In this final chapter, I look back at some of the key points made about individual agent-victims of civilized oppression and consider their relevance to the nature of their agency. What moral agency can and should be exercised by the victims in particular? Some of the points argued for in earlier chapters are to do with the moral standing of the victims with respect to civilized oppression; some are to do with moral actions I have urged as their prima facie obligations; some are to do with the nature of certain relationships which, I believe, they either should enter into and develop, or should avoid or try to sever; and some are to do with mental attitudes that even victims, the most vulnerable and most hurt players in civilized oppression, should try to cultivate. That is to say, the agency referred to as morally desirable on the part of the victims covers far more than “actions” in the primitive, behavioral sense (a sense elucidated in the previous chapter).

**Passive Victims**

It is one of the main points in this book that victims of civilized oppression, although wronged, psychologically oppressed, and constrained by powerful others as well as by social institutions and structures writ large, should not be thought of as inevitably conforming to the stereotype of
“passive victims,” at least, not those victims who have a fair degree of agency-capability. To speak of victims is simply to speak of those at the receiving end of the power-backed oppression at work here; it refers to those who are systematically wronged and denigrated (whether overtly or otherwise) because of their membership in some despised group. Nothing more is built into the concept of victim as I use it. (In the remainder of this chapter I have in mind victims who have the capacities and abilities of moral agents.)

The victims do have special moral standing as victims, although it is not do with some kind of justified passivity. They have special standing in at least two respects. First, they have a claim on the community at large to the amendment of their situation, to compensation (if that is possible), to changes to the practices and structures that have left them victims, to the “repair” (to use Margaret Urban Walker’s term) of the distorted relationships they have been maneuvered into. And second, they have special standing in that they are an irreplaceable source of information, protest, and insights about civilized oppression.

The non-oppressed have an obligation to learn about oppression and in the case of this type, it is essential to learn about the powerful impact and moral significance of apparent trivialities inflicted on the socially disadvantaged. Since civilized oppression is inherently much harder to grasp than violent oppression (or oppression codified in law), the victims’ experiences and accounts are even more vital than in cases of more blatant oppression. And since civilized oppression itself extends over a range of phenomena, which become increasingly subtle, there are whole ranges on this spectrum where input from the victims is not only valuable, but essential, if the nature of the oppression is to be grasped. We have already seen philosophers like Laurence Thomas, Elizabeth Spelman, and Christine Koggel emphasize the value of such input, and Thomas bluntly asserts that if we lack such input, if the victims decide to remain “silent,” then there is no realistic hope of understanding some types of social injustice. Agent-victims have a prima facie obligation to inform the non-oppressed about the nature of the oppression, to convey, as best they can, some understanding of what is involved, to draw attention to the actions, including the less visible ones, that contribute to the oppression,