

## **Should Victims Have a Victim Mentality?**

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Figures engaged in discussions about contemporary political life have criticized policy proposals in various domains on grounds that these would encourage or enable those affected to adopt a “victim mentality.” Talking points to this effect have been propounded, often by conservative participants,<sup>1</sup> in debates over social welfare programs,<sup>2</sup> criminal sentencing,<sup>3</sup> and hate speech regulation.<sup>4</sup> Apparently, most such critics assume that it is possible for one to have a victim mentality without being a genuine victim, and likewise, that it is possible to actually be a victim without having a victim mentality.

This paper argues that if we understand the notions of “victim” and “victim mentality” in ways consistent with the usage of these terms and mainstream accounts of epistemic norms are true, then there is an epistemic sense in which genuine victims should have a victim mentality. The first section conceptually unpacks the two notions based on the ways they are appealed to in various debates. The second section introduces and evaluates arguments for the claim that it is wrong for all people, genuine victims included, to have a victim mentality. The third section then outlines the orthodox view in normative epistemology that people and processes should be or necessarily are norm-guided toward the formation of beliefs with true propositional contents and argues that if this view is true, then genuine victims epistemically should have a victim mentality. The conclusion considers what would be involved in answering the question of whether victims, overall, should have victim mentalities, but ultimately does not endorse a specific position in answer to this question. The claim of the paper is significant because those who most often criticize the adoption of a “victim mentality” are also those who most commonly attack non-traditional epistemological positions, according to which the formation of false beliefs may be considered an epistemological or (more commonly) a non-epistemological good.

### **I. Victims and Victim Mentalities**

This section introduces the two key notions that feature in the main argument, namely, those of a “victim” and a “victim mentality.”

The first concept that needs elucidation is that of a “victim.” For our purposes, a “victim” may be understood as one who is not morally responsible for the bringing about of some set of negative (i.e. bad from the standpoint of rational prudence) circumstances in one’s life. This understanding of “victim” is supported by the contrast that is commonly drawn between victims and agents. Whereas agents (with respect to a given set of circumstances) are those with the

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<sup>1</sup> Delgado and Yun 1994 (p. 1808, p. 1818), Shiell (p. 67, p. 68).

<sup>2</sup> Nussbaum 2001 (p. 412).

<sup>3</sup> Nussbaum 2001 (p. 406).

<sup>4</sup> Delgado and Yun 1994 (p. 1819).

capacity to act freely in general and whose circumstances at a time are the outcome of the exercise of this capacity in a given instance or instances, victims are those whose negative circumstances at a time are not the outcome of any exercises of such a capacity and who may or may not be capable of free action in the first place. This definition is neutral on whether the account of freedom at work in this definition is libertarian or compatibilist.

In understanding this definition of the term “victim,” there is a question about what it means for one to lack moral responsibility for some set of circumstances in one’s life. We may answer this question by considering what distinguishes cases in which an agent lacks responsibility for some set of life circumstances of hers from cases in which she has responsibility. The proposal implied by the discussion of free action is that an agent has moral responsibility for some set of life circumstances iff those circumstances are an outcome of her exercise of a capacity to act freely, where acting freely may be understood variously depending on one’s favored realist account of free action.<sup>5</sup> Notably, this proposal assumes realism about both moral responsibility and free action. To properly be considered an “outcome” of the exercise of an agent’s capacity to act freely in a given instance, and thus a state of affairs for which that agent is morally responsible, a state of affairs has to be one that could reasonably have been foreseen by the agent in performing the action. This is consistent with definitions of responsibility that have been offered by writers on legal issues in order to handle cases of criminal negligence.

Notice also that one is always a victim relative to a bad state of affairs or set of these whenever the bringing about of that state of affairs was not the outcome of one’s free action. Unlike one’s being an agent, therefore, one’s being a victim is not an evaluatively neutral condition with respect to the state of affairs by which one’s victimhood is determined. A judgment that someone is a victim with respect to some set of circumstances in her life is always a judgment that she is in a bad condition with respect to that set of circumstances and implies a judgment that the relevant set of circumstances is bad. By contrast, a judgment that someone is an agent with respect to some set of circumstances in her life does not imply any further evaluative judgment about the relevant set of circumstances.

Whether one thinks there is objectively such a thing as a “negative circumstance,” and hence whether or not one would hold that there is an objective matter of fact about someone’s victimhood, depends on one’s favored evaluative framework. If one is a realist about the evaluative domain and not a relativist, then one holds that there is only one evaluative domain in which there are truth-valued evaluative facts. It follows that for any given circumstance for whose bringing about some agent lacks moral responsibility, there is a matter of fact about whether it is a bad circumstance or not. If it is an objectively bad circumstance according to the relevant objective evaluative standard, then it is a matter of fact that the relevant agent is a

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<sup>5</sup> This coheres with the definition of some agent’s responsibility for X given in Raz 2012 (p. 136) as capacity responsibility plus the agent’s role in bringing about, preserving, or contributing to the preservation of X and the fulfillment of further conditions that guarantee a suitable connection of this role to the agent’s powers of rational agency.

victim. If it is not an objectively bad circumstance, then it is a matter of fact that she is not a victim. The rest of this paper assumes the truth of non-relativist realism in the specified sense. Thus, people may err in their judgments about whether they or others are victims along one dimension by incorrectly evaluating as bad the circumstances relative to which those judgments are made.

A second key asymmetry between victims and agents is that agency requires the capacity for moral responsibility in general, whereas victimhood does not. On the account sketched here, the mentally impaired, those with major psychiatric disorders, and nonhuman animals may be considered terminal victims insofar as their life circumstances are negative. Since these groups are thought to lack moral responsibility in general,<sup>6</sup> they are not morally responsible for the bringing about of any sets of circumstances in their lives, positive or negative.

There might be a further question on the proposed account of whether, if you are confronted with some set of negative life circumstances, some other agent must have been morally responsible for bringing about that set of circumstances in order for you to be considered a genuine victim. The idea that victims must ultimately have been victimized by an agent is supported by the locution in English “x is a victim of y,” where x refers to a victim and y refers to some agent. It is not a feature of my account that victims are required to have been victimized by agents. This is consistent with the English phrase “she was a victim of fate,” where “fate” is not obviously or uncontroversially an agent, and the phrase as a whole is used to express that the referent of “she” is not morally responsible for some set of negative circumstances she finds herself in. People also talk of being a “victim of a natural disaster,” or being a “victim of the system,” where no single agent, in the latter case, and no agent at all, in the former case, can be held morally responsible for the relevant bad states of affairs. What is essential to one’s victimhood is not one’s current predicament having been among the foreseen outcomes of another agent’s exercise of a capacity to act freely, but rather one’s being in a set of negative life circumstances for which one lacks moral responsibility oneself.

It seems like one could object to the account of victimhood given so far that it is too broad. That is, it seems like by relativizing one’s status as a victim to some set of negative circumstances, too many people are made genuine victims for negative circumstances that seem minor in the grand scheme of their lives. Is it really fair to consider Sam a victim, for example, for failing to get into his top choice medical school despite a competitive academic record if he faced no known setbacks in his life whatsoever leading up to that point and will spend the next year backpacking in Europe as a consolation prize? The reply is that by the foregoing account, Sam is a genuine victim with respect to one negative circumstance in his life: his being passed up in medical school admissions. How we or Sam should view his status as such in light of the events leading up to the relevant circumstance or the further circumstances Sam finds himself in is a separate question. This question may be answered in part by the proceeding discussion of what it means to have a victim mentality.

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<sup>6</sup> Strawson 1963 (p. 5, 12).

Though “victim mentality” has been spelled out in various ways by psychologists and those employing the notion in a political context, all ultimately seem to agree that a “victim mentality” is a conception of oneself as a victim.<sup>7</sup> By the earlier analysis, this amounts to a conception of oneself as lacking responsibility for some set of negative circumstances in one’s life. This is ultimately a set of dispositions to propositional beliefs that one is not oneself responsible for the circumstances, believed to be bad, with respect to which one develops a victim mentality.

Self-conceptions, as these are discussed here, are complexes of dispositions to propositional beliefs. The beliefs that a self-conception like a “victim mentality” disposes an agent to form may alter her motivational profile insofar as beliefs are capable of altering the motivational profiles of the agents who hold them. However, that an agent conceives of herself as a victim does not imply any motivational facts about her or facts about her desires beyond those that would arise via the introduction of the relevant beliefs she is disposed to form to her existing belief set.

In particular, the complex of dispositions to beliefs that comprises a person’s “victim mentality,” as described here, does not include any dispositions of hers to believe she *deserves* the circumstances in her life she believes are bad and for which she believes herself to lack responsibility. This point sets the account given here apart from some of those in psychology that use the term “victim mentality” to refer to pathologies that stem from a person’s belief that she deserves the bad circumstances with respect to which she believes herself to be a victim.<sup>8</sup> Manifestations of these pathologies are supposed to include rituals of self-flagellation that may involve self-harm and suicidal behaviors.<sup>9</sup> This alternative interpretation of a “victim mentality” offered by scholars in psychology is interesting because it appears to go against the philosophical links that are frequently referenced between desert for various circumstances and responsibility assumed for bringing them about by exercises of rational agency.

The idea that having a victim mentality amounts to conceiving of oneself as a victim in the specified sense squares with the description of victim mentality offered by WebMD, which reads:

“We all have our ups and downs in life. Bad things might happen to you or people you know on a daily basis. But there are some people who claim it is never their fault. They argue that they have no control over the tough situations and problems they encounter.

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<sup>7</sup> Thanks to Ryan Fennelly for proposing this definition of “victim mentality” in a Philosophy of Law discussion section.

<sup>8</sup> Andronnikova and Kudinov 2021, Callan et al. 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Callan et al. 2014 (p. 142).

It is simply always happening to them.”<sup>10</sup>

The characterization of “victim mentality” in these lines supports the overview of the concept here as involving a person’s dispositions to believe that she is not responsible for some set of the bad things that happen to her. The WebMD article appears to use “victim mentality” to refer to the mindset of a person in the extreme case in which the set of bad circumstances for which she denies responsibility includes all of the circumstances in her life that she judges to be bad. As the concept of a “victim mentality” is analyzed here, however, the beliefs in the set someone is disposed to form in having a victim mentality need not include beliefs that she is not responsible for every circumstance in her life that she judges to be bad.

To see why this constraint is unnecessary in specifying the sense of the concept of “victim mentality” used by those engaged in the relevant political debates, consider the following example. It includes a case in which critics would likely criticize the agent involved for developing a victim mentality, but in which the mentality that the agent develops does not involve dispositions of hers to believe she lacks responsibility for all of the circumstances in her life that she judges to be bad.

***Police Profiling.*** Hassan is a 16-year-old, black teenager in New York City who is crossing the street as the light changes from yellow to red. A police officer gives Hassan a ticket for jaywalking, but he has never heard of any of his friends receiving a ticket for the same infraction and could not have reasonably foreseen that this would happen to him as a result of his decision to cross the street when he did. He later looks up the officer who ticketed him by name on a social media platform and sees that the officer has posted photos that include well-known dogwhistles to white supremacist hate groups. On learning this information, Hassan is disposed to believe that he is not responsible for the set of bad circumstances which include his having been ticketed and fined for jaywalking. Last month, Hassan failed a high school history test for which he did not study and believes himself to have been responsible for his low score.

In the above-described case, conservative critics would likely classify Hassan as adopting a victim mentality in denying responsibility for the set of bad circumstances in which he finds himself when he is ticketed. However, as the last sentence of the narrative states, Hassan accepts responsibility for a different set of bad circumstances in his life: those associated with his failing a history test for which he did not study. This counterexample shows that a conception of “victim mentality” that requires the agent who develops one to deny responsibility for all of the negative circumstances in her life isn’t true to critics’ use of the term. Because Hassan does not believe that he deserved to be ticketed, this example also shows that the sense in which those engaged in the relevant debates use the term “victim mentality” does not entail the disposition of the person who has one to believe she deserves the set of bad circumstances with respect to which she believes herself to be a victim.

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<sup>10</sup> Brennan 2022.

It will be important to preliminarily highlight the ways that being a genuine victim can come apart from having a victim mentality. First, one can evidently have a victim mentality without being a victim. Since we have stipulated that attributions of responsibility are truth-valued, objective truths, a non-victim might have a victim mentality by deflecting responsibility for a set of bad circumstances for which she is in fact responsible. Since we have established that evaluative judgments of circumstances as bad are also objective and truth-valued, a person might also correctly believe that she is not responsible for a set of circumstances that she erroneously judges to be bad. Finally, someone might have a victim mentality without being a victim by being wrong on both counts. That is, she might erroneously believe that she is not responsible for a set of circumstances she erroneously judges to be bad.

There is a further question that is more controversial: that of whether a genuine victim should not develop a victim mentality. In other words, this is the question of whether someone who is actually not responsible for a set of bad circumstances in her life should prevent herself from developing a set of dispositions to believe that she is not responsible for the relevant bad circumstances.

## **II. Why Victims Should Not Have Victim Mentalities, According to Critics**

Those who criticize policy proposals on the grounds that these support a victim mentality usually hold that a victim mentality is a bad thing for an agent to have and that those who are victimized should strive never to develop a victim mentality. By considering the reasons such people cite in arguing for the claim that victims should not develop victim mentalities, this section explores and evaluates an important segment of their view.

It is possible to divide criticisms of victims having a victim mentality into two main groups. The first group of criticisms may be called deontological. These have to do with one's duties, considered abstractly, and the merits of one's actually forming the beliefs toward which a victim mentality disposes one. The idea is since it is wrong to form the beliefs associated with a victim mentality due to certain properties of those beliefs themselves, it is wrong to develop a disposition to form the relevant beliefs. The second group of criticisms is forward-looking. These criticisms take into account the total welfare of the victim in the future and roughly hold that a victim should not develop a victim mentality because some victim's being disposed to form the beliefs associated with a victim mentality would be an impediment to her future development as an agent.

The first class of criticisms involves the alleged intrinsic wrongness of holding the beliefs that a "victim mentality" disposes one to form. These criticisms can be rooted in either the idea that it is wrong for one to see oneself as a passive entity to any degree or the idea that it is wrong for one to deny responsibility for some relevant set of circumstances in one's life.

One might be led to endorse the former idea that it is morally wrong to hold beliefs that lead to a conception of oneself as a passive entity by adopting a view on which beliefs that

express certain traits—for example, honor, bravery, courage, or strength—have intrinsic value and beliefs that express traits antithetical to the aforementioned ones have negative intrinsic value. If beliefs about one’s own passivity express, for example, cowardice or weakness, then on the type of view under discussion, it is morally wrong to hold such beliefs, regardless of their truth, due to their intrinsic badness. This is the case because holding the beliefs in question is incompatible with one’s fulfillment of a moral duty to form beliefs about oneself that cohere with a certain ideal of character.

One might be led to endorse the latter idea that it is wrong for one to deny responsibility for any bad circumstances in one’s life by adopting an evaluative framework on which the set of possible bad circumstances excludes those for which one can lack responsibility. The Stoic outlook is an example of one such evaluative framework. Proponents of Stoicism hold that “externals,” or things outside of the control of an individual agent, can have no evaluative significance from the standpoint of rational prudence for that agent. Thus, holding a belief that one lacks responsibility for some set of bad circumstances in one’s life is morally wrong, according to Stoics, because it must be untrue given their evaluative view of the world.<sup>11</sup> Holding the beliefs a victim mentality is supposed to dispose one to form would prevent one from fulfilling either a moral or epistemic duty to form only true beliefs.

There is a question of whether the two groups of deontological criticisms mentioned establish the alleged wrongness of adopting a victim mentality. My sense is that they do not. As Martha Nussbaum writes, the kind of total unwillingness to acknowledge that one is vulnerable to any degree whose recommendation is the basis for the first group of deontological criticisms is also characteristic of pathological narcissism.<sup>12</sup> Pathological narcissists are seldom regarded as paragons of virtue, and in fact, their condition is considered a mental disorder.

The Stoic contention that the set of circumstances one can rightly consider bad and the set of circumstances for which one can lack responsibility are completely disjoint also seems highly controversial. If there are objective truths about which circumstances are bad from the standpoint of rational prudence for a particular agent, it seems like they must include some circumstances that are outside the control of that one agent. Surely, it is objectively bad from the standpoint of rational prudence for one to be imprisoned for years for a crime one did not commit but of which one has been falsely accused, though the Stoics would consider the circumstances that included such imprisonment “externals.” Thus, the reply to the latter class of deontological criticisms is that these seem to be premised on an implausible evaluative outlook that we cannot take for granted if we are supposing that there are objective evaluative facts.

As mentioned, the second set of reasons why people commonly take the position that it is wrong for anyone to have a victim mentality is forward-looking. These center the idea that

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<sup>11</sup> Nussbaum 2003 (p. 372-373).

<sup>12</sup> Nussbaum 2003 (p. 409).

believing oneself to lack responsibility for a given set of negative circumstances in one's life has negative instrumental value. This could be true for a number of reasons. The continued acknowledgement that one lacked responsibility for some set of negative circumstances that came about sometime in the course of one's life could lead to feelings of resentment that could detract from one's overall happiness, even if the relevant circumstances later improved. Such acknowledgement could also lead to feelings of helplessness that could be in themselves bad and prevent one from attempting further achievement, or to paranoia or anxiety that could likewise manifest in various undesirable ways. Because forming the beliefs to which a victim mentality disposes one has negative instrumental value, these criticisms hold, it is wrong to develop a victim mentality.

Although the critics under discussion highlight serious ways in which conceiving of oneself as a victim can hinder one in the pursuit of future achievements or take away from one's overall happiness, there is a further question of whether these considerations are weighty enough to ground a prudential duty on the part of genuine victims to avoid developing a victim mentality. For this to be the case, the referenced drawbacks associated with developing a victim mentality would have to detract from the total welfare of genuine victims over time more than would those associated with not developing a victim mentality. Thus reframed, the question becomes about whether the negative instrumental value associated with failing to be disposed to form true beliefs about the fact of one's own responsibility for some set of bad circumstances is greater than the negative instrumental value associated with being disposed to form true beliefs about the same subject matter.

Failing to develop a victim mentality could have negative instrumental value in a case where someone victimized in the past is likely to be victimized in the same manner again. Instances in which one is a victim of systemic, rather than random, bias, for example, might be reasonably avoided through preventative measures in the future if one has true beliefs about one's past experiences of victimization via the same biases.

Systemic bias is distinguished from random bias in that a target participant in a given system has a 100% chance of encountering a systemic bias in virtue of their participation in some system. In contrast, a random bias is one that a target participant in a system has a nonzero chance of encountering in virtue of her participation in the system, but which she also has a nonzero chance of not encountering. The difference is pertinent to whether a possible target of bias can be rightfully blamed for actually becoming a target of bias after choosing to enter a given system. Whereas it is often not appropriate to blame an agent for choosing to enter a system where she could be a target of random bias, it is usually appropriate to blame an agent for choosing to enter a system where she would be subject to systemic bias if she could have been reasonably expected to know of its existence beforehand. This is the case because if a target individual can be expected to know of the existence of systemic bias in some system, the foresight of the chance of suffering adverse consequences as a result of such bias is something a reasonable person in her position can be expected to have.



The following case contains an illustration of the point that failing to develop a victim mentality can have negative instrumental value for a genuine victim who experiences systemic bias thus defined.

***QBS.*** Mary is a senior engineering manager for a team of mostly men, and who feels she was unfairly treated throughout much of her career. For this reason, she is especially hard on young women she manages when it comes to giving out promotions, feeling that they deserve to be treated in the same way she was as they are climbing the ranks. Consistent with her pattern of mistreating her employees who are women, Mary denies Jean, a woman, a promotion during her semi-annual performance review. Jean is friends with a few of the men who received promotions and knows that she worked longer hours and executed her projects more competently than many of them. Later, Jean meets a former, longtime employee of the same company at a party who recalls how she left the company after Mary denied her promotions for ten years in a row. Still, Jean is not one to have a victim mentality. She believes against the evidence that she is responsible for having failed to receive a promotion. She does not seek employment elsewhere, continues to work for Mary's team, and does not receive a promotion again the next year.

In the above case, it is clear that Jean's choice not to develop a victim mentality, if it can be said to be a choice, has negative instrumental value when considered in light of her total welfare over time. On account of her failure to acquire a disposition to believe truly that she was not responsible for failing to be promoted, Jean makes a choice that she would have been prevented from making had she acquired the disposition to and come to actually hold the belief with that content: the choice to continue in the same job and put her earning potential in Mary's hands again. It is true that in not developing a victim mentality, Jean is spared the psychological cost of perceiving herself as a victim of bias and perhaps also comes off as more affable to her conservative colleagues, who admire her easygoingness and mental toughness. However, Jean's earning potential is greatly diminished in the long term by her choice to continue to work with Mary.

It is clear from this discussion that the question of whether a victim's development of a victim mentality after an experience of genuine victimization has positive or negative instrumental value is not a straightforward one to answer, and that in virtue of this, neither is the related question of whether victims have a prudential duty to develop such a mentality or a duty not to develop one.

### **III. Why Victims Epistemically Should Have Victim Mentalities**

This section lays out the argument that those who count as genuine victims by the definition introduced earlier have an epistemic duty to have a victim mentality according to most views in normative epistemology. Then, it tries to clarify how the notion of an epistemic duty interacts with other types of duties to generate all-things-considered duties. First, a defense of the claim that genuine victims epistemically should believe that they are victims can be represented by way of the following premise-conclusion argument.

**(P1)** According to most views in normative epistemology, everyone epistemically should believe true propositions.

**(P2)** If one is truly a victim with respect to some set of bad circumstances in one's life, then it is true that one lacks responsibility for the set of negative circumstances in one's life with respect to which one is a victim.

**(C1)** If one is truly a victim with respect to some set of bad circumstances in one's life, one epistemically should believe one lacks responsibility for the set of negative circumstances in one's life with respect to which one is a victim (by **(P1)**, **(P2)**).

The first premise says that most views in normative epistemology hold that everyone epistemically should believe true propositions. This premise is supported by the claim that forming true beliefs is the aim of the practice of believing propositions. If some outcome is the aim of engaging in a practice, then assuming that one's ultimate goal in engaging in the practice is to engage in that practice well, it is true that one should achieve the outcome that is specified to be the aim of engaging in the practice. Some, like Williamson, have explicitly defended the claim that believing truly is the aim of believing.<sup>13</sup> Others have indirectly defended this claim by defending two claims from which it follows: the claim that knowledge is the aim of belief and the definition of knowledge as justified true belief. Finally, some people take believing truly to be an aim of whatever processes and behaviors are involved in forming justified beliefs.<sup>14</sup> That believing truly is one aim of believing also follows from this claim about truth being an aim of justification, the claim that knowledge is the aim of belief, and the JTB theory of knowledge.

The second premise says that the truth of the proposition that one lacks responsibility for some set of negative circumstances in one's life follows from the fact of one's being a victim with respect to the relevant set of circumstances. This premise may be considered a restatement of the definition of "victim" introduced earlier as someone who lacks moral responsibility for the set of bad circumstances in one's life with respect to which one is a victim.

Recall that having a victim mentality consists in being disposed to form beliefs that one is not responsible for the circumstances with respect to which one is a victim. The conclusion that victims epistemically should have victim mentalities follows from the above argument if we add one further premise.

**(P3)** One who should form certain beliefs should or must be disposed at some point to form the relevant beliefs prior to actually forming them.

What this means for whether victims should have victim mentalities in the all-things-considered sense of "should" depends on what epistemic duties are and how they interact with

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<sup>13</sup> Williamson 2000 (p. 11, 47, 256).

<sup>14</sup> Haack 2001 (p. 29), Littlejohn 2012 (p. 1).

other types of duties to generate all-things-considered duties. It is generally assumed that if one should  $\phi$ , where  $\phi$  is any activity, then one has a duty to  $\phi$ .

#### IV. Conclusion

This paper has introduced the notions of a “victim” and a “victim mentality” as they have been appealed to by participants in political debates, explained why conservatives engaged in these debates tend to be critical of anyone who develops a victim mentality, and laid out a premise-conclusion argument for the claim that victims epistemically should have victim mentalities according to most mainstream views in normative epistemology. This conclusion considers how the related claim that genuine victims have an epistemic duty to develop a victim mentality bears on the question of what kinds of mentalities victims have duties to develop or not develop in general.

To answer the question of whether the conclusion that genuine victims epistemically should have a victim mentality implies anything about whether genuine victims overall should have a victim mentality, where the epistemic and overall senses of “should” are taken to imply a *prima facie* epistemic duty and an all-things-considered, overall duty, respectively, we should consider whether the combined overall instrumental and intrinsic value of some victim holding true beliefs about her responsibility for the set of circumstances with respect to which she is actually a victim is greater or less than the combined overall instrumental and intrinsic value of her holding false beliefs about her responsibility for the same set of circumstances. There may or may not be different varieties of instrumental and intrinsic value associated with the moral, epistemic, and prudential domains, depending on one’s big-picture views on these issues. Different views may or may not take bringing about these types of value in different amounts and proportions to ground moral, epistemic, and prudential duties of different strengths.

In estimating how those with different views will ascribe overall value to having a victim mentality and not having one, respectively, it may be useful to consider that if one holds that being disposed to believe truly has moral, epistemic, or prudential intrinsic value, then some victim’s having a victim mentality will have some positive intrinsic value and her failing to have one will have some negative intrinsic value. Whether the ultimate value of having a victim mentality will exceed that of not having one will then depend on how the intrinsic values of both are quantified, the amounts of negative and positive instrumental value associated with having a victim mentality, and the amounts of negative and positive instrumental value associated with not having a victim mentality. Whether the value of having a victim mentality exceeding that of not having one or vice versa will ground a duty to have a mentality of a certain kind will then depend on the relation of duties to values on one’s big-picture view.

If one does not hold that being disposed to form true beliefs has intrinsic epistemic value and also holds that being disposed to form true beliefs has no non-instrumental moral or prudential value, then the comparison becomes one of the net instrumental value of being disposed to hold true beliefs in the victim’s particular case to the net instrumental value of her

failing to be disposed to hold true beliefs in that case. Because how one actually makes the comparison will depend on the intricacies of one's views about how instrumental values of different types should be quantified in relation to each other and in particular cases, as well as one's views about the ethics of belief, they are beyond the scope of this essay. However, the paper has hopefully succeeded in highlighting a possible tension between conservative views about victims' duties not to have victim mentalities based on the alleged overall disvalue of genuine victims' attributions of moral responsibility for various circumstances to outside forces (assuming realist accounts of moral responsibility and prudential evaluations of circumstances) and mainstream views about the epistemic value and potentially also the instrumental, moral, and prudential value of forming true beliefs.

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