. To see this, we consider some points raised by Moran.

Moran writes that "a practical question about one’s emotional response will normally be transparent to a theoretical question about the world. One answers the question of whether to feel hopeful or ashamed by determining whether something is actually hopeful or shameful" (1988, p. 145). When one judges that one hopes that p, one judges that p would be a positive outcome. Further, one typically judges that p

---

\(^5\) We have no stake in deciding whether scariness is an objective feature of the world or not. Indeed, our response to the going objection does not require that we take a stand on that issue.
is possible but that it is not assured. If one thought an outcome were genuinely impossible, then one could not even hope for it; if one thought an outcome were assured, one would simply expect it instead of hoping for it. Like fear, this is a combination of a judgment about the world (that p is neither impossible nor assured) and an evaluation of p (that p would be good).

Gordon includes "I intend that p" at the end of a list that starts with "I hope that p" and "I fear that p". Intending most explicitly involves the practical element emphasized by Moran. In coming to the conclusion that one intends that p now (rather than merely reporting that one had intended p previously), one decides or reaffirms the decision to bring about p. The decision process by which one concludes that one does intend that p is the very same process that forms or reaffirms one’s intention.

We do not have a general recipe for extending our analysis to all of the propositional attitudes. Some may be considerably more involved than what we have said about belief, fear, hope, and intention. Yet we suggest that these cases provide building blocks for handling the rest. Self-ascribing a propositional attitude "I Φ that p" will involve a combination of assessing what the world is like, assessing the value of certain prospects, and affirming or rejecting plans or decisions. These are questions about p or decisions to be made, rather than matters to be resolved by introspecting on the very attitude one self-ascribes.

4.2 Practical and theoretical questions without introspection

In the above cases, we have taken the question whether one Φs that p in what Moran (1988) calls a practical, rather than in a theoretical, way. The practical question is to whether one Φs that p is taken up in the first person and in the present tense. In considering whether you believe that p, for example, you consider evidence because you want your belief to reflect whether or not p is actually the case. More generally, and as we have seen, our answers to practical questions, regarding believing, fearing, hoping and intending, do not involve any direct introspection of those very mental states.

A theoretical question is most easily posed in the past tense. To take a specific case, suppose you were asked whether you (at age 5) believed that there was a tooth fairy. It would be inappropriate to consider the evidence available to you now. Instead, you might consider what you at that age said and did. Insofar as it is not like a judgment about someone else, it is because you might know some things about what you were like at that age that a third-person observer would not know. Imagine, for example, that you remember lying in bed and wondering what color hair the tooth fairy had. Even if this involves some process that might (in some sense) seem “introspective”—perhaps the calling up of a memory— it is not a direct apprehension of a belief in your own mind. As a result, answering this higher level

---

6 To our ear, there's something wrong with an assertoric utterance of "I hope that I live forever though, of course, that is impossible". This is part of what distinguishes hoping from wishing. One can wish something even though one deems it impossible, provided that one judges, or would be disposed to judge, that it would better for it to obtain than for it to fail to obtain.
question about whether you held that belief does not require that you introspect on that very belief.

We can also raise theoretical questions about more recent attitudes, and one can raise theoretical questions about the future. You might consider whether you had intended to take out the trash this morning, and you might predict what your fears will be when you are older. Again, introspection plays no special role in these judgments.\(^7\) Thus, direct introspection of our own mental states is required for neither practical nor theoretical questions about our propositional attitudes.

**Works Cited**


\(^7\) Although it is possible to pose theoretical questions in the present tense, it is somewhat strained. Someone who wonders whether they now \(\Phi\) that \(p\) in the theoretical sense treats themselves not as an agent but as a passive observer.