6. Conclusion. We started our inquiry in **Chapter One** by acknowledging the depressing state of our public moral discourse. Arguments about morality are ubiquitous, interminable, indecisive, ritualistic, and poisoned with self-interest and sophistry. After many hundreds of hours (or years) of inconclusive debate, it occurred to a few that something was amiss. When the simple belief that there is an objective and discoverable distinction between right and wrong was eventually called into question, the result, canvassed in **Chapter Two**, was a boisterous parade of anti-realists, relativists, skeptics, nihilists, determinists, subjectivists, amoralists, non-cognitivists, and error theorists, all dedicated to disturbing our comfortable certainty about morality.

Those who believe in a conscious, powerful, and demanding divinity, have an answer for the skeptics and amoralists. Morality depends on the will and the commands of their god. But we saw in **Chapter Three** that even if we assume that the world was created by a wise and powerful designer, it is still possible to ask, and difficult to answer, what I called ***The Question***: "Why do we have a moral obligation to obey this being?" That unanswered question, and others, led us, in **Chapter Four**, to the search for a respectable secular morality. We were not impressed by the rationalists, and when we got to empiricism, the most sensible voice seemed to be that of David Hume. According to John Mackie, a 20th Century Humean, Hume's "Objectification Theory" (his "projectivism") is a part of the best explanation for the widespread but false belief that there are moral facts and/or properties.

If neither the rationalists nor the empiricists have managed to defend morality any better than the religious moralists, and if Mackie and Hume's explanations of our moral beliefs and beliefs about morality are plausible, then moral realism is in trouble. But before rashly dumping all of "morality," we paused to survey, in **Chapter Five**, some of the many answers offered to questions about good, bad, right, and wrong. Moral anti-realists don't buy any of these answers, so by the end of the chapter we had generated an inventory of the various normative theories of value, obligation, and rights that make up the contents of the moral abolitionist's intellectual dumpster.

Even after learning what we are going to abandon when we abandon morality, and why it may be a good idea to do so, we were not quite ready to start our new post-moral reflections because several objections to amoralism, the error theory, and even moral abolitionism had not yet been answered. So, in **Chapter Six**, we considered some of the peculiar and desperate things moral philosophers have said in order to defend morality against its traditional enemies. I then moved on to suggest that the worries of these philosophers are unwarranted because we can do quite well without what Mackie called "the moral overlay." I concluded Chapter Six with a criticism of moral fictionalism, the idea that while moral judgments are all false, there are practical reasons for continuing to exploit them. However useful morality may have been in the past, if it is truly in error, as the error theorist insists, it will be available to encourage and defend destruction and atrocities unimaginable in previous centuries. This alone might make morality, in Nietzsche's words, "the danger of dangers." Plenty of powerful religious and political figures have insisted that their followers have a moral duty to destroy some country, or to abuse or even kill the members of some race, religion, or alternative persuasion. Our future will be much brighter if we can all stop our self-involved and combative moral posturing, develop a more realistic understanding of our conflicts of interest, and come up with ways to resolve them that are based on mutual respect and the best information we can get.

When we finally arrived at **Chapter Seven** we were officially “beyond morality.” Questions such as “What ought I do?” and “What is truly good?” were given a rest and we started asking “What shall I do?” and “What do I value?” By looking beyond morality we can tune in on some very wise advice by people who sound quite unlike the moralists we usually hear. For example, Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic Emperor, was just writing in his diary about his efforts to deal with the problems of state and with unreliable associates and relatives, and trying to figure out how to deal with life’s difficulties. He rarely wrote anything that was not framed as advice to himself, and we are fortunate to be able to listen in. Other helpful suggestions about emotions and desires flow in from Epicureans, Buddhists, Daoists, and from all those who have elaborated on and/or profited from that ancient wisdom.

The result of taking some of this advice seriously can be very positive, but we still needed to know how to apply these helpful suggestions in our own lives. That meant that we needed to take a close look at what happens when we do come to that “fork in the road.” We decide, of course, but how does that work? Our desire and emotions come in but, as I argued in **Chapter Eight**, decisions emerge, as do beliefs, from an unconscious “processor” that we do not completely control or even fully monitor. Decisions and beliefs are formed, as Malcolm Gladwell remarked, behind the locked door of our minds; and this is a good thing, because otherwise we might just paralyze ourselves trying to figure everything out, or we might get eaten (or beaten) because we were thinking when we should have been jumping.

I concluded that we will understand the decision process better if we become more familiar with what finds its way into this device, which I decided to call our “decider.” Chapter Eight contained a far-from-complete inventory of ways we have developed to influence decisions, ways to put in a good word, or several, to deciders. Each day we are bombarded with threats of punishment, promises of reward, warnings about possible consequences both natural and supernatural, deceptions, slogans, stories, jokes—the list is endless. We even use these methods on ourselves. If we want to change in ways that will make our lives more satisfying, then our best hope is to monitor, clarify, purify, understand, and regulate the input to our decider. We must make sure that our information is good information, that our sources are reliable, our influences are honorable, and that we are free of greed, anger, and inattention.

Of all the methods we have devised to advance our interests, language is our crowing achievement. It plays a role in the use of almost all the techniques discussed in Chapter Eight and its abuse and deliberate exploitation has expedited much of our misery. Language can function as a tool or a weapon, and it can both cause and cure confusion and error. Understanding the ways we are manipulated by those who use it as a weapon is a large part of becoming well, so in **Chapter Nine** I canvass some of the traps language sets for us, and examine three attempts to walk away from problems spawned by careless uses of words or by misguided questions. A deep understanding of the role language plays in the construction of our version of reality may be the very thing to help us walk around those traps and away from moralism.

The aim of those “methods of socialization” discussed in Chapter Eight and the point behind much of our talk is control. But there is a danger of being controlled by the desire for control, so it is wise to ask how much control we really want to have over others. How manipulative, how didactic, how demanding shall we be? Which of those “methods” shall we use, and how far shall we go in our use of them?

In **Chapter Ten**, after distinguishing between the "way of control" and the "way of harmony," I claimed that we are almost all a bit heavy on the control side and I suggested that we can reach a balance by leaning in the direction of harmony. In order to "reprogram for harmony," we have to begin by "looking carefully," and that means undoing some of the damage caused by the overenthusiastic application of some of those methods of socialization. Fear, false beliefs, superstition, slogans, and propaganda have all done us harm, and it may take a while to recover from our "socialization."

When we have recovered, and have managed to gain a relatively "clear view" of our world, our life, and our use of language, the next step is to learn to appreciate how well things can work if we are not always at the controls. Harmony comes when we know when to let things happen, when to let go and trust others. At this stage of our inquiry we are far beyond the thought that harmony needs a moral defense—to know it is to love it. But how do we come to know it? Since the answer is "practice," I ended the chapter by suggesting several simple exercises that can give anyone who tries one of them a "taste" of harmony. Rather than proving that harmony is best, I just say, "Try it; you'll like it." Who can argue with that?

Earlier I said that these remarks about moving from control to harmony "complete the answer to the question of how it is possible, pleasant, and sociable to live beyond morality." In **Chapters Eleven and Twelve** I moved on to show how moral abolitionists can navigate the hazardous waters of applied ethics at least as well as any moralist, and perhaps better because they do not have to carry a cargo of false beliefs heavy enough to sink a battleship.

I began Chapter Eleven with a quote from Albert Schweitzer, who said that "a man is truly ethical only when he obeys the compulsion to help all life which he is able to assist, and shrinks from injuring anything that lives." I don't think Schweitzer was using 'ethical' in the sense I have been promoting here. For him, "truly ethical" probably meant "truly moral," but even so, an amoralist can hear and respond to this remark as a heartfelt plea to make this attitude a part of our *ethics* (now in *my* sense of the word). This attitude goes way beyond morality, and also beyond the ethics of all but a few. The goal of respecting *all* life may be beyond the reach of anyone reading (or writing) these words, but the idea of respecting life more than we currently do is beyond neither our comprehension nor our capacity. We may not be able to see all life as *sacred* (whatever that means), but we can come to *realize* (in my sense of *that* word) that it is *life*. Even that one thought can make a difference.

In these final two chapters we have seen how the moral abolitionist can stand side by side with moralists, address the same practical problems, and, freed from the need to embrace false hypotheses and beliefs, deal with these problems without being distracted by conflicting and often absurd rules and requirements. Whether dealing with matters of life and death, the distribution of resources, or the treatment of others, moral abolitionists come out looking more humane and practical than the moralists, who are too often unable to see, or admit, the precariousness of their rationalizations for trying to impose their will on those who do not share their principles. However certain they may feel, their moral judgments remain dependent on unsupported or even unintelligible assumptions. Unless they can stun their critics with their rhetoric, they face the same ridicule as anyone who is unable to process or tolerate the sincere doubts of others.

When we finally realize that the bondage the moralist insists upon is an illusion, we may think that we have been liberated and that now "everything is permitted." We may feel cut loose, on our own, or, as some French philosopher more dramatically asserted, abandoned. But that too is an illusion. Without (or beyond) morality we do not float free, but are held in place by countless other laws, attachments, and forces. Moralists have always been more than willing to take credit for the order we have achieved, but we have seen that the role of morality in our actual choices is often minimal. At its core, morality is based on mistaken assumptions and confused concepts, so all those who take it seriously have doomed themselves to endless arguments, to idle and imaginative fantasizing about future consequences, and to conflicts of interest dressed as conflicts of principle. When people complain about the lack of values, they are usually complaining about the fact that other people fail to value the things they value, and they are presupposing that the things they value are the things that are truly valuable. When we finally get beyond morality, we leave all of this confusion and self-interested posturing behind. None of it is necessary and all of it is perplexing and distracting. Without morality we will have fewer reasons to object to the private acts of others or to censure them for doing, saying, or seeing things we would not do, say, or look at. We will back off and let others make the decisions that concern them, as we may hope to be allowed to make our own.

We are not going to get the world we want by arguing that war is morally wrong, that humans have inherent value, or that everyone deserves to be happy. Peace and happiness and the other things we all hope for will only come when we develop the habits and institutions that generate and nourish them—habits of cooperation and consideration, habits of generosity of thought and action and of yielding for the sake of harmony. These characteristics are easier to acquire when we have left the trackless jungle of morality behind us. They unfold as we attain a clear view and a deep understanding of the true character of our rules and principles, our institutions and conventions, our friends and fellow beings.