**Conclusion**

The aim of this project was to learn more about the kind of objectivity that we might justifiably attribute to our moral judgments, and to do so by investigating the defensibility of moral realism. Moral realism would get us a very strong kind of objectivity for our moral judgments. If moral realism were true, there would be moral facts or truths that are independent of our evidence for them. In this case, the demands of morality would have a very wide scope; it would seem that they would apply with equal force to all agents regardless of agents’ other reasons for acting. And, if moral realism were true, morality would not be a matter of human conventions, nor could our moral judgments be understood merely as expressions of the judge’s attitudes. We would expect, too, that moral right and wrong would not be culturally or historically conditioned. We would expect that there would be just one moral reality and that it is in terms of this moral reality that our moral judgments could be justified.

In Chapters 2, 4, and 5 we saw a number of reasons for thinking that moral realism might be a viable thesis. Certain forms of moral realism can withstand many of the standard objections that have been brought against the thesis. In addition, antirealist views that attempt to unmask moral properties look to be unsustainable. We also saw that it won’t do to interpret moral judgments in a thoroughly noncognitivist fashion because we use moral predicates as if they have an essential descriptive meaning.

But in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 I offered a number of reasons for rejecting all forms of moral realism characterized by the two core tenets. Because of his commitment to the second core tenet, the moral realist cannot account for the practical or action-guiding character of morality. Specifically, he cannot account for the highly intuitive form of internalism described by IT. Although externalism strongly coheres with realism, externalism doesn’t appear to be at all intuitive, especially not in light of the phenomenology of moral language use. Further, if (as I have argued) it is true that we conceive of morality as largely aiming at human well-being, it becomes impossible to satisfy the realist’s second core tenet. What constitutes human well-being will always be partly, or even largely, decided by us, and this means that it won’t be the case that moral facts or truths are independent of our evidence for them, for it won’t be the case that what makes a moral judgment true has nothing to do with the beliefs or attitudes we have—whether as individuals or groups of individuals—regarding the object being judged. Finally, the realist’s commitment to the mind-independence claim prevents him from adequately accounting for what I have called the subjective feel of our moral value experience. The moral realist needs it to be the case that moral properties exist prior to our perception of them. But this doesn’t look to be possible if we think that our affective responses ought to have some weight in our moral evaluations, or if we think that a person has not correctly judged the rightness or wrongness of a situation unless they have the appropriate emotional response, or if we think that our reasoned value judgments are judgments or evaluations and not simply cognitive recognitions of features in the world.

Perhaps another way of making the point that I am trying to make in Chapter 6 is to say that the realist cannot satisfactorily account for the evaluative meaning of moral predicates (or judgments). As Hume writes, “There are certain terms in every language which import blame, and others praise, and all men who use the same tongue must agree in their application of them. . . . no man without the most obvious and grossest impropriety could affix reproach to a term which in general acceptation is understood in a good sense or bestow applause where the idiom requires disapprobation . . .” (*Of the Standard of Taste*, paragraph 2). Here it is worth noting how the Bush Administration has tried to fend off objections to its practice of torturing prisoners. Rather than argue that torture is not always morally wrong, and rather than controvert the negative evaluative meaning of ‘torture’, the Administration chose rather to alter the descriptive meaning of the term by paring down what counts as torture. Someone in the Administration recognized, in other words, that it would be much easier to strip the word of its descriptive meaning than of its evaluative meaning. The strong connection between our moral terms and affective responses is a problem for the realist because he cannot subscribe to a plausible form of internalism without moral properties turning out to be queer entities.

Whereas in Chapters 4 and 5 we saw reasons for rejecting the nonexistence of moral facts or truths and for rejecting the idea that moral properties, if real, are entirely subjective, in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 we saw reasons for rejecting the view that moral properties, if real, are entirely objective. In Chapters 3 and 6 we also saw why the claim that moral properties have both objective and subjective aspects to them isn’t at all implausible; colour properties already have this dual nature. A view of moral properties along the lines of what McDowell proposes holds that moral properties are both objective and subjective in nature. This view seems far more explanatorily adequate than any of the other metaethical views canvassed in this dissertation. As such, it provides us with one more reason for rejecting moral realism.

In concluding that moral realism is not defensible, I conclude that we cannot have the very strong form of objectivity that moral realism brings with it. The problems that we have seen moral realism run into also suggest that morality isn’t even |objective| (see Chapter 1). My sense is that we ought to be internal realists of some sort. In this case, it would be the form of life in which one lives that sets constraints on moral right and wrong. Morality will be relativistic in the sense that it will be both historically and culturally conditioned, but it won’t be such that moral judgments are merely expressions of personal opinion. There won’t be a definitive justification for any particular moral outlook, one that all human agents must accept on pain of irrationality. But under internal realism I suspect that solid justification could be provided for many moral judgments, and that it will certainly still make a good deal of sense to say that some kinds of lives are better for us, qua human beings, than other kinds of lives.