

IPP Phenomenology of Being Series

Victimhood



Abstract	3
Preamble	3
1 – Innocence	3
2 – Irresponsibility	4
3 – Powerlessness	5
4 – Habit	5
5 – Anger	6
6 – Self-protection	6
7 – Consolation	6
8 – Meaning	7
9 – Fear	7
10 – Recognition	7
11 – Self-sacrifice	8
12 – Bonding	8
13 – Inertia	9
14 – Manipulation	9
15 – Identity	10
16 – Trauma	11
17 – Hiding	11
18 – Empathy	12
19 – Strength	12
20 – Certainty	13
21 – Complacency	13
22 – Egocentrism	14
23 – Justice	14
24 – Dereliction	15
25 – Ignorance	16
26 – Hypersensitivity	17
27 – Social conditioning	17
28 – Nihilism	18
29 – Erotism	18
30 – Sexism	19
31 – Xenophobia	20

Abstract

Victimhood is a trendy tendency. For different reasons, many people today tend to describe themselves as the victim of someone, of some group, of something or other. Of course, all of us undergo diverse phenomenon that we cannot control, that can hinder our freedom and our existence, that can make our life more difficult. Just the fact we did not choose to be born and were "thrown in the world", abandoned, as existentialist philosophers phrase it, in some arbitrary time and place, in a random given context, could provide sufficient reason to complain. Same goes with the people around us, even our own family, who in spite of the sentimental bonds we entertain with them often make us feel victimized.

We examine multiple reasons why we maintain such a victim attitude, rather than adopting a wiser, more potent, rational or distant perspective. For example, the victim is by definition "good and innocent", in opposition to the "evil executor". The victim does not have to take responsibility for its actions and defects since it is powerless. It is an easy habit to develop. It is as well a good way to rationalize the discontentment we experience toward ourselves and the world, to justify our own irritation and anger. We can protect ourselves from criticism and find some consolation for the pain we endure, since by being a victim we attract attention and empathy from our surroundings. Thus, we envisage multiple other hypotheses explaining the popular attraction for victimhood.

Preamble

In this text we try to identify the causes and manifestation of victimhood, in the sense of a self-victimization, a popular trend in our society. But we cannot clearly distinguish between these two aspects because they are too intertwined in this particular human phenomenon. In a way, even though we try to give causes to such behavior, we can conclude that victimhood is its own cause: it is fundamentally an existential and psychological attitude, a certain way of being, with its legitimacy and its flaws. It is as well a significant and inevitable facet of life. We can claim that to be a victim is indissociable from human existence: objectively, we are all victims, of something or another, of someone or another. The difference lies in the intensity, the dependency, the perception, the degree of suffering it engenders, and especially the wish or will to describe oneself as a victim.

1 – Innocence

The victim is beyond reproach, he is not guilty of anything, since he suffers from the wrongs that are done to him. The assumption being that no one wants to harm himself, a rather illusory principle, since there are many reasons why someone would want or accept to be harmed, if only because of passivity, lack of courage, or to give value to his

own existence. Therefore the victim is the contrary of the persecutor, the latter being the bad person, the wrongdoer, in opposition to which the victim is considered innocent. Although Nietzsche claims that the victim is the main collaborator of the persecutor, since without one form or another of acceptance, the offense could not be committed. But in general, the victim is thought of as irreproachable or guiltless, he is by implication good and innocent of any offense. If the "victim" were bad, he would be called a rascal, scoundrel or else, and whatever misfortune or torment happening to him would not be called victimization but punishment, rightfully considered, deserved. Since the victim is considered good, the misery inflicted on him is undeserved and unjust. As well, to be a victim allows one to escape judgement or punishment, since victims do not have the exercise of free will, or pretend not to have it. Their state is determined by circumstances or the will of their predators. If their actions are dependent on some external forces it implies that they can not be guilty and therefore cannot be judged or punished, an issue that most people prefer to avoid. In a more extreme way, some try to establish the idea of being a victim as a form of moral superiority. Today the status of "victim" seems to have even gained a sacred character. Some persons therefore adopt the victim posture because it allows them to be "sanctified", to render themselves beyond the reach of any criticism and become untouchable. It is an elevated moral position, a glorification which can provide the victim with a sort of saintly aura. But as Nietzsche wrote, the victim can as well be criticized for a certain perverse behavior, as he is the main "collaborator" of the executioner and therefore far from innocent. He raises the suspicion that no one is ever a victim without his own tacit psychological or existential approval, since to be a victim is after all an attitude. Without victims, there would be no persecutors.

2 – Irresponsibility

By posing as victims, our mistakes and our wrongdoings are externalized to some factors we could not control, to some people whose higher powers are decisive, to some rule, regulation or law that could not be transgressed or to some overpowering circumstances. The victim does not have to take responsibility for the situation he is in, for his shortcomings or deficiencies, not even for his own actions. Whatever wrong exists or has been done is the fault of someone else, the victim is free of any culpability, relieved of any moral, social or legal incrimination, liberated of any psychological burden. He cannot and therefore does not have to act, the wrongs that are accomplished take place without his consent, since they are harmful to his person. This refusal of responsibility can be viewed as a form of infantilism, known as Peter Pan syndrome. It describes one's inability to accept getting older and engage in behavior usually associated with adulthood, when people do not want or feel unable to grow up. They do not know how to or do not want to stop being children. They therefore do not want to commit themselves to keep promises, they lack self-confidence, they indulge in

inconsequential or childish behavior. As a “child”, we undergo events, we do not control our environment nor act upon it, others are supposed to find solutions for us, a rather comfortable state, although this irresponsibility bears its dose of psychological pain.

3 – Powerlessness

To feel powerless, to be powerless, to claim powerlessness is a common revendication. To feel vulnerable and weak, and even brag about it is a banal phenomenon that we encounter a lot in our contemporary times. Either because of the political and social transformations that weaken the citizenship concept, or because trendy psychological concepts promote feebleness and fragility as a quality. If we are powerless, we do not determine reality, we undergo, we withstand, we are subjected to the events and processes affecting, and this makes us a victim. This powerlessness can nevertheless be explained as a lack of courage to change the course of events. When there are aspects in our existence that we deeply loathe but are difficult to modify or necessitate too much energy, we prefer to claim that it is too late, or keep repeating that our life is terrible anyhow. It is easier to take the role of the victim and blame everyone around us, bad luck or circumstances for our misery, rather than having the courage to act upon reality. To be powerless is a comfortable psychological or existential recourse. Although we notice as well that being a victim can be a source of power, a way to affirm and exert a certain power. Since declaring oneself a victim is a form of resistance and protest to the course of events, when it is repetitive and insistent it can take the form of an aggressive stance and positioning. One could then state as well that the victim suffers from a fear of success. He prefers to undergo events of the world instead of acting upon them. He is a recipient and not a creator, he fears taking charge of the outcome of events, to be a spectator is for him a safer position. In a sense, the tormenter is symbolically the adult, while the victim can feel like a helpless little child. Victim attitude can as well belong to the category of “low energy” behaviors, where one cannot mobilize his own self, does not exercise and actualize his own power, is not adequately “centered”, be it for psychological, environmental, educational or physiological reasons. This lack of will, of drive, of passion, makes him before anyone else a victim of himself.

4 – Habit

Habit is in general not the cause of a phenomenon, it is a consequence. Nevertheless, a repeated or continuous behavior or action installs itself as an automatism, it becomes a second nature. This tends especially to be the case when this manner of being is facile and effort free, we easily permanently adapt to it and integrate it to our behavior and personality. That is the case for people who adopt over time the victim role and regularly entertain such a character: it becomes natural to them. Such a posture provides explanations and meaning, identity and excuses, a feeling of being right without much to do; there is no reason why they should stop benefitting from such a comfortable

position. We should note as well that “habit” is itself a victim posture, where someone becomes a victim of himself, of his own routine and complacency. Such a person lacks the energy and willpower to freely and consciously determine himself, and to modify his actions and his behavior.

5 – Anger

Numerous persons are angry, it seems to be a constituent factor of their psychology, of their temperament, of their existential attitude. Most likely the world and their own self do not satisfy their expectations, they do not know what to do about this situation, they feel powerless, so they are unsatisfied and angry. The victim position fits very nicely with such a scheme, since it can justify a posteriori the anger, give it a concrete object, a justified reason, a plausible explanation. Thus, those victims can express their anger and vent it on society, as a sort of permanent cathartic experience, which can be summoned at any moment. Of course, they will explain that the wrongs done to them are the cause of their anger, but it actually is the reverse: they constantly look at reality as an endless reservoir of motivations to feed their anger.

6 – Self-protection

Playing the victim enables the person to avoid feelings of guilt and shame, and it spares criticisms. Such a scheme protects from internal and external suspicions, from blames, judgments and condemnations. Strangely enough, the victim does not have a good self-conception, since he is impotent and suffering, but at the same time the victim posture produces a carapace that prevents psychological pains, since the victim is innocent and self-righteous. Disapproval would be too painful, stirring up a sense of worthlessness; being a victim prevents such rejection of the self, objectively and subjectively. He cannot be blamed, he makes no mistakes since he does not act, and victims cannot be criticized, since everyone considers they suffer enough already. It is a form of survival. For psychological reasons, since they do not have to act. But as well for practical reasons, since people tend to help victims, protect them, and they might satisfy their immediate needs. As well, playing the victim can help to cope with some difficult situations as a safe way to account for a problematic situation, and some people psychologically cannot take a healthier attitude, or prefer not to do it.

7 – Consolation

Consolation is a thought, action or else that makes us feel better when we are unhappy or disappointed. It does not solve our problem, but merely compensates our pain or worry by making us feel better. And we all have reasons to feel unhappy or disappointed, since obviously life does not grant us all our wishes and many problems

punctuate our existence. One such consolation, even though paradoxical, is to indulge in a victim status. As we see with other concepts, there are many values attributed to the victim status, and such an identity spares us the pain and anguish of facing our own impotence when facing problems, resulting in a rather reassuring existential positioning. When we believe we are a victim, when we present ourselves as a victim, this grants us some type of compensation or reward for what we consider undue sufferings. The idea of bad luck is for example a good way to explain or account for negative occurrences in our existence. Even though the idea of bad luck is in itself unpleasant, the fact we can account for our problems through the idea of a self-imposing hazard, freeing us from responsibility, guilt or shame, makes us feel better.

8 – Meaning

Human beings cannot be satisfied with only a biological life, mere survival is not enough. A true and dignified existence implies a need for meaning, our life needs to have some significance, in the different senses of the term. First, to be important, to be valuable, because we represent something unique and relevant. Second, to grant value to ourself through some quality, specific identity or purpose that makes our life worthy. Third, to account for our being, a sort of apology, justification or explanation for our life, its course and events, depicting why things happened the way they happened, giving reasons for our failures and shortcomings. To be a victim, by attributing a glorious connotation to the term, fits quite nicely and easily such an existential and intellectual function. The passion of Christ is an example of such a meaningful victimization.

9 – Fear

Facing our problems and dealing with them is much harder than being a victim. To tackle the problem is more challenging than blaming others, than accusing circumstances and taking on the role of a weak victim. Not to be the victim of a situation implies tenacity and courage, a quality that many people are lacking, a constancy in action that necessitates energy and perseverance, a frightening perspective for weak souls. Fear is a reason for many decisions and actions in human existence, since there are too many evils and hardships to confront, as painful as they are insurmountable. Therefore, we adopt the position of the victim, declaring ourself impotent and suffering, rather than admitting we just do not have the courage to face adversity. Shyness is a classic example of such a redescription, where fear takes on a euphemistic disguise in order for the subject to look like the victim of some unchangeable personal trait.

10 – Recognition

When we act like a victim, the response from others is often a form of attention: people listen to our confidences, explanations and stories, and try to comfort us, the poor

victim. The victim automatically attracts pity, understanding and compassion. A victim generally receives more attention than a person who is “fine”. Others tend to care more about people in need. For this reason, to be “vulnerable” has recently become some quality to brag about. This attention provided by others to our pains or weaknesses feeds our self-value, since it shows that we are worthy of someone else spending time and energy on our person, just because they show interest in hearing our story, consoling us or trying to mend our wounds. For some people, victimhood is in fact the only way to “feel seen”, to obtain recognition. They do not see any particular aspect of their existence that is worthy of interest, they do not have a good self-conception, thus they fear to be unnoticed, they suffer a feeling of estrangement, an alienation from others which intensifies their sense of worthlessness. But if they complain enough and portray themselves as the miserable victim of some mean people or of some unfortunate circumstances, they suddenly become more interesting, even if they see mainly commiseration in the eyes of others. In this misery lies the interest, an imposed misery that no one deserves, that establishes the victim as some type of hero, or anti-hero, as it is called in literature or cinema: a hero of suffering.

11 – Self-sacrifice

A sacrifice is the act of giving up something valued for the sake of something else regarded as more important or worthy. For example, the killing of a person in order for the gods to bring some benefit to the community, or the firing of employees for the company to make more profit. But sacrifice can be self-imposed as well, a common practice, where we give up something important for ourselves in order to offer something else to others, or to ourself. A classic example is the mother sacrificing her well-being in order to benefit her husband and children, worrying primarily about their own well-being, or the one of a person sacrificing his personal existence in order to dedicate himself to his work. Those people are visibly suffering, but they present their existential choice as an obligation, something they have to do, that they cannot not do. Whatever the explanation is, moral, educational, economical, psychological or else, they present themselves as a victim of a situation. They will easily negate their own degree of freedom in such a decision, which can evidently be viewed as an expression of bad faith. Of course, they derive from this self-sacrifice a sense of worthiness, which can bear a heavy cost. Such a scheme can as well be used to avoid confronting some more important existential issues, to skirt facing oneself.

12 – Bonding

Among the different means by which human beings relate and associate, victimhood is a common one, a rather popular scheme. In general, individuals connect through some particular form of victimhood, with which the participants to the gathering can identify. It can be a loosely organized collective, informal, or a determined and identified group.

They can share some activities, engage in some established rituals or even claim some revendications. Through this attachment, they can reinforce each other's sense of victimhood, although it can as well represent a way to overcome this status or situation. But in all cases, they can complain together, share sad stories, even engage in "who has it the worst" contest. And this bonding strengthens their sense of victim identity. Alcoholics Anonymous is an example of such a group. Although they hope to overcome their alcoholism problem, they define themselves as alcoholics even when they have stopped drinking for a long time, sort of claiming to be the victim of some immutable inborn characteristic. Political movements, for example of Marxist orientation, who claim to unite the oppressed against the oppressors, bear this inclination as well. Or again conspiracy theorists, who think that we are the victims of dark and powerful forces who manipulate the world. In such cases, the dividing line between a mere complaint, a demand or a fight is never very clear.

13 – Inertia

Inertia is the resistance of any physical object to any change. This includes changes to the object's speed or to the direction of its motion. An aspect of this property is the tendency of objects to keep moving in a continuous fashion, with a constant speed or orientation, or to remain motionless, when no external forces act upon them. In terms of human behavior, this applies in the same way to adopting a certain way of functioning, to making a habit and resisting change, or to remaining passive. But as unpleasant or problematic events constantly happen in an unpredictable way, we have to resist or adapt in order to cope with those new circumstances, and for this to mobilize our own forces and act in a determined way. We have to be willful and persistent, what can be called a voluntaristic behavior. But some people experience great difficulty to act in such a decisive manner. They are inclined to a certain passivity, for lack of passion or weak internal drive, or they suffer from what is commonly called laziness, thus they prefer to resign themselves and implicitly define themselves as victims, since they undergo events rather than act upon them. Either they pretend to ignore this detrimental reality and remain an unconscious victim, or they produce a discourse about the impossibility to intervene and justify their victim attitude. To take responsibility, to exert one's own influence means one must take action in order to change things, which requires time, effort and energy. Complaining about aversive events or ignoring them is easier and less demanding than attempting to solve problems.

14 – Manipulation

To be a victim can be a relational or social strategy, for different reasons. First, the victim attracts attention and interest, he will obtain recognition, empathy or compassion from his surroundings. Second, if someone declares himself weak or impotent, he will find some benevolent persons that will propose to help him or save him. Because of

some basic sympathy between human beings, one will often instinctively act to help when noticing a person that is obviously impeded by something beyond his reach. As well, numerous persons who desire to be helpful, who want show their strength or are eager to prove their worth, are always looking for such opportunities to help others. They even encourage such victim behavior in others in order to boost their own self-conception. Third, the victim makes the other persons feel guilty, an interaction that offers different advantages. The victim makes the others suffer as well, he makes them feel guilty, an effect which can provide a feeling of sharing pain, a sense of power and a sadistic pleasure. As well, when facing a victim one can naturally surmise that he is part of the problem, maybe just by the fact he is not doing anything about the issue, therefore inciting him to alter his behavior in order to improve the situation, and thus help him. Because of this potential benefit, the victim attitude is therefore rather used, both in interpersonal relations and social contexts, as a way to exercise power. The christian doctrine somewhat feeds into this scheme, since after all, "The meek shall inherit the earth". Furthermore, to look weak and subdued, to look like a loser, can be a winning strategy, by inviting the opponent, feeling strong and superior, underestimating the victim, to lower his guard. He will pay less attention and make mistakes. Since we usually think that weak people do not provide any danger, we are less suspicious and our pity towards them can blind us: only strong and free people represent an obstacle. Beggars often overplay this weak and pitiful role in order to get better results. As Zweig reminds us, pity is a dangerous sentiment, because of its binding and inextricable side.

15 – Identity

The human being needs an identity, some characteristics that make him interesting and different, granting him worth and dignity. The victim identity is rather a convenient one, since we all have some way in which we can describe ourselves as a victim. One only has to decide to put forward as a primary aspect this dimension of his existence, to produce a narration about it, to enrich it with as many details as possible, descriptive and explicative, to accentuate and even to exaggerate some features in order to produce the desired effect upon the listener and for oneself to end up really believing the story. Repetition of this narration is a crucial aspect of this phenomenon, both to esthetically improve the narration and to enhance its credibility. The victims complain a lot, describe how hard their life is, how difficult things are for them, describe some terrible events that occurred to them, therefore establishing for themselves an enriched existence and a definite identity. As well, to be a victim overrules or hides our deficiencies and even our wrongdoings, providing a basis for argumentation that lawyers often use in court proceedings. Since being a victim a priori justifies one's actions, one can be a criminal, just like he can be upset, angry or aggressive; as long as he is a victim, he can be forgiven. Of course, this type of behavior, the construction of such a victim identity, most likely results from a very poor self-conception, a weak

identity one is trying to compensate for. A victim does not trust himself, he has no confidence in his own power, there is always something or someone which is bigger and stronger, who knows better, that will rule his existence without any consideration for his freewill or well-being. In a way, to make oneself into a victim, to make it one's singularity, is a form of sublimation of painfully weak identity, a way to compensate for a lack of self-worth. Some religious schemes are founded on this principle, where the human is fundamentally bad, where he does not know what is good for him, he should therefore surrender to a divine will and accept suffering as his fate, finding in this suffering a true identity. Characterizing life as a valley of tears, as a place for expiation of suffering, can truly enhance our miserable existence.

16 – Trauma

With the popularization of psychological and therapeutic practices, through the vulgarization of introspection, everyone is prone to identify some events in his life, particularly in his childhood but as well in his adulthood, that deeply affected him, damaged him, scarred him for the rest of his life. The trauma can refer to specific painful or violent incidents, but as well to educational or moral principles, or to some continuous mental duress. And it is easy to find some unpleasant or painful episodes that occurred in our history and infer from these experiences some distressing emotional or mental consequences. Of course, the same events could have occurred without the terrible consequences we attribute to them, but we often prefer to dramatize them, first of all because it makes us interesting, second because it can explain and justify our defects and shortcomings. Therefore, if we are in a certain way or behave in a certain way and we undergo some criticism from our surroundings, we can account for those defects with events beyond our control, and therefore we can avoid or resist any demand for change or improvement. Rather than examining the way we think and act in the present, we prefer to tell stories about the past as a strategy to account for our own personality and actions. Sartre criticizes such a “psychologizing” attitude, claiming that even if we cannot change the events that happened to us, we can deliberately choose how we describe them, how we live them, and therefore determine the effect they have on us. Therefore the issue is not to debate between “true or false” victims, but to examine the attitude one has in relation to past problematic events. In this capacity to determine one's own mental state lies real freedom, and from this the decision to be a victim or not. But we often observe a confusion between “negative liberty”, meaning the absence of impediment to action, an impediment that constitutes the victim, and “positive liberty”, which is having the personal energy and the will to carry out an action.

17 – Hiding

If some victims enjoy bragging about their constructed self in order to grant themselves a status, others are victims because they prefer to hide, or they hide because they view

themselves as victims. This hiding of the victim can be a consequence of shame, of pride, or of a fear of acting out in reality. To be a victim allows one to hide, since one does not have to confront reality, to face others, be they the cause of their distress, a witness of it or anyone else. To fight against the oppressor, to modify a harsh situation, to react energetically implies to expose oneself, when one can avoid any confrontation and hide as a victim. Some persons who suffered an intense trauma can experience shame from it, or they felt they were demeaned, and they prefer not to speak about it, an attitude which can affect their whole being and make them inhibited and self-effacing. Thus, by acting as a victim, one does not have to say directly what his problem is to another person and address it. A consequence of this “choice” can be a totally subdued and passive attitude, or a passive-aggressive behavior, where the resentment for the negative episode is turned toward everyone, including oneself. Passive-aggressive behavior is characterized by an avoidance of direct communication accompanied by a pattern of passive hostility, by a systematic refusal to others. Inaction where some action is necessary or customary, remaining silent when it is not appropriate, are such typical strategies.

18 – Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand another person’s feelings and experience, although some extend its meaning to a form of sympathy or compassion, a sharing of feelings, or to pity, the sadness caused by the suffering of others. With these different attitudes from the others, we feel less lonely in our pain, we feel noticed, we feel understood, and in a way, we might feel protected or vindicated. This attention implies a sort of mutualization of the pain: the others try to help us or console us, and they would want us to do the same for them. We are understood, because every human is a victim in some manner, everyone is familiar with this experience, we all know how our weakness has been abused at some point in our life, and sharing this display of common fragile humanity helps us to heal our wounds. The reciprocal recognition of vulnerabilities can reinforce the victim status, but as well it can help the victim to overcome this suffering identity and take action.

19 – Strength

To be a victim, or the acceptance of the status, can be a form of strength. Someone going through continual tough times, continual pain, continual adversity, continual hardship, may appear or feel impotent and vulnerable, but reveal itself to be quite strong. Just like someone going through the same amount of stress and pressure and still fighting may appear strong, but be moments from breaking. The imperative of being tough and looking resistant can be a very fragile shell. In a way, true strength is built through weakness, through accepting our fragility and our incapacity to modify ourselves and the environment. For example, it takes a lot of mental strength to accept

the aging process, the loss of physical capabilities, the disability and pain of diseases, or the need to deal with an upcoming death. It takes a good amount of fortitude to accept reality in the midst of crippling situations. A dam built to keep back the feeling of weakness that threatens to overwhelm us cannot last forever. Therefore, accepting our victim status can help us become equanimous when facing the bleak dimension of reality. The example of Socrates accepting an unfair judgment and condemnation to death, a conscious victim of injustice, is a good case of the “strong victim”.

20 – Certainty

The life of a victim is predictable, unlike the life of a tormenter. Strangely enough, the victim’s success is to be beaten and defeated, a rather guaranteed outcome, when the tormentor’s success is to overcome obstacles and win, an outcome for which there are no guarantees: sometimes he wins, sometimes he loses. As a victim, one declines responsibility for his own failure, fatality rules, an attitude which presupposes an absence of surprise. Whatever we do does not matter, we are not in control, the deck is stacked, the game is rigged, we will lose anyhow. This allows the establishment of a “peaceful” routine, no matter how painful it is: it is psychologically less straining than constantly having to make decisions and acting upon them. The outcome is tragic, for it is secure. One can be surprised by the way some victims accept silently and serenely their fate, behaving like an animal steadily entering the slaughterhouse. It can be viewed as a form of determinism, a reality where necessity rules: we feel that we are not free in our choices, our decisions and actions will not fundamentally modify the course of events, therefore the scheme of victimhood means to identify and accept what we cannot control. Of course, this can be viewed as a type of wisdom, the capacity to accept one’s fate. But it can be viewed as well as a desire for certainty, a fear of taking risks, the mind recoiling from taking risks, refusing to adventure itself into the unknown. One might as well take its beating right away rather than prolong an unpredictable future: the latter is often considered psychologically more painful.

21 – Complacency

Some persons often complain of being offended: they feel upset because some person told them words that they felt were rude or embarrassing, or they felt someone acted wrongly toward them. Complaints can be about anything, even about issues that are not so important. They are easy conversation starters and in a way a factor for social cohesion, provided that others are easy public or agree on some common enemy. Victims either whine or they get indignant, depending on the emotional level they prefer to indulge in, or depending on the internal energy they have or want to mobilize. But whatever the reaction, they seem to get some satisfaction from this opportunity, even drawing a strange kind of pleasure out of their own complaining or irritation, especially if they encounter some attentive ear that would listen to them. They are complacent in this

modality, in spite of the pain they express, since they nevertheless experience a feeling of gratification with themselves and the situation. In a way they have no particular desire to modify those events: they get a sense of “feeling good” about themselves, probably because this proves that they are a good person in opposition to others who are wicked. The intensity of the annoyance or the resentment they undergo, for example when they were insulted or wronged, is nothing compared to the pleasure they get in reacting to it. This is particularly the case with indignation, the moral anger someone senses in front of injustice, surprised at so much villainy, a situation which provides our upright hero with a strong conviction of self-righteousness, the impression of being so reasonable compared to those unspeakable people. Furthermore, if some others share the same indignation, it can be a real bliss. The lack of respect others have for us, the blatant ignorance of our feelings, the shame and embarrassment they provoke, are typical motives for easy and common victim complacency.

22 – Egocentrism

The victim attitude is in principle self-centered. The world is divided between an outside that causes pain, or is indifferent to our pain and in this sense collaborates with it, and ourselves, the subject undergoing pain. This dimension of reality is the aspect of it which is the closest to us, which affects us the most, and therefore remains the most important actuality. The reason for this situation is that the victim attitude is primarily centered on feelings, not on reason. The elements of rationality sometimes evoked are primarily used to rationalize or explain the feelings incurred: it is essentially a subjective positioning. The significance of this posture is that feelings are individual, personal, self-centered, subjective, when reason is supposed to be universal, objective, collective, etc. As well, truth is not an issue, since critical thinking or evaluation analysis, problematization and objecting, are not welcome: conviction rules, our feelings are right by principle, our sentiment is not questionable. In general, when we experience feelings, unless reason intervenes, distantiation is not on the agenda, it is not even envisaged: we strongly believe our own feelings, we take them at face value. And the victim defines himself first of all through his pain, through his suffering, considered as evident facts; the cause of the suffering comes second, as an explanation of the pain. The basic claim of the victim is the fact that the world does not function the right way, people are not the way they should be, reality does not fit expectations. The victim's state itself is the sole valid criteria to determine how things are and how they should be, a very good definition for egocentrism. A person who adopts a victim mentality considers oneself the center of the world, therefore things are done specifically to hurt him, accidentally or on purpose. He cannot envisage that there are intrinsic reasons for those events that probably have nothing to do with him: he takes everything personally.

23 – Justice

To be a victim, to declare oneself as a victim, can be a form of revendication, a way to require a fairer state of things, to demand equity. Throughout history, populations of victims of discrimination have been proven right, their claims were the basis for advancing social justice. Thus, women who were often inferior in rights to men have acquired some equality after being recognized as victims of society. The same is true of black populations who have long been treated as subhuman and have since been formally granted equivalent rights once they were recognized as victims of a historic period. Antisemitism was denounced in the same mode. Most of the major discriminations go through a period of recognition of the victimhood of the population concerned before changes in the law and society can follow. Victimization can therefore constitute a step in social advancement. It is the stage of recognition of the damage done to the victim, the acknowledgment of the victimization, which must precede an evolution in practical and political transformation. And this acknowledgment can in itself be already a relief for the pain of being a victim. Therefore, positioning oneself as a victim, individually or collectively, is a way of asking for justice to be established or restored. To be a victim in this sense means to place oneself on the side of progress and rectitude in order to enforce proper moral and social values, an important reason which legitimizes victimization and makes it so popular. Although recently, with the popularization of the concept of “social victimhood”, a sort of competition on this issue has emerged, where different groups with opposite or conflicting interests compete for championship in the matter.

24 – Dereliction

In a way, as existential philosophy tries to explain, every human being can actually be considered a victim, as each one of us is just “thrown into this world” without consent, a personal fate all of us undergo. As some desperate teenager might angrily tell his parents: “I did not ask to be born”. We came into the world at a given time, in a given place, in a given context; we received a given familial and academic education, we underwent numerous social and personal events, without ever having a say in the whole matter. We can conclude from this vision that the role of freewill in our whole existence is rather reduced and frail. As well, we are condemned to grow old and die, our mental and physical capacities are limited, most of our important questions will not be answered, all of which is called the experience of finitude, the feeling of being determined and limited. Therefore, being a victim is much more realistic and natural than not being one. We of course try to forget this distressing situation by finding some outlets of satisfaction through satisfying some desires or fulfilling some expectations, in order to minimally enjoy our own existence, but those momentary reliefs can be considered superficial and illusory. Thus, by definition, we would be victims, the only difference between individuals residing in their more or less successful capacity and attempts to sublimate this dramatic situation. Although, we notice that most people that

present themselves as victims focus their attention on a very reduced part of their own finitude, a given limit that obsesses them in particular, thus ironically neglecting the true extent of their finitude.

25 – Ignorance

The sense of victimhood is often based on ignorance, a lack of culture. For instance, primitive humans, when there were strong storms, droughts or other natural disasters, thought that some powerful forces were angry at them, for particular reasons or arbitrarily. Therefore they had to act, pray or sacrifice, in order to propitiate those dark powers and protect themselves from their wrath. Of course they ignored natural processes, so their immediate reaction and explanation was to presuppose bad intentions from powerful forces of which they were victims. And when children fight, they easily accuse each other of bad intentions: “He always wants to bother me”, again attributing some bad intention to the other, instead of more objectively understanding his real desires, his global behavior and personality. The impulse to view the other as mean or evil, and powerful, is a typical reaction of victims, inscribed in the scheme of “the good, weak and innocent victim, versus the strong and mean persecutor”, the latter having by definition bad intentions towards him. He entertains a naive world vision, where people or events are divided into “good” and “bad” ones, a rather reduced ontological or moral scheme. Postulating that certain things or people are “bad” makes him feel like a victim of an unacceptable situation. He has no access to concepts such as necessity, reason, or other more transcendental principles. His thinking is more into immediacy. The explanations for why something happens are largely psychological, not epistemological, esthetical or metaphysical.

Since the victim suffers and feels powerless, he stays focused on his feelings and stops reasoning. This does not allow him to find explanations for other’s actions beside the suspicion or accusation that they want to hurt him, that they are against him. In this sense, the victim scheme is rather a xenophobic one: others are dangerous, both because they are badly intentioned and powerful, more potent than us. To think that the world is populated with mean creatures, the “others”, is a way to say that we do not understand the world, that we are ignorant about its functioning: it does not operate according to reason. The world of the victim is arbitrary and not really understandable. The victim thinks on a small scale: he does not have a substantial access to the principle of causality, to scientific rules, lawful order of things and rationality are foreign to him, he ignores larger processes. Evidently, the victim has as well a lack of self-knowledge. He is as ignorant about himself as he is about other people. He does not realize that his world vision is reduced and warped, and that his way of thinking is what makes him a victim of something or someone. He cannot properly analyze a situation. He just sees the “what was done to him”, he is blind to the overall process,

but especially he is blind to his own narrowness, his sadness and confusion. In reality, victims are generally mainly victims of themselves.

26 – Hypersensitivity

Some people are more sensitive than others, in the sense that they feel quicker and more intensely any psychological pain when something wrong happens to them. They can be qualified as acute receivers of outside stimuli, therefore victim-like. Because of this hypersensitivity, they have a tendency to be easily offended or upset by occurring events, even when the nature of their reaction makes no sense. Their victim nature makes them quite perceptive and reactive, a susceptibility that can engender a rather paranoid worldview and behavior. As a consequence, they are easily afraid or suspicious of other people, believing that “they” are trying to harm them in an excessive and unfounded way. Any event tends to be interpreted as threatening, because the world is filled with wrongdoers, or with people that condone those wrongdoings, or are indifferent to them, thus they easily perceive plots and malicious actions. If they can suffer from something, they will do it, since it comforts their world vision, it justifies their fears and complaints. Of course, they really suffer, a phenomenon that seems strange and incomprehensible to observers; from there those victims will derive an impression of being misunderstood, a feeling which increases their suffering and sense of impotence.

27 – Social conditioning

In political and social life, which is highly hierarchical, most people are rarely asked to make a decision concerning others, they don't need to take responsibility for collective actions. People are taught to follow orders, political and economic laws, or more recently, follow cybernetic devices and their algorithms. In other words, we are incited to be a mere cog in the machine. Free will is a problematic concept, less than obvious, since the average citizen does not experience a sense of power, and people tend to conceive of themselves as passive. Therefore, when some problem emerges, its cause is immediately attributed to some external power, some social or political authority, some power group, more or less clearly identifiable. The recent development of interest in conspiracy theories, which basically adhere to the idea that some obscure, hidden, malevolent forces are ruling or attempting to rule the world, at the expenses of the common citizen, demonstrates this. Here and there some identifiable person or entity is accused to lead or represent such a world plot. Although throughout history, different religious groups, ethnic entities, ruling bodies or social organizations have periodically represented evil incarnated. As well, the sense of powerlessness has modified itself within the social and political context, for example the reign of absolute monarchy or the practice of slavery do not function the same way than the interaction of powerful financial lobbies with formal democracy. But whatever the hierarchical social or political

structure is, the average subject or citizen can always find reasons to feel like a victim, since his basic expectations are generally not fulfilled. And he notices that he is deprived of power or resources in comparison to the more glorious or influential strata of society. To the extent that if here and there some persons decide to struggle and combat the arbitrariness, in general it is easier and more common to take on a victim mode, passive and suffering.

28 – Nihilism

Nihilism is in general the belief that nothing has any foundational value, it expounds the idea that religious, metaphysical or moral principles have no grounding or legitimate significance. Nothing exists as an absolute, there is a denial of any transcendence, in an ontological or moral sense. Nihilism proclaims the negation of any substantial a priori reality, therefore generating a radical suspicion towards any strong belief, since it negates any established moral and social values and their hierarchy. This produces a sort of mental disposition characterized by pessimism and psychological disenchantment. In a way, it allows a radical freedom, since such a scheme does not admit any a priori constraint of society or social codes on the individual. But the consequence of such an ideology is as well that the world is abandoned to chaos and arbitrariness, where all that is left is the survival of the fittest. Man becomes a wolf for man, and therefore we are at the mercy of any individual or organized group. No instance or authority can protect us anymore from abuse, we have no saving recourse, since there is the denial of any benevolent or positive institution or ideology. In this sense, we are all victims, since no matter how strong we are, we will always encounter some more powerful person or group that will act for its own benefit and against our personal interest.

At the same time, in a nihilistic world, we can observe an unconscious or sublimated desire for transcendence. This aspiration leads some people to bow down in front of other persons, entities or higher powers, thus idolized, worshiped or deified, in a positive or negative fashion. They act in accordance with these “powerful forces”, they follow or undergo their power. And they can easily perceive themselves as a victim of their influence, even viewing themselves as a singular and sublime figure of martyr. Fatality, dark conspiracies or the “matrix”, are good examples of such a mechanism. The whole world, mean and vicious, can represent as well such an entity, where people project their inner self, as is often the case of transcendence: their gods are pure negative of their own person. This dynamic can be described as an idolizing of the self, an egocentric scheme where one is both tormenter and victim.

29 – Erotism

Passivity and submission comprise an erotic dimension as well, to be a victim can be a source of pleasure. Obviously, one can here think about sexual sadomasochistic

practices, where a person undergoes excitement and sensual gratification in the act of abasing himself, of submitting himself to the whims of another person, or even suffering pain through this interaction. But in a more general way, in daily life, we can observe that some persons seem to enjoy being a victim or acting like one. Making oneself an object for another person, regressing to a primitive infantile state, submitting to a strong person, are then undergone as a gratifying experience, in the limited context of sexual activity as in general existence, and diverse persons are inclined to seek the experience with different intensity or degree of violence. This is what Freud characterized as the “enigmatic and unintelligible” pleasure of being a suffering victim. One recurrent aspect of the phenomenon is the fact that some persons behave strongly or powerfully in a certain context but enjoy or accept being a victim in another context. A typical example is the opposition between private life and public life, where one can act as a bully or a persecutor in one case and act as a victim in another one, experiencing alternatively opposite forms of psychological pleasure in relation to the exercise of power. One can here speak of the aphrodisiac dimension of power, either by exercising the power or by willfully undergoing someone else’s domination, in a sort of erotic codependency. Objectifying oneself, abandoning our fate to an external power or authority, being another person’s servant or slave, can provide meaning or value to one’s life; a sense of identity through the establishment of an intimate and strong bonding, a sensation of accomplishment by being useful, such attitudes providing their lot of satisfaction and pleasure, even though obviously mixed with pain.

30 – Sexism

Sexism is a form of discrimination or judgment based on sexual or gender differences. It can be viewed as a prejudice or an illegitimate bias, but it can be as well the foundation for existential or psychological choices, be they considered legitimate or not by others from a moral, social or psychological standpoint. For as we observe in numerous societies, and still now in our contemporary western world, in spite of certain modifications in attitudes and customs, women are often considered and educated as the “weak sex”, and periodically even explicitly qualified as such. Whatever the different reasons one could argue for such a perspective or explain it, the point is that women often behave as a victim because that seems to be their “vocation”, as they believe it or as society and their context incite them, oblige them. The sacrificing mother, who dedicates her life to the family at the expense of her own existence, taking care of everyone and everything, permanently multitasking, ruled by her obligation of “perfect woman”, is almost a cliché in this matter. One could criticize such a behavior, inviting the woman to emancipate herself and acquire the relatively greater freedom their male counterparts seem to benefit from. But this victim attitude can as well be transvaluated as a “caring” attitude, critical of the “power” scheme of the traditional patriarchal society, where to be strong and domineering is the value par excellence. This philosophical

scheme, moral and existential, has emerged as a constructed theory and practice over the recent years as the “ethics of care”. It is viewed as proposing “feminine values”, critical of “virilistic” values, where one is afraid to be passive and caring, viewing the world as a competition and the exercise of power, a world composed of strong people and weak people, a clear-cut division between winners and losers. In opposition, this ethic of “care” promotes as an ideal the principle of assisting others, of looking after one’s relative or neighbor, which in a way means to be at their service, an attitude some describe as a victim attitude.

31 – Xenophobia

Commonly, the term xenophobia refers to the fact of disliking or fearing the people of another country, of another culture, for example as a prelude to racism or chauvinism. But the “xeno” radical comes from ancient Greek and indicates what is “other”, the foreign country being only a specific form, a reduced manifestation of the phenomenon. Thus, if we take the term xenophobia in a wider sense, meaning that one does not appreciate or even dreads what is “other”, it seems we can perceive in general in humans a kind of latent xenophobia, more or less clearly expressed and multifaceted. Proverbs as “Do not wash your dirty laundry in public” somewhat reflects this attitude, or when we order the child not to talk to strangers, despite the prudent and rational dimension this recommendation may have. The idea is that the other is a threat, an intruder, that he must be kept “outside the walls”. The fear of judgment, the menacing gaze of others, is a very common aspect of this. In short, there are “ours” and there are “others”, “ours” are generally the “good” ones, the “others” being those who have other interests, other ways, those we don’t know and are therefore suspicious, that is to say the “bad guys”. As well, the “bad guys” are both numerous and powerful, even more than we can imagine. They disturb us, they oppress us, they are weird, they do strange things, they impede what we desire, they compete with us. and moreover they judge us and do not like us. All one has to do is to listen to the news to realize this.

We can see that there is not far to go to connect this xenophobic vision to a victim identity. Certainly this feeling will vary depending on the cultural and educational level of the person, depending on their cultural modality, but whatever openness and interest towards what is different is encountered in some individuals, it nevertheless remains true that the other is always somewhat disturbing, he signifies an intrusion of which we are the helpless victim. Even within a family, one necessarily meets this type of antagonism, in spite of the emotional connections, simply because identities, concerns or interests diverge, they oppose and obstruct each other. The famous phrase of Sartre “Hell is other people”, not least because they remind us of ourselves and awaken in us a recalcitrant awareness, captures the problem well. Thus we suffer the oppression of the others, we are their unfortunate victim. and if we find from time to time in ourselves the strength and ability to act potently upon them, their mass effect generally leaves us

anyhow with an aftertaste of powerlessness and subjection. Unless we fully accept those others, as they are, without fear or second thoughts, a wisdom that offers a challenge that is beyond most of us.