INTRODUCING DISCORD

Mark Schroeder

IN THIS ARTICLE, I introduce and explain an underappreciated but, as I will argue, pervasive phenomenon that I call *discord*. Discord, I will argue by illustration, helps to explain the source, dynamics, and resilience of many forms of interpersonal conflict. And it is a kind of misunderstanding into which philosophy turns out to offer a particularly privileged form of insight. By better understanding the nature of discord, we can better understand its inevitability, better navigate it, and better appreciate how it can amplify minor conflicts into more significant forms of strife.

1. CONCEPTS

1.1. Discord

The phenomenon of discord is simple. Philosophers of action and theorists of responsibility have distinguished between actions for which you are *attributively responsible* and those for which you are not—what is *attributable* to you, for short, and what is not. Discord is my name for what happens when there is a mismatch between how I apply the attributable/nonattributable distinction to you and how you apply it to yourself. That is it. That is the whole phenomenon (up to substituting other people for you and me).

Discord, I will show, is not just a theoretical possibility—it is inevitable. If you and I are in discord, then there is some difference in what we identify as attributable to you. So for us to be in discord, one of us must be wrong. Unfortunately, it is inevitable that each of us will sometimes be wrong about what is attributable to you, because no one—not even you—is infallible about what is attributable to you. This does not quite make discord inevitable, for our mistakes about attributability could be correlated. We could be harmoniously out of tune. But I will argue that not only are our mistakes about attributability not perfectly correlated, but, in fact, we are wired to disagree about attributability. For interpreting what is attributable to someone requires applying interpretive *charity*, and charity is a bias toward the good. So we are bound to disagree about it just as much as we disagree about the good.

But discord is not just inevitable. It is also impactful—I will show that it has consequences. What we interpret as attributable to someone affects how we respond to them. So if you and I are in discord, then I will not respond to you in the ways that you yourself think are appropriate. Worse, unrecognized discord has consequences of its own. If you do not recognize that we are in discord, then when I respond to you in ways that you think are inappropriate, you will infer the wrong things about my motives. And sometimes, as I will show, discord itself persists precisely because it is not recognized.

Fortunately, by giving you the concept of discord in this article, I am equipping you to be able to recognize when you are in discord. So this concept can be therapeutic because it can help you to avoid the bad effects of unrecognized discord and to escape discord that persists only because it is unrecognized. But unfortunately, even after I give you this concept, you will not *always* be able to recognize when you are in discord. Discord can be particularly hard to talk our way out of because the very thing that leads us to disagree about what is attributable to someone—the *charity* with which we apply the concept of attributability—can also give rise to *clumps* of coordinated discord about different topics. And sometimes the topics over which our discord is coordinated include our own attempts to talk our way out of discord.

1.2. Attributability

In his classic introduction of the vocabulary of attributability and efforts to distinguish it from closely related concepts in the theory of responsibility, Gary Watson says that you are attributively responsible for some action when it in some sense expresses your true self, as you determine it.[1] Watson follows John Dewey in adding the 'as you determine it' clause. This clause fairly accurately describes a wide class of philosophical theories of attributability, from Dewey's own, to Harry Frankfurt's, to Michael Bratman's, Christine Korsgaard's, and David Shoemaker's.[2] All of these theorists say not just that some actions in some sense express your true self but that you in effect get some *say* in what your true self is—either by accepting some things about yourself or by identifying with them, them resonating with you, or fitting into more comprehensive planning structures, or the like. But my own view is that all of these views misidentify the kind of power that we each have over our true selves.[3] So I

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1 Watson, "Two Faces of Responsibility."

2 See Dewey, *Outline of a Critical Theory of Ethics*; Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"; Bratman, *Structures of Agency*; Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*; and Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins*.

3 See Schroeder, *When Things Get Personal*, especially ch. 5. Even if you do not share my view, it is better to work with a less contentious concept so long as it is easy to do so.

propose to leave this out. Let us say, then, that the actions that are attributable to you are those that express your true self, and let us leave as a separate question what makes something part of your true self, including whether you get any say in what determines this, as well as how seriously to take the metaphor of a "true self."

This definition is only as helpful as the metaphor of the true self, so examples will be helpful. In a classic pair of cases, Frankfurt distinguishes between the willing and unwilling addicts.[4] Both have a powerful addictive desire to take their drug—so powerful that it is inevitable that they will succumb before the end of the day. But the willing addict rises from bed eager to get their first hit and structures their day around it, whereas the unwilling addict awakens in the hope that today is day one of being clean and spends most of their day taking all of the right steps to make this happen—destroying their stash, throwing away their needles, deleting their dealer's contact info, and logging into an online addiction recovery support group. (Of course, eventually they lose their nerve—he did warn us up front that it was inevitable.) Frankfurt thinks that we can see the difference between these two characters, which he describes as a difference in which acted *freely*. Watson identifies the concept of freedom in which Frankfurt was interested as a paradigm of trying to understand attributability. The willing addict—but not the unwilling addict—is attributively responsible for taking the drug.

Here is another example that I like more.[5] When we get together to discuss this paper, you ask me a question, and I snap harshly at you, "No!" At first, you might get angry at me for being rude. Or, depending on your personality, you might instead get anxious that you have made some mistake that I am annoyed at—or even, adopting this hypothesis, become embarrassed about it. But instead, it might occur to you that we are having this conversation in midafternoon, and I have not had a chance to grab lunch. Perhaps I am merely hangry, and rather than getting angry at me or embarrassed, you should just pass over it and steer our conversation toward where we can find a snack.

Mars, Inc. has founded a successful international advertising campaign supporting over $450 million in annual sales on their bet that all of us recognize that we are not always fully ourselves, and hunger is a familiar—and relatively easy-to-manage—way in which we can fail to be fully ourselves.[6] Their ads feature crabby, belligerent, and difficult people on rampages until someone hands them a Snickers bar, at which point, no longer hangry, they suddenly turn back

4   Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person."
5   See Schroeder, "Tipping Points."
6   Beadle, "America's Top 10 Best-Selling Candy Bars of the Year."

into themselves (depicted cinematically by the substitution of a different actor). These ads work because we all recognize the idea that not everything that we do reflects ("expresses") who we really ("truly") are. They directly evoke the philosophers' metaphor of the "true self." But they also show that this distinction is not just one that philosophers make after reading some Dewey or carefully attending to patterns in pairs of cases. It is a distinction that ordinary people make—ordinary enough for the Mars corporation to bet big on selling them candy bars in this way.

1.3. Participant Responses

So why do ordinary people make this distinction? I think that the answer is simple. Attributability is, I suggest, the "in" to what we can call, following Peter Strawson, *participant responses*. In "Freedom and Resentment," Strawson noted that there is a large variety of ways that we relate to persons but not to other kinds of thing—ways that we relate to *whos* rather than *whats*. When you are angry, for example, I can ask *what* you are angry *about* but *who* you are angry *at*. Anger is, in Strawson's terms, a participant attitude because it answers to a who rather than a what.[7]

All the participant responses that Strawson discussed are attitudes. So he does not distinguish between participant attitudes and other kinds of participant responses. He also endorsed a strong thesis about what the participant attitudes have in common. He said that they are all *reactions* to someone else's attitudes. So he conflated both of these distinctions, referring only to what he called the *participant reactive attitudes*.[8] But we should make both of these distinctions. Even if it turns out that participant attitudes are all reactive, we should distinguish that as a substantive further thesis that requires additional support. And there are many clear examples of participant responses that are not attitudes at all—any verb that answers to "who?" rather than "what?"

Take complaining, for example. I can ask what you are complaining about but only *who* you are complaining *to*.[9] Yet complaining is not an attitude—it is a speech act. Or take the example of listening. True, there is a general kind of listening that we can do with music, ocean waves, or the creaking of the stairs. But that is not the kind of listening that we seek from loved ones or therapists. We want from them a distinctive kind of listening that we do to persons but

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7   Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment." Compare Langton, "Duty and Desolation"; and Schroeder, "Persons as Things."

8   Compare Holton, "Deciding to Trust, Coming to Believe," who first coined the term 'participant stance' to pick out the first of these Strawsonian ideas.

9   Compare Bosco, *The Triangle of Innocence*.

not to things. Listening is also not just an attitude. So the class of participant responses is potentially quite diverse.

Strawson notes that it is possible to detach from the kind of perspective that we need to occupy in order to have participant responses. You can step back and observe someone from a more objective, clinical perspective, from which you will not get angry at them or listen to them. You can think of them as a what rather than as a who. And he also allows that you can exclude some things from your participant responses to someone. For example, while listening to what they say, you can take the objective perspective toward their tone of voice—thinking of it as just a result of being hangry. When you do so, you are thinking of what they say as reflecting who they are, but their tone of voice merely as reflecting what they are.

Strawson makes it sound like these are more and less extreme versions of the same thing—that when you exclude aspects of what someone does from the participant perspective, this amounts to a kind of *restriction* or *limitation* on the participant perspective to seeing someone as a what rather than a who (though to a more limited extent). But I do not think that that is quite right.[10] We are all of us embodied in imperfect ways. We are subject to hanger and hormones. It is not a limitation on seeing you for who you are to recognize and appreciate the limits of your embodiment. I can see you *better* as who you are if I am prepared to recognize the limits imposed by your embodiment. So omitting some things from my participant responses to you is not necessarily a way of seeing you as a what rather than as a who. It is sometimes required in order to see you for who you are.

The connection between attributability and participant responses brings us back to our earlier metaphor that what you are attributively responsible for is a matter of what expresses your true self. Dropping the redundant word 'true', what is attributable to you is what reflects *who* you are. Actions for which you lack attributive responsibility, in contrast, reflect *what* you are but not *who* you are—they come from your embodiment, as someone who has an addiction or has missed lunch. So just as we do not have participant responses to rocks or rainbows, we do not have them concerning actions that we do not attribute to you. The actions that we respond to—that we listen to, get angry about, are proud of, or respect, among many other participant responses—are limited to those that we interpret as attributable to you.[11]

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10   Compare Schroeder, "Persons as Things."

11   And this in turn explains why accountability entails attributability, as theorists of responsibility often allow but often leave unexplained. To be accountable is to be fittingly called to account. But calling someone to account for something is a participant response to

So ordinary people need this distinction, I suggest, for the same reasons that they need to grasp the distinction between whos and whats—it shapes our ordinary interpersonal relationships in pervasive ways by enabling modes of response that we do not have to mere things. And importantly, these modes of response are diverse. They include not just attitudes like anger and resentment, which have received so much attention in the theory of responsibility, but also ones like pride, gratitude, and appreciation, as well as other sorts of actions like *listening to* what someone says and *honoring* her requests.

2. CONSEQUENCES

2.1. Error

From the fact that what we attribute to someone shapes how we respond to them, it follows that mistakes in attributability interpretation are not idle. If we make mistakes about attributability, then that has consequences for how we relate to someone. And those consequences can shape our relationship with them in unfortunate ways.

Suppose, for example, that I snap at you simply because I am hangry. My snap does not mean anything—there is no broader import to it or anything that it reveals about how I really feel about you. I am just crabby because it has been a few hours since I have eaten, and you get the brunt of it. The success of the Snickers advertising campaign turns on our familiarity with the idea that in at least some cases like this, my snap is not attributable to me. So let us suppose that ours is such a case. If you correctly identify this, then my hanger will cause us only minimal trouble. Overlooking it, you can pass me a Snickers bar or remind me that we should break for lunch, and we can move past it without incurring any lasting effects on our relationship.

But if you mistakenly think that my snap is attributable to me, then things will not go so smoothly. Now my snap is eligible for participant responses. You may get angry at me for my rudeness or embarrassed about what mistake you may have made that I am responding to. If in fact, however, all that is going on is that I am a bit hungry, then this imperfection in my embodiment is getting in the way of our relationship and of our understanding one another. You are getting angry or embarrassed about something that is not worth getting angry or embarrassed about. You are *overprojecting* attributability.

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them. So you can have this response only to what you interpret as attributable to them. For further development of this point, see Schroeder, *When Things Get Personal*.

The ability to distinguish between what is attributable to someone and what is not is so important because it allows us to avoid some of this kind of mistake. If we have the concept of attributability, we are not doomed to overreact to everything that one another does. But having this concept also creates the risk of a new kind of mistake. It creates the possibility of *underprojecting* attributability, interpreting some action as not attributable to someone when it really is.

Suppose, for example, that something that you have been doing has been bothering me for months. But every time I try to tell you about it, you are simply so charming and I am simply so afraid of conflict that I am unable to go through with it, and so unwittingly, you continue to do this thing that bugs me (mispronouncing my name, for example). Today, I have missed both breakfast and lunch, and so due to being hangry, I am finally crabby enough to overcome my timidity about conflict and tell you what I really think, even though you are so disarmingly charming. But unfortunately for me, as you have gotten to know me, you have learned to recognize the signs that I am hangry. So when I tell you what I really think, you just pass me a Snickers bar.

Something goes wrong in this case, but it is different from what goes wrong when you overproject attributability. Instead of responding to *too many* things about me, now you are responding to *too few*. But it follows from the fact that we exclude some things from participant responses (as I have argued, by interpreting them as not attributable—but this label is not essential for the structure of the problem) that we can at least potentially make the mistake of excluding too many things—and hence make the mistake of responding to too few.

So far, I have not said anything about what the attributable/nonattributable distinction is really about—what it really tracks. We have just identified it with the metaphor of expressing your true self, applied it to some paradigmatic examples, and established its role in connection to participant responses. But *whatever* the nature of this distinction turns out to be—whatever it is really tracking—it will be something that it is possible to be wrong about. Mistakes about attributability are inevitable. And as I have shown, these mistakes have consequences for how our relationships go.

Nothing about the inevitability of these kinds of mistakes tells us how common we should expect them to be. Some things are easier to know about—and hence easier to avoid mistakes about. If attributability is one of the things that it is easier to know about, then we should expect these kinds of errors to be less common. But if it turns out to be one of the things that it is harder to know about, then it makes sense to expect these kinds of errors to be more common. When philosophers theorize about attributability, they normally do so directly. They do not worry about what kinds of mistakes people are prone to make about it. But I suggest that we can get leverage on understanding what

kind of thing attributability is from the other direction. We can observe how often people make mistakes about it.[12]

My conjecture is that now that we have seen what the consequences of mistakes about attributability look like, you will agree with me that the circumstantial evidence suggests that these kinds of mistakes are quite common indeed. Respecting, acknowledging, listening to, and being proud of are all participant responses. So whenever someone does not respect, acknowledge, or listen to you or fails to be proud of you when you expect it, you are experiencing the symptoms that we would expect if they were making the mistake of underprojecting attributability to you. Women who are dismissed as hysterical, Black men who are dismissed as angry, and teenagers who are dismissed as hormonal all experience what we would expect it to look like if others underproject attributability in their interpretations of them.[13]

2.2. Discord

Actually, this is not exactly right. When you feel like someone is not listening to you, it *looks to you* like you are experiencing the expected symptoms of them underprojecting attributability onto you. But this is also what it would look like to you if they were actually interpreting you correctly and *you* were the one *over*projecting attributability onto yourself. If you have ever apologized to someone and admitted that they were right to pass you a Snickers bar or wait to rediscuss an issue after you had sobered up, then you know that when you are in the heat of being affected by hanger or alcohol, part of the experience can be precisely that of *not* being inordinately affected in these ways. And things only become clearer once you are no longer hangry or drunk. So you know that from the inside, it can look like the other person is overlooking or dismissing you even if they are not.

So in the first instance, our experiences of the symptoms of another person underprojecting attributability onto us are better evidence that our interpretations of what is attributable to us do not match the person's interpretation of us than they are that the other person is making a mistake. This mismatch is what I call discord. The fact that discord involves *mismatch* makes it a better concept to use, I believe, in order to understand interpersonal conflict. If you make a mistake about what is attributable to someone, and they make the very same mistake about themselves, then in a way, both of you misunderstand

12   See Schroeder, *When Things Get Personal*, especially chs. 4–9.
13   This does not mean that this is *all* that is going on in these kinds of distinctively gendered and racialized experiences—that is most certainly not the case. And it does not *entail* that discord plays any role in these experiences. But it is striking evidence that errors of attributability play *some* important role in *many* of these experiences.

something important about them and about your relationship. But because you misunderstand it in the very same way, this is not going to cause you trouble in getting along. This is like being out of proper tune but in harmony with one another. Disharmony arises not when someone gets out of tune but when not everyone goes out of tune in the same way, together.

Because discord is a mismatch in interpretation, it requires error. But the concept of discord is neutral about who is making the error. This makes the concept of discord an especially useful tool, I think, for perspective-taking in conflict. If two people are in discord, then it looks to each of them *as if* the other person is engaging in inappropriate participant responses. Applying the concept of error in the same circumstances focuses our attention on the wrong thing, in order to understand what things look like, from their perspective. It focuses our attention on their being wrong. And so if this is our customary way of thinking through these cases, it makes it harder for us to appreciate that we may be the ones who are wrong.

Because discord happens only when there is error, it could be that the explanation of discord always consists in the explanation of particular errors. You and I might be in discord, for example, because I make a particular mistake. If that were right, then thinking about discord would always lead us back to thinking about error, as soon as we started wondering why we are in discord. But later in this article I will argue that this is not true: sometimes discord can be explained *directly*, without explaining either person's error. This is because, I will argue, attributability interpretation is *value laden*, and so disagreements in values will engender disagreements in attributability interpretation. So we can sometimes have a pretty good understanding of where discord comes from without yet getting to the bottom of the question of who is the one who is in error.

2.3. Unrecognized Discord

When you and I are in discord, the way that I respond to things looks, from your perspective, to be inappropriate. When I get angry, for example, you do not identify the thing that I am angry at as something to which anger is an apt response. Or you expect me to respect your expression of your wishes, but I do not. This, I have argued, can have problematic consequences for our relationship. But unrecognized discord is worse.

When two people are in unrecognized discord, their attributability interpretations do not match, but they do not realize that their attributability interpretations do not match. Even though you are in general aware that other people do not believe all of the same things as you do, when something seems especially obvious, it can be especially surprising that it looks a different way to someone else. When the infamous photo of "the dress" took over the internet in February

2015, for example, what baffled people who saw the dress as gold and white was how anyone could possibly (and seriously) see it as black and blue.[14] When you look at a photo of a gold and white dress, it does not normally occur to you to wonder whether someone else is taking for granted that it is black and blue.

While I was writing this article, for example, I ran an errand to pick up some gold-colored gift bags for my daughter to distribute holiday gifts to her friends, and I handed them to her in the car while we were driving home after dark that evening. She was quite upset at me for buying her black bags for holiday gifts and did not believe that they were in fact gold until we pulled over and had more favorable lighting conditions. Similarly, if an attributability interpretation seems very obvious to you, it might completely fail to occur to you or seem creditable as a serious possibility that the other person sees things another way.

But unrecognized discord creates illusions of ill will. If I can see that you are angry at me, but I do not see the way that I snapped at you as a legitimate object of anger because I had obviously just missed my lunch, then I will have to look for another answer to what you are upset at—and I will arrive at the wrong answer. If I can see that you are not listening to what I say but rather just passing me a Snickers bar in the hopes that I will stop saying it and we can move back to another subject, then I will infer that you must not *care* about what I am saying—or at least, do not care enough. In general, if I have a different space of interpretive possibilities of what you are responding to about me and how, then when I try to understand what beliefs and motives are leading you to respond in these ways, my mistaken understanding of the totality of your beliefs is going to lead me to a mistaken understanding of your motives.

So one way that unrecognized discord creates problems is by leading us to misidentify someone's quality of will. But unrecognized discord can also be worse in a different way. And that is that discord can sometimes persist precisely *because* it is unrecognized. Whether this is so depends on each person's *basis* for applying the attributable/nonattributable distinction in the way that they do. So far, I have not said anything about how we apply this distinction, and in particular, I have not said enough in order to be able to illustrate how the failure to recognize discord can reinforce the underlying attributability interpretations that constitute that discord. So this is just a promissory note. But I want to note it here as a special further deleterious consequence of unrecognized discord.

Fortunately, not all discord is unrecognized. In particular, now that you have the concept of discord, you may recognize it. But even before you had a name for the concept of discord, you may sometimes have appreciated that someone else was interpreting your situation very differently than you were. You may

14 See Resnick, "The Internet Peaked with 'The Dress.'"

have used less specific vocabulary to grasp at this—for example, you may have said that they had a "different narrative."[15] Or you may have had a narrower concept identifying special cases of discord, without having a general concept that encompasses everything that I count as discord. For example, you may have recognized or even had a word for the experience of being a woman making a point in a meeting that is not taken up or acknowledged until it is made again by a male colleague; but you may not have considered it a single concept that includes both this and the experience of a child who is frustrated that his parents are not proud of him for something that they take for granted—even though discord can encompass both of these as special cases. So some discord can be recognized, even if it is not conceptualized specifically in the way that I have.

But much discord *is* unrecognized. And even once you have the concept of discord, it can remain unrecognized. Discord creates problems, but unrecognized discord is worse.

3. WRINKLES

3.1. If Only Things Were Simple

So far I have explained what discord is and why it has certain kinds of characteristic earmarks—a mismatch between the participant responses that people exhibit and those that we expect of them, which can often consist in their not listening to us, not respecting us, not being proud of us, or the like. And I have observed how unrecognized discord can create illusions of ill will. This is the impactfulness of discord. I have also shown that error about attributability is inevitable, so that discord must also be inevitable unless we can coordinate our errors with one another. And I have pointed toward circumstantial evidence that both error and discord are common.

You might think, however, despite the fact that its characteristic symptoms are common, that discord should not itself be quite so common. You might think that it could be easily avoided or at least moderated by acquiring a better understanding of psychology or neuroscience. One way that you might think that we could avoid discord is to always accept each person's interpretation

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15   The concept of discord does not compete with the idea that you and someone else accept "different narratives" about what has happened as a potential explanation of why you each have different emotional responses to what has happened between you. Rather, it tells us what makes differences in narratives relevant and how. As Lindemann emphasizes, narratives work by foregrounding and backgrounding information (*Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*). They select some events as important and significant. This is exactly what attributability interpretation does. Compare Schroeder, "Narrative and Personal Identity."

of themself. It is a familiar idea in popular culture that it is wrong not to take someone's self-interpretation at face value, after all, and on some interpretations of that idea, it might imply that if you know what someone attributes to themself, you should believe that interpretation, or at least not disagree with it. You might even think that on many of the theories of attributability developed in the philosophical literature, something like this ought to be true because many of those theories take seriously and develop in different ways Dewey's idea, emphasized by Watson, that attributable actions are those that express yourself *as you determine it*.[16] So if what is attributable to you is a matter of what you determine, then who better to know what is attributable to you than you?

But this idea, I think, cannot be right.[17] Each of us, I conjecture, can identify times in our lives when we have realized that we were ourselves wrong about what was attributable to us. At those moments, we did not think that we were merely hangry or hormonal—the issues at stake felt really important to us. It is only in retrospect that we look back and realize that that is precisely how the hanger or hormones got their grip on us—by making those issues feel so important at that moment. More generally, the fact that we interpret ourselves in different ways at different times means that we cannot always be right. And all the proponents of familiar views of attributability according to which it is in some sense self-determined can allow this. Whatever sense in which attributability counts as self-determined, even on these views, is not one that makes it at all times transparent to you what you have self-determined.

Whether or not attributability is self-determined, you might think that it is a matter of an action's having the right sort of cause. It must spring from, say, desire rather than impulse, values rather than desires, or complex planning structures that integrate agency over time rather than one-off plans.[18] Nearly all philosophical accounts of attributability have this structure. What they disagree about is which cause is the special one that makes actions attributable and whether this cause has first-order unity or might instead be unified only at some more abstract level, such as being a cause that you "identify" with or accept or is relatively enough enduring within your psychology to count as "character."[19] If attributability is a matter of having the right cause, then we

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16 Similarly, many philosophical accounts of identities or of personal identity make them in an important sense self-constructed. Compare, for example, Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*.

17 Compare Schroeder, *When Things Get Personal*, especially ch. 5.

18 See, for example, respectively, Arpaly and Schroeder, *In Praise of Desire*; Watson, "Free Agency"; or Bratman, *Structures of Agency*.

19 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*; and Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins*.

should expect that mistakes about attributability will be more common the less that we understand about human psychology and, correspondingly, less common the more that we come to learn about psychology.

But I conjecture that this is not the case. In fact, I think it is far from being the case. The more we learn about human psychology, the more possible diagnoses we have available to us for understanding the causes of one another's actions. We can form hypotheses about attachment styles, neuropathies, anxiety, depression, and personality disorders. We can keep track of whether or not someone is "off their meds" and about how tired they are. We have specific new concepts like that of being hangry that make it easier for us to identify new kinds of behavior to overlook and manage. All of these tools make it easier and easier for us to diagnose when something is *not* attributable to someone, because they provide us with a longer and more fully articulated list of alternative interpretive possibilities for what it is attributable to instead.

But I conjecture that we do not find less discord now than ten, twenty, or two hundred years ago. On the contrary, experiences of being overlooked, ignored, diminished, objectified, unseen, and unlistened to figure especially prominently in all manner of contemporary literature and are heavily theorized by feminist and intersectional theorists. The problem is that these tools for better psychological understanding make it easier to identify when things are *not* attributable, only at the cost of making it easier to make the mistake of thinking that something is not attributable when it really is. And everyone who has experienced any of these diagnoses firsthand knows that it is not so easy to do so. Just as hanger might sometimes lead me to snap in irrelevant ways but can also sometimes be the very thing that allows me to get over my timidity and your charm and follow through to tell you what I really think, depression can have some effects that are not attributable to you while also having others that are. And the same thing goes for everything else that we might put on our list of helpful diagnoses.

I conclude, tentatively, that things are probably not so simple as this. If the concept of attributability tracked a purely causal, psychological distinction, then we should get better at applying it the more that we learn about psychology.[20] And this seems to me to be very far from obviously what we actually do observe. But we can also find direct evidence that attributability does not work quite like this—or at least that we do not think about it in this way.

3.2. Attributability and Charitability

Suppose (in a distant counterfactual possibility—she insists that I add just to clarify) that when my wife comes home from work and compliments my

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20 See especially Schroeder, *When Things Get Personal*, chs. 6–7.

gardening, I start speculating about what lucky thing must have happened to her earlier in the day that put her in the mood to pay me a compliment.[21] This would be icky. Something is wrong with our marriage if my response to compliments is not gratitude or pride but speculation about where they came from. Still, the more we know about psychology, the better we can appreciate the truth that people are more likely to compliment one another when they are in good moods and more likely to be in good moods when something favorable has happened to them. The ickiness of my responding to my wife's compliment in this way therefore has nothing directly to do with how likely it is to be true.

In contrast, if my wife instead comes home and (in an even more distant possibility—she insists that I add) complains about my gardening, there is nothing icky about my holding in reserve the hypothesis that she has merely had a bad day. An important part of being able to get along with someone involves understanding their embodiment and hence being prepared to recognize that not everything they do or say reflects on them or on your relationship with them.

But of course the causal connection between complaining and having had a bad day—mediated by mood—is precisely the analogue of the causal connection between complimenting and having had a good day. The contrast between the right way for me to respond interpretively to these cases does not come from a difference in their causal structure. It comes from the difference between compliments and complaints. The difference between these two cases is, I conjecture, an evaluative one. And their contrast reveals that attributability interpretation should be value laden. It needs to be biased towards the good.

I do not mean to say that compliments are always good and complaints are always bad. When complaints add to our understanding of what is genuinely important to one another, they can be overall quite good, even though they are unpleasant to process. But there is also something icky about speculating about what bad event earlier in the day led to a constructive and instructive complaint like this. So I think that the contrast in ickiness is a contrast that tracks an evaluative difference between the cases. Insofar as you agree with my ickiness judgments, you should agree that attributability interpretation— at least between spouses—*ought* to be biased toward the good. Other things being equal, we should lean towards attributing good things and away from attributing bad things.[22]

21 This case comes from Schroeder, "Persons as Things."

22 I argue for this claim at greater length in Schroeder, "Persons as Things," "Attributive Silencing," "Tipping Points," *When Things Get Personal*, and *Interpretive Objects*. Here I follow the argument of "Persons as Things." See also Christine Korsgaard's argument (in "Creating the Kingdom of Ends") that responsibility judgments are practical.

But this is not just something that we should do. Even more importantly for my purposes here, it is something that we *do* do. It turns out that when psychologists and empirically minded philosophers have set themselves the task of examining how people actually make judgments about attributability and the related concept of a "true self" that attributable actions are said to "express," they have found systematically that people do in fact make true-self judgments in ways that are evaluatively biased towards the good. George Newman, Paul Bloom, and Joshua Knobe use several experiments to draw out the way in which people's true-self judgments are biased towards what they believe to be good; and Newman, Julian de Freitas, and Knobe argue that the value asymmetry in true-self judgments underpins and explains many other value asymmetries that experimental philosophers have uncovered in applying many closely related concepts.[23]

So attributability interpretation is and should be charitable. It is and should be biased toward the good. I say that it not only is but *should be*. But all that I need in what follows is that we *do*, as a matter of empirical fact, use a charitable bias toward the good in determining what is attributable to someone. This fact turns out to make sense of many interesting features of the kinds of mistakes that we make in interpreting ourselves and one another—and of many complex and interesting features of discord more generally.

3.3. Charitability of Attributability Explains Systematic Patterns in Errors

We observed earlier that underprojecting attributability has the consequence that we can fail to have appropriate participant responses to things that merit it. We can fail to be proud of things that deserve it, to honor or respect people's wishes, to admire their accomplishments, or to listen, because all of these things are among the many forms of participant response. We treat someone as a little bit less like a who than is called for and a little bit more like a what. But it turns out that this kind of mistake is unevenly distributed.

People are whos. Things—objects—are whats. So treating someone a little bit less like a who and more like a what is treating them a little bit less like a person and a little bit more like a thing—more like an object. Another word

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23 Newman et al., "Value Judgments and the True Self"; and Newman et al., "Beliefs About the True Self Explain Asymmetries Based on Moral Judgment." Some of the asymmetries covered by Newman, de Freitas, and Knobe include asymmetries in what subjects count someone as *valuing* (Knobe and Roedder, "The Ordinary Concept of Valuing"), in who they count as being *happy* (Philips et al., "The Ordinary Concept of Happiness"; and Philips et al., "The Good in Happiness"), in the conditions under which they are counted as experiencing *weakness of will* (May and Holton, "What in the World Is Weakness of Will?"), and in who counts as *blameworthy* or *praiseworthy* (for example Pizarro et al., "Asymmetries in Judgments of Moral Blame and Praise").

for treating someone a little bit more like a thing and less like a person than they really are is *objectification*. But theorists who study objectification do not in general find that objectification is equally well distributed across different people. Instead, they pay attention in particular to ways in which women are more often objectified than men.

Listening is a particularly important form of participant response. It is through listening to one another that we are able to cooperate and live together. Of course, there are kinds of listening that you can do to instrumental music or to the sound of waves lapping on the shore. But when you tell someone how you are feeling, this is not the kind of listening that you are looking for—you want them to listen to *what you are saying*, not just to how it sounds when you say it. This kind of listening is a participant response. But if someone is telling you things and you are not listening to them because you interpret it as noise rather than as signal, then there is a very natural sense in which they are *silenced* to you. This is what Mary Kate McGowan calls *true-self* silencing.[24] Like objectification, we have substantial evidence that the experience of silencing is not equally distributed across people. It has been feminist theorists who have called our attention to silencing and done the most to theorize about it because the experience of feeling silenced is particularly prominent for women in particular.

Giving credit is another form of participant response. When someone does something, we can be grateful for it and thank them; we can admire it and praise them; or we can acknowledge that it came from them (perhaps in our bibliography). Famously, the giving of credit is also not equally well distributed across different people. Who gets credit and what they get it for are famously infected in interesting and complex ways by gender, social status, and economic class, among other things.

Here is an utterly simple conjecture about what explains much of these differences in how objectification, silencing, and the giving of credit are distributed across race, gender, and class, among other social distinctions. It is that this is a consequence of the fact that social values are distorted in ways that correspond to race, gender, and class. I describe this as a conjecture, but notice that it requires making no new assumptions. We all know that social values

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24 McGowan, *Just Words*. This notion makes errors of underprojecting attributability a promising way of accounting for some experiences of being silenced that draws on tools from the philosophy of action rather than the philosophy of language (as in Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts"; Langton and Hornsby, "Free Speech and Illocution"; and Hesni, "Illocutionary Frustration" do, among many others) or epistemology (as in Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence"). True-self silencing is not so much a competitor for these other tools for understanding silencing so much as a closely related phenomenon that can overlap with other forms of silencing or encompass cases that they fit less well. Compare Schroeder, "Attributive Silencing."

are distorted in ways that correspond to race, gender, and class. And we have already seen that what people attribute to someone is affected by their values. And finally, we established earlier that attributability is the "in" to participant responses—what we have participant responses to is limited by what we attribute to someone. So we already have substantial evidence for each of these three assumptions. The fact that when put together they predict the utterly banal observation that objectification, silencing, and the giving of credit are likely to be distributed in ways that are affected by race, gender, and class should further increase our confidence in each.

4. MORALS

4.1. Symmetric Explanations of Discord

I set out at the beginning of this article to introduce you to the concept of discord. I showed that discord is easy to define from the philosopher's concept of attributability and that since we all apply the concept of attributability in our everyday relations to one another, it matters whether we are in discord or not. I also used the general connection between attributability interpretation and participant responses in order to explain *why* mistakes about attributability such as those that arise in discord can create trouble for interpersonal relationships. And I explained why unrecognized discord can be especially pernicious. Along the way, I hope that I have illustrated or at least alluded to enough applications of this framework in order for you to see why mistakes in attributability interpretation are particularly important for us to think about and understand—and to begin to anticipate how having the concept of discord might be therapeutic.

    The most controversial thing that I have said so far, I think, is that attributability interpretation is properly value laden. I claimed that the right way to interpret what is attributable to someone requires applying a kind of interpretive *charity*, which means that it requires exercising your own values. But even if I am not right about this, we at least have substantial evidence that this is what people in fact do—both direct empirical evidence from the laboratory setting and also indirect evidence in the form of the explanation that it offers of the systematic maldistribution of things like objectification, silencing, and the giving of credit, which are not otherwise well explained by the hypothesis that we are merely applying a simple scientific distinction to one another.

    But the reason why I wanted to get to this more controversial claim about attributability interpretation and not merely to settle for introducing the concept of discord in general—in a way that is independent from assumptions about

how we actually interpret what is attributable to one another—is for its theoretical fruits. We have seen one such fruit: it gives us new potential insight into the sources and mechanisms of the systematic maldistribution of objectification, silencing, and the giving of credit, among many others. To fully realize this insight, of course, we need to walk more carefully through *how* attributability interpretation is value laden and to rely more specifically on assumptions about *how* social values are distorted. That is work for another occasion. But I want to close this article with two more important upshots of the fact that attributability interpretation is value laden. The first, in this section, concerns the value of the concept of discord for *perspective taking*. And the second, in the sections that remain, concerns the way that discord can *clump* around related topics.

Earlier, I emphasized that the concept of discord contrasts favorably with the simple concept of error in attributability interpretation in offering a better tool for perspective taking. If you are in a conflict with someone, recognizing that you are in discord offers you a helpful window into how things look *to them*. Because it is a symmetric concept, it focuses our attention on what is symmetric about the situation and hence makes it easier to appreciate that from the inside, the other person could be equally frustrated or mystified about you. And because the concept of discord is neutral about whose interpretation is in error, if we start with discord, there are equally natural paths into wondering whether we are the ones who are mistaken, as wondering why the other person is mistaken.

Of course, if the only ways that we have of understanding that or how we could have gotten into discord with someone start by understanding that or how one of us got attributability interpretation wrong and then abstracting away from who it was, then framing what is going on between us in terms of discord is not particularly helpful for deciding which of us is mistaken. In this context, it is particularly valuable to appreciate how attributability interpretation is value laden.

Value disagreements, we know, are extremely common. Even among people with deeply shared values, there are lots of evaluative questions still to disagree about. The pervasiveness of value disagreements means that since attributability interpretation is value laden, discord is also going to be pervasive. We are bound to find ourselves at least sometimes in discord, because there are bound to be cases in which our value disagreements rise to the fore in our attributability interpretations, even if we agree about very many values. Recognizing the way in which our attributability interpretations are bound to be informed by our values therefore offers a particularly neutral way of recognizing that we may now be in discord—a way that is not mediated by identifying any particular mistake that one of us made. It is a way of thinking about the source of discord that can help to open us up to think about it symmetrically—or even

to acknowledge that the other person sees the situation correctly, and we are the ones who were in error.

4.2. Unrecognized Discord, Redux

Earlier, I argued that the effects of discord are often worse when they are unrecognized. The main reason for this is that when you do not recognize that you are in discord with someone, you interpret them as responding to the same things that you see as apt to be responded to. And so if they are in fact responding to something else, then this gives you a misleading impression of their motives and priorities. It creates, as I put it, illusions of ill will. But I also claimed (so far without argument) that sometimes discord persists precisely *because* it is unrecognized. I did not complete the argument for that claim earlier because we did not know enough yet about how people decide what to attribute to someone. But now that I have argued that we use *charity* to interpret what is attributable to someone, we have the necessary piece to complete this argument.

I do not mean to suggest that *all* discord persists only because we are unaware of it. Far from it. The very fact that attributability interpretation is value laden suggests that all it should take for discord to persist is for two people to have different values. Then no matter how much evidence they each acquire, the difference in their values, mediated by the application of the principle of charity, will lead them in different directions. For example, realizing that your father is not proud of you because he does not see your accomplishments as really belonging to you is not a way of becoming convinced that he is right about that. It might help you to appreciate that he really does care about you even though he is not proud of you for these particular things. But you can recognize that the two of you disagree about what is attributable to you while remaining confident that you are the one who is right.[25]

The reason why failing to recognize discord can help it to persist is simple. It is that discord persists because competing attributability interpretations persist. Competing attributability interpretations persist, when they do, because each of the interpretations persist. And because attributability interpretation relies on charity, an attributability interpretation can persist because it continues to be charitable. But what it is charitable to attribute to someone can depend on what you think that they are doing. And the space of hypotheses about what they might be doing is shaped by the space of things that you think they could

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25   If some form of conciliationism in the philosophy of peer disagreement is correct (compare Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement"), then it could be that you become *less confident* of your interpretation of what is attributable but still do not end up agreeing with your father's interpretation. That is one way in which learning about discord has some potential to moderate discord, but I have something stronger in mind in what follows.

be responding to. That means that it is shaped by what you interpret them as *thinking* or *perceiving* is attributable to the person they are responding to. But if you fail to recognize that you are in discord with them, then what you interpret them as thinking or perceiving is attributable to someone will be the same as what *you* think or perceive is attributable to them. Consequently, when you fail to recognize that you are in discord, charity can push you toward an attributability interpretation that is different from what charity would push them toward. So some discord is bound to persist precisely because it is unrecognized.

My suspicion is that this dynamic is often at least to some degree implicated when we have persistent disagreements about small matters concerning how to live together, such as where to keep the toothpaste, how to do the laundry, or how often to take out the trash. When people live together, they often have competing preferences or values about how such small things are handled. Ideally, much of the time, these preferences are weak enough or unstable enough that both parties can meet in the middle and find new ways of doing things that work for each of them. But this is not, I conjecture, how it always goes. We often experience one another's expectations about how such things are to be handled as *requests* that they are making of us, which we can only judge as reasonable to the extent that they are justified by benefits that exceed the force of our competing requests to do things in a different way.

When someone requests that you do things their way even though you have issued a competing request that they do things your way—or at least that you be allowed to—this tells us something about their priorities. It tells us that they think the values to be realized by their way of doing things are more important than honoring your request. At least, it tells us this if we assume that they attribute this request to you. For honoring a request is a participant response, and we do not honor requests that are not actually attributable to someone (such as an unwilling addict's request that you return her needles). But other things being equal, it is uncharitable to interpret one's life partner as caring more about (say) whether we keep extra folded trash liners at the bottom of the trash can to replace the old one when we take out the trash, than about honoring your request not to. So charity can lead you toward failing to attribute that request to them. Maybe you see it as pathological or compulsive. It paints a more positive picture of them to see them as having a hangup over the trash liner thing but caring a lot about honoring your requests, than as caring more about this very specific thing than about what you want.

But the charitability of this interpretation turns essentially on assuming that they attribute your request to you. And unfortunately, the situation is symmetric. They have also requested you to do something—and you are persisting in your request to do otherwise. They attribute their own request to

themselves, and so an interpretation of you has to decide whether you care more about whatever value (laziness, perhaps) is served by not having to follow their request than about honoring their request. From their perspective, *that* does not look charitable. And so from their point of view, it can look more charitable to interpret *your* request as not attributable to you.

Importantly, the charitability of *each* of these interpretations turns on failing to recognize that the two of you are in discord. Once you recognize that the other person does not interpret what is attributable to you in the same way that you do, charity does not require failing to attribute their request to them in order to avoid taking them to care more about some minor household preference than about honoring your requests.

4.3. Discord Clumping

As the foregoing example illustrates, sometimes two or more cases of discord can be coordinated with one another in an interesting way. You and your partner are each making a request of the other, and each of you interprets your own request as attributable to you but is in doubt about whether the other's request is really attributable to them. The way that each attributability interpretation is sustained by charity offers an explanation of why the alignment of these two separate mismatches between what you interpret as attributable and what they do is not a coincidence. They come together because each helps to sustain the other.

The fact that attributability interpretation is value laden makes it likely that discord is *often* clumped like this. Because our behaviors are connected to our values in complex ways, it is often the case that when charity supports not attributing some particular behavior to someone, it also supports not attributing other closely related behaviors. For example, your friend has had one too many drinks at the end of the night and asks for their keys back. You decide that this is just the alcohol speaking and hang onto their keys. But then they get upset. "Don't you remember that paper about discord that we read last week? You're making an error in not attributing this decision to me—it's up to me to decide whether I'm sober enough to drive." Now they are trying to talk their way out of discord and using me to try to do it. But the very same reasons that support interpreting their request for the keys as not really attributable to them also support interpreting their insistence that it really is attributable to them as likewise not attributable to them.

5. CONCLUSION

In this article I have sought to introduce and explain the concept of discord. Discord builds on the concept of attributive responsibility, but because, as I

have argued, attributive responsibility marks a distinction that all of us mark as an integral of all of our interpersonal relationships, it is not just a philosopher's concept—it describes an ordinary phenomenon that can and does arise in ordinary interpersonal relationships. Indeed, I have argued that discord is unavoidable—we are bound to make some mistakes about what is attributable to someone, and, in particular, we are bound to sometimes underproject attributability. This leads us to fail to listen to, be grateful to, or be proud of one another even in cases in which doing so is licensed. I have also shown that the failure to recognize discord can have deleterious consequences of its own. It can help discord to persist longer than it would otherwise, and it can create illusions of ill will as we triangulate on others' motives and priorities from mistaken interpretations of what they are responding to.

All of these things are possible and have real consequences for interpersonal relationships, no matter what attributability really is and no matter how we actually think about it. But I have also argued that as a matter of fact, how we determine what is attributable to someone is filtered through our own values because we interpret through the lens of *charity*. And although it is not required for the further points that I have made in this article, we are *right* to do so. If this is right, then it can help us to understand many other important things about discord—including its prevalence. Value disagreements are everywhere. And if we count by its earmarks, discord is too.[26]

University of Southern California
maschroe@usc.edu

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