QUASI-REALISM IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY
An interview with SIMON BLACKBURN

By Darlei Dall´Agnol

ethic@ - Would you, please, introduce yourself to the readers of ethic@ and tell us why you chose to study philosophy and what your main interests in it are?

I chose to study philosophy because I was bored with the natural sciences of the school. I went up to Cambridge, people expected me to read natural sciences and so, physics, chemistry. But I decided that my friends in art subjects were having a much better time. They were sitting around discussing novels, while I was sitting in a laboratory learning about properties. I wanted to change to an art subject. The admission teacher said that since I've been in sciences, I wouldn't like English because of all its topics, because it was not vigorous. Philosophy was the thing for me. I was really directed into it. But when I got up to Cambridge, I had a wonderful tutor, a man called Casemir Lewy. He was the editor of G. E. Moore. He made all these fascinating remarks about philosophy. So, I became a philosopher by accident. It was luck that I went to that college, that tutor, that direction. I could have been anything, but I would probably be a lawyer.

ethic@ - You have been developing over the years a metaphysical program known as "quasi-realism". How would you explain it in a few words to our readers?

I think, the easiest way to understand my program is if we look back to people like A. J. Ayer, *Language, truth and logic*, Charles Stevenson, *Ethics and language*, and the expressivist or emotivist traditions in ethics. The situation in about 1970 was that the emotivists were very much on the retreat. People had arguments against them. In particular, Peter Geach had, in a famous paper of 1965, argued that emotivists simply couldn't cope with the way moral language is used. Specially, the way there seemed to have a moral proposition, which cannot, for example, ever be asserted. But we can, he had prophesized, wonder whether it's true; you can say, if it's true, then other things are true. So, it behaves in some quite complex logical ways. Geach had argued that emotivists or prescritivists like Hare, the famous author of *The Language of morals*, might have a story about what we do when we assert moral propositions. For example, "that is good", "it's good to be kind to your mother" etc. They gave an account of that along the lines of "hurray to be kind to your mother" or "be kind to your mother". But

that doesn't explain what's happening when you say things like "if it's good to be kind to your mother, then it's also good to be kind to your father." You don't say positively "hurray, to be kind to your mother," but nor can we say in English or in any other language "if hurray to be kind to your mother, then hurray to be kind to your father". The "if-construction" doesn't work with the "hurray," the expression of attitude. Arguments like this show that emotivism simply couldn't work. You have to give a better account of the moral propositions, the content of the moral thought. You couldn't say that when we moralize, we express attitudes because of this argument. By 1970 a lot of philosophers, I think, had been impressed by this argument. John Searle talked about the policy of trying to give an account of meaning in terms of speech acts. Other philosophers tried to answer in different manners. Hare himself wrote a nice answer in "*The Philosophical Review*" in 1970. Dummett said some things about it in his book on Frege. But, I think, there wasn't a very good general account. This led John Mackie, in his book *Ethics* (1977), to say that emotivism was right, but ordinary language, and ordinary thought, implied that it was wrong. So, ordinary language and ordinary thought were actually based on mistakes. This was his *error theory*: ordinary language is full of mistakes of what normative facts were. According to Mackie, emotivists are right in saying that there are no moral facts and ordinary language wrong when it talks as if there were. I was very dissatisfied about it, that is, I had very strong sympathies with the emotivists. I thought there was something fundamentally right about giving an account of the meaning of moral language in terms of the attitude it expresses when we moralize. But I also didn´t want an error theory. I thought it was not true. I thought that ordinary language was in perfect order. I read Wittgenstein who taught that ordinary thought is better than philosophical thinking. So, I tried to attack Geach´s argument in a slightly different way and to give an account of the constructions, the contents of moral speech, to such a problem. I tried to give an account of what are we doing when we use language in that way. But that would be both an explanation of what we are doing and also a justification. It wouldn't give any motive, any account of the content, of the reasons, of the motivations, of the error theory. So, that was the program. I called it "quasi-realism" because it starts from with an emotivist, a fundamental expressionist, account of the fundamental elements of what we are doing when we moralize. And that is a particular activity, a particular thing you do, which is basically to express attitudes, to put pressure on plans, intentions, conducts. It's something practical. But we talk as if there were a truth in that talk, that´s why the *quasi*. We talk as if there were a reality, a

normative reality, the kind of reality Plato believed in. Now, Mackie thought that that was an error. I said "No! The talk is okay, it is the philosopher who is wrong." The philosophers make the error when they are demanding some fact, some kind of Platonic forms in the world, or, in Aristotle, some kind of teleology of human nature. All these are philosophers' stories about something which I thought could be explained and justified more easily. And, so, that was the program and it required answering Geach's arguments, his technical work. I tried to do it. That work proved to be quite controversial. There are many discussions on this matter because, in a way, I made the picture more confusing than people like. People used to think "expressionists say that....", "realists say that....". But I came along and said: "Well, why shouldn't expressionists say this thing, which realist also says. But if it is an account of what he's doing when he says it, then, of course, the picture becomes a lot more confused. The "quasi" proves to be quite tantalizing. People are interested in it. They also found it quite confusing, more confusing than I had expected. So, that's the story.

ethic@ - How does quasi-realism work in moral philosophy?

The really important thing in my mind is that it's an explanatory story. So, it gives, if you like, a genealogy, a picture of how the moral proposition comes to be an object of thought. As you know, G. E. Moore, at the beginning of the 20th century, famous for using the naturalistic fallacy, made people realize that the ethical propositions, the propositions that something is Good, with capital g, basically any proposition that we have obligation, or duty, or virtue, are very strange because they are totally different from propositions about nature, about what can be measured, the waves, the sea. They have a different kind of identity. But, having argued that they have this different identity, Moore found it very hard to give a positive theory. All this talk about intuitions! Why should we be interested in them? Everything Moore finds is very unsatisfactory. The question is why should we be interested im moral propositions? Why are we normally interested in pleasures and pains, the distribution of goods and so on? Why should we be interested in this extra, very peculiar fact, about thinking? I think, Moore left people dissatisfied. But his negative argument, his argument against identifying the content of moral propositions with the content of any empirical, or scientific proposition, remains. People are very impressed by it. That's really what opens the door to expressivism. It is always right: moralizing is a different thing from describing, but Moore was wrong to go straight to the moral proposition, to make it

such an object of mystery. I mean that expressivists are right, they just have not identified the subject of mystery. But, what you could do is add to expressivism a genealogy, an account of how you get to think in terms of moral propositions of what we ought to do, what we ought to be. So, the way it worked for moral philosophy was opened-up, possibly by Moore, who, in a sense, re-introduced a platonic mystery. And I wanted to say: "No, no! They were right to avoid a certain kind of naturalism; they were wrong to introduce a mystery." So that's the way it worked in moral philosophy.

ethic@ - What does moral* knowledge *mean to a quasi-realist?

The position has been classified as non-cognitivism. That applies to the absence of knowledge and it's one of the confusing things I mentioned. If one tries to hold a concept of knowledge, having said that this is all about expressing attitudes, then it looks as though it's not of the nature of knowledge at all. Knowledge, in many people´s minds, I think, implies receptivity, implies receiving the kind of information formed outside. Knowledge implies getting representations of how things are. That's missing from an expressivist position. It is a type of non-cognitivism. I want to say: I'm not sure that the image associated with the concept of knowledge is right. Suppose we take a slightest more social view of what we are doing. Again, look at the action. I think this is very wittgensteinian: "In the beginning, there was the deed" (Goethe). Wittgenstein is famous for saying: Look at what we are doing when we claim knowledge or allow knowledge to other people. If I think of two moral propositions that I hold, I might say that I hold that "you shouldn't be unkind to children" and, my usual example, is that "there ought to be a minimum wage for workers". Now, I would claim to know the first; I don't know the second. I believe quite firmly that there should be a minimum wage. But, I am very aware that I don't know much about economics and some economists might come along with very plausible stories: if we have a minimum wage, then we'll keep society from actually getting work done. That would, to me, be a very bad thing. So, I would have to change my mind. What's the difference? I think the difference is that I will insist on you taking my word, on the first case. That is, I can't envisage a good position coming along which undermines my conviction, that you ought to be kind to children. That seems to me indefeasible. I can't make it a real possibility that something comes along and overturns my view about that. In the case of the minimum wage, I can envisage such a possibility. As I said, I'm a little bit vulnerable and I don't know much about political economy. So, all right, I think there should be a minimum

wage, and I'm open to conviction. I'm open to argument that there shouldn't be. I think that's one of the functions of claiming knowledge, that is, to signal whether you are open or not to the defeasibility. I know that I am sitting in this room and other things. It's simply not an open possibility for me. And if somebody came and asked me, I wouldn't act in an informative way. I would just tell him the things I would know for certain. But if it comes to the kind of thing I'm talking about, namely the minimum wage, I won´t act like that. I don't have a conviction. So I think, if you give a practical account of knowledge, or an expressivist account of knowledge, you can allow for moral knowledge. I think, there's lots of moral knowledge: talk that pleasure is better than pain; talk about being rewarded for things that you deserve, as being better than being rewarded for things you don't deserve, and so on. Many little bits of moral knowledge. So, in that sense, I don't find the word "knowledge" a problem. I sometimes apply quasi-realism to other areas. One I like is probability. I like the idea initially due to Ramsey, the Cambridge mathematician. He thought that when we talk of probability, we express *confidences* and so believe that the proposition is probable. Again, there is the problem that associates it with knowledge. People may ask: how do you know that the half-life of the radioactive atom is a hundred years? What could be the probability? I would say "Yes, you can." But there are confidences where you stand by. Suppose you don't know the probabilities, that you guess. But there is again the possibility of more and more solidly based opinions until eventually you give up on the chance of improvement. That is when you start to talk of knowledge. It is a complex story, but it's the story I rather like.

ethic@ - *Which conception of* truth *is more suitable for a quasi-realist? Is there a specific moral truth in a particular kind of "language game" or may we assume the traditional theory?*

       This, again, is an interesting area. I think, the easiest thing to say, the first thing to say, is that many philosophers, not for reasons that have to do with quasi-realism, have become very attracted to some minimalist's, deflationist's theory of truth which takes on from Frege´s idea. They tend to say that "it's true that you're sitting on a chair" you say no more no less than *you're sitting on a chair*. So, the truth predicate is not thought as something substantive introducing the property in the same way that usually nondeflationists think it does. Quine and others say that the utility of the truth predicate, even if you do something special to a proposition by stamping it as true, it's rather that

you, when you say it's true, are just asserting. But the truth predicates may induce you to say indirect things like "Darlei said nice things before breakfast". Now, even so, I can know that or I can believe that without knowing what those things are. If that deflationism is right, then of course, it's a great help to a quasi-realist, because then I just say: Well, I have a story about what you're doing when you say "it's wrong to steal", you're expressing your attitude of not stealing and I can just now help myself with deflationism and say "it's true that it's wrong to steal" because I think that "it's true that" is not adding, is not actually going beyond having the assertion, making the assertion. So, deflationism is a great help, at least, at first sight. This has been a subject of discussion, specially, in the philosophical journal *Analysis*. I think that in the *Analysis* of 1994, there are 4 articles about whether quasi-realists and expressivists should like deflationists or not. The opposition said: Look! If you are a deflationist about truth, then you can't really be an expressivist about value or anything else because an expressivist really needs some kind of contrast between sentences that do represent facts in the world and sentences that don't. They seem to claim that there's a huge difference between "there is a table there," which represents a fact about the world, and to say "it's good to be nice to your children," which doesn't represent a fact about the world, but just an attitude towards the world. Unless the expressivist can draw that contrast, then he has nowhere to stand. But that contrast is on the cut by deflationists. That contrast depends on some kind of faithful, robust, conception of representing the facts. But deflationist say there's no such thing. They got away from the correspondence conception of truth and what they think are part of that picture. So, the opposition say expressivism has been displaced by deflationism. But this is not true. A lot of philosophers say: "No!" expressivists can perfectly cope with deflationists. So, there has been debate there. My own feeling is that the expressivist does need a robust concept of representation. I don't know if they need a robust concept of truth. I do think we have to say that there are some predicates like "is red" or "is square" or "has a mass," which in a famous phrase "have the particular directional pit of the world." That means that the directional pit must answer to the properties of things. The expressivist has to say that the directional pit of moral predicates is different. Not all predicates answer to things in the world. Moral predicates, certainly, do not. That takes us back to Plato or Aristotle or Moore and their problems. I have to say that the directional pit of the moral predicate is essentially practical. It's like intention or plan, like desires that change behaviour. Moral properties conform to a certain path. So, you do need a concept of representation. I think

if we went totally minimal about representation, then expressivists lose any place to stand. But I'm not sure that having a robust concept of representation, in this sense, is the same as having a correspondence theory of truth. I want to say that, again going back to Wittgenstein, going back to deeds and practices, it seems to me obvious that the practice of, for example, saying "there's a table in this room" answers to the world in a certain way and the practice of saying "hello" to somebody when meeting somebody, or making a promise, doesn't answer to the world. We all understand that there's a difference between saying something and tending simply to truth. It's different from saying something in the course of telling a story, telling a picture. So we have, wherever we put the semantics, some sort of place for the idea of activity in speech. Its intention is to represent, to impart information as opposed to activist speech, whose intention is different. The expressivist just say that, in spite of its, in some ways, representative appearance, the fundamental way to understand moral speech is to see it in practice. I think, we have enough of a robust concept of representation to make that point. Actually, recently, I have been working on that concept of representation, but that's work in progress.

*ethic@ - **You have argued that Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations support non-cognitivism, but other philosophers (McDowell, for instance) think that they support cognitivism and even realism. What do you think of this debate today?***

I always thought it was a curious debate. It was very imaginative of John McDowell, especially, to think that the rule-following considerations supports moral realism. I mean, the rule-following considerations, in many people's minds, have undermined realism everywhere because they suggested that what counted as true, a proper application of a concept, was not so much determined by the world, but by our responses to the world. That seems to open the door to a generalized kind of anti-realism, sometimes called "anthropocentric irrealism", or, at least, not realism. I think that McDowell's idea was, because of the rule-following considerations, because of the way our overall sensibilities get involved, that it's no worse in morals than in anywhere else. Of course, our moral burdens depend on how things strikes us, but that's not bad, because, after all, if it's about color, it depends on how things strike us also. So, as William James said: the trail of the human serpent flies over everything. If you are a realist about shapes, Wittgenstein tells us, then you have to be realist about morals. That's the idea. I always thought this was philosophizing at a higher level of abstraction,

generality, because, after all, the aspects of moralizing are reflected in our attitudes towards the results of counting or whatever. Wittgenstein himself said it, in mathematics, speech does not break out. Whereas morals most often seems to break out. So things don't strike people in the same way. To make realism out of it, you have to say that there is a right way for things to strike people, and a wrong one. You have to have a story about why some burdens can be discounted. I always thought that McDowell and some of his followers became very elitist on this point. Those aristotelian people who are virtually well trained and had education. Things struck them the right way and the other people could basically go hang. Their wills and organism, the ways it struck them had to be discounted. I always thought this was elitist. I didn't like it. It smells to me a certain kind of aristocratic and rather aesthetic ethics. So, you just trained up your sensibility to fearfully replying to them and really you could not communicate with other people because they were following other concepts, they had different rules. I bet the way of life Hume knew was better. I didn't like that. If that was the option, I think I'd prefer to go with Kant. Kant´s followers are great democrats about ethics. We have all the capacity to reason, the capacity to reason correctly about things. I don't really fully believe that either. But, I wanted something much less elitist than the McDowell position. I also thought it was very strange idea to make realism out of this fundamental anti-realist idea: all our responses are anthropocentric, that is, down to earth system. So, I thought there was insufficient "realism". But, I don't think it's right to say that I thought that the rule-following considerations immediately generated a motive for expressivism. I think they are neutral. I don't think that they help or hinder expressivism or realism. Just because there is enormous difference between judgments of colour or judgments of shape, between primary and secondary distinctions, it does not follow that there is a big difference between them, on the one hand, and ethics, on the other hand. I mean, ethics strikes even quite naive philosophers as special. That's why we have departments of moral philosophy as special just because moral verdicts arise so much contention, so many diversions, essentially contesting concepts. And pretending that there's one reality behind all this essentially contesting nature strikes me as pretending, as just not right on the face of it. Abusing the rule-following consideration to somehow rub out the differences, struck me as not very well motivated. It also not true to Wittgenstein. He always felt, in the *Tractatus,* in the middle period, right to the end of his life, that ethics was very special. It had no affinity with making empirical judgments, with making ordinary judgements of facts. He often

said that when you're doing ethics, you're not talking about facts. So, I thought that McDowell was wrong both on scholarly grounds and on philosophical grounds. That was the origin of the debate. I think it's quite interesting that philosophers like McDowell, David Wiggins etc. actually think of their position in terms of a sensible subjectivism. It's not a realism; it is subjectivism. Well, I want to avoid both.

ethic@ - Is it still helpful to use Moore's open-question argument to establish the specificity of moral properties avoiding naturalism?

Well, I think so. Moore's open-question argument has been much discussed and it's not an easy argument to make formally valid. I mean, Moore is targeting the open-question argument against a particular synonymy claim. He didn't distinguish that very carefully from a claim of the identity properties. So, I think Moore thought as if a property of being good was identical to a property of happiness. Then, the concept of being good would be identical to the concept of creating happiness. So, he could reject that with the open-question argument. This meant there was a special moral property, and, of course, a lot of people have tried to distinguish between concepts and properties and so on. Maybe the property of being good is to be considered identical to some properties such as creating happiness. I think that when all the dust is settled, there's still something right about the open-question argument and I think of it's rightness in this obvious form: moralizing is a very special kind of activity. Similarly, seeing any other property, creating happiness, maximizing the position to be worse off, whatever you like, that is, seeing any property on the heading of the good is seeing it in an special way. I've seen that special way, and I've lost that special way, taking up an attitude. Moore didn't, and I think that's a pity. But he did have a strong sense of something special going on, once you get into the realm of the ethical. And I think he's right about that. I think it's parallel with other philosophical problems. Take, for example, causation. I think Hume believed, following Hutcheson`s sentimental story about morals, which I would say is equivalent to the expressivist story about ethics, that he could apply it to the case of causation, causal necessity. So, putting in my terms, what Hume discovered was that causalizing is a very special activity. Seeing a regularity in nature, in terms of a causal relation, the relation of one of them necessitating another, is seen in a very special way. The mind goes into a particular kind of shape when it sees things like that. It voices that shape by talking about A causing B, that's not the same as just saying that Bs regularly follow As. Because you could see that and not be in the

same state as the person that causalizes the regularity. Once you causalized it, you will use As to bring about Bs, you say that "had there been an A present, there would be a B present", and so on. The status of the A-B connections becomes quite different in your mind. I think, similarly, in ethics, the status of a property becomes quite different in your mind, once you say this is a standard for the good, this is the property you must look out for in order to judge if things are good or bad. That means you become prepared to recommend it, you become sensitive to it in a special way, you moralize it. And making a property A into your moral candle is treating it in a very special way. I think that's what Moore's argument depends on. If we deny that in a dispute, neither of us can say that the other is contradicting himself and doesn't understand the meaning of the words. That will set a lot of our conversation, will set a dispute with different impact us. I think the moral argument depended obviously on the recognition that when you're dealing with the conflicts of practical stands or doubts about practical stands, then meanings, words, semantics, property, I guess, is not gonna help you. What can help you is coming to see the properties in the same practical light and that's a good thing. But the open-question argument was put back again in this very platonic way, a way open to objection. But, underneath, there is an insight that doesn't go away.

ethic@ - *What is the relationship between Hume's is-ought question and Moore's naturalistic fallacy argument?*

Well, I made them very close because, again, there is this is-ought gap. I could, more or less, repeat what I just said about Moore taking Hume into consideration in stressing the is-ought gap. What he said at the end of the is-ought discussion, the is-ought passage, what he is trying to get you to see, I think, is exactly, if you acknowledge the "is", but refuse to go into the "ought", it's not going to be a logical mistake, it's not going to be a mistake of meaning, it's not going to be a mistake of something you can't dissolve contradiction or talking in ways you can't make sense of. You can acknowledge the "is" and can't go to the "ought" because of a particular sentiment, a practical disposition, what people call "a particular shape of your passions". You may be awful, you may be evil, you may be bad, you may fail to see things as I want you to see them. But what is fundamentally in question is the problem of your sensibility, your practical sense, your passions, not the problem of the pure logic. The pure logic won't bring you back into the ranks of the good. And I think Hume was right about that. I think Moore's version of it was right for the same reason.

So, in a sense what I do is diagnose both their arguments as arising from the same insight. I'm getting a little bit advanced in here, but certainly the whole paradox analysis made it very difficult to handle exercising philosophical logic. But if you tip-toe passed, you may be right to do so.

ethic@ - *Richard Hare has, following this path, introduced the notion of the 'supervenience' of moral concepts upon natural ones. Don't you think that it gives too much to the naturalist?*

Actually no, I don't. Hare didn't introduce the notion of supervenience, but, yes, he introduced the term, I think, that's true. The term is older, but Hare was probably the first to use it in the modern sense. I don't think he does for an interesting reason, I don't think he gives too much to the naturalist, because I myself think that supervenience is sometimes part of the problem and not part of the solution. Now, what I mean by that is, not just in moral philosophy, once you discover the moral supervenience on the natural, you somehow perform almost like a reduction. There is no more to the moral than there is to the natural, somehow that it's ok. I think in order to avoid that rather quick sort of collapse, think in terms of, say, the philosophy of mind. Many people like to think that the mental supervenes on the physical. And I think it does. The organisms are identical or equal to the mental states. Does this mean that people make a reduction or something like a reduction of the mental on the physical? Well, I'd say "no" very firmly. For example, take Descartes. He almost certainly thought that the mental supervenes on the physical. Leibniz, I think, almost certainly thought that the mental supervenes on the physical. Locke, thought that the mental supervenes on the physical. But the dispute between Leibniz and Locke will be entirely about the status of the supervenience claim. For Locke it's going to be a matter of whenever two things are in the same physical state, if one has a pain, then the other has a pain. If one sees blue, then the other sees blue. It's, in a wonderful phrase, "it's a matter of God's good treasure," meaning just as metaphysical, just how it happens. But Leibniz rails against Locke, saying that you can't leave it there. That's not good enough because that would imply that God was arbitrary. Really, what Leibniz is trying to work through is that you shouldn't have these dandling double logical principles. That God thinks in terms of this truth: that whenever you are by me when I feel pain, then if you are near I feel pain. That would be too accidental. It would leave open that tomorrow God might decide that my mind should supervene a month on the physical facts and your mind should supervene on an entire different

setting, and so on. There is no rhyme or reason to it. And when I say supervenience is part of the problem, not part of the solution, what I mean is that you have to see supervenience as speakable. It is to do philosophical work, it's to be part of a happy overall package. I think you have to know what explains it. Now, in one of my early papers there's a famous statement, where notoriously I argued that realist couldn't explain the supervenience of the moral on the physical because they had a conception of the global norms, the platonic norms. Why shouldn't they relate to the physical one way on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and on a different way on Tuesday and Thursday? There's no explicit reason, there's no logical reason why if a particular set of facts entail the good one day, or determine the good one day, it had to do the same the next day. I am very pleased that the debate on the philosophy of mind, I think, eventually comes to see this as the problem. I think, in ethics, we are still a little way behind, but I think it's easy to say that the moral supervenes on the natural. The difficult thing is to say why. And I argue that expressivism had an advantage here because expressivism could say why we had to obey a supervenience constraint. That is, expressivism doesn't look at it as two sets of truth, the moral truth and the natural truth, and wonder about how they relate and what metaphysical link-principles there are. Expressivism would say, why should we obey a supervenience constraint? Why should that be laid down as if it were a ground through of the activity of moralizing? I think that's quite easy to see. Because if you moralize, if you seem not to moralize on the light of the natural properties of things, then you're just a nuisance, you're not really doing a practical reasoning at all. You're sounding awful, you're saying things that come into your head and that's not part of the practice. So, I felt that it was possible to give an expressivist solution to this problem of supervenience in a way that realists couldn't. Now, given the huge numbers of thinkers calling themselves realists, the reduction is of various kinds. There will be realists who will say, "I can explain supervenience". Ok, that's fine. So long as they realize there's something they've got to do. Then, my eye would turn to whether the way they do it implies other costs. Exactly the way expressivists do it is rather clean, neat, doesn't bring other costs. So, that's very much an explanation for what the overall package demands. I think supervenience is a very interesting part of it. I got better, as you may remember, my oldest paper on the supervenience which I wrote on 1973, I acknowledge, I got better through a conversation with Casemyr Lewy. I was talking about Moore's paper *"The Conception of Intrinsic Value"* which was very important to me, it was part of the Cambridge tradition, as it were.

ethic@ - *Leaving, now, meta-ethical issues aside, what kind of normative ethics is compatible with or suitable to a quasi-realist?*

Oh, good question! I think the lines of implication here are complex, are not at all straight forward. A way of seeing it, well, it is not at all difficult to see Kant as a kind of quasi-realist about ethics. Kant is usually, these days, interpreted as a constructivist, he doesn't think the way we moralize we are representing the moral facts. That would be substantive realism and Kant's a constructive realist. Kant might be interpreted as a quasi-realist. More naturally goes Hume since he is regarded as the father of this kind of approach. So, there's a variety of first-order positions, I think, which can go with quasi-realism. But I also I think that Kant is at a disadvantage with Hume and humeans come with a rather more attractive package. Part of an overall explanatory program, such as mine, would be an attempt to explain why we have moral attitudes, why we moralize. And I think once you get into that frame of mind, then like Hume, you're eventually going to be looking at an adapted story, that is, a genealogy of what you're doing for us. I think that's a kind of frame of mind which is more hospitable to a consequentialist ethic than to a very rigorous deontological ethic because it's difficult to both hold on to rigorous deontological attitudes and also recognize the attitude. So, I think there is a relationship, a slightly unusual relationship. It's certainly not true, for example, I don't think it's true, that Hume was a utilitarian in the nineteenth century. I think a more attractive pathway to something like most utilitarians think, that is, we find ourselves approving of breaches of conduct, of motivations human beings, virtues. But, then, we can trace back that approval to a useful more agreeable, or in some sense, conducive to a cooperative business which would allow me to go forward. I've been flying myself to a some sort of indirect utilitarian first-order package. And I think it fits well with the quasi-realist story. Then, again, I tell that argument. Like Hume, I feel a total package, a story about what our moral lessons are and then why we have them, what they should be. If you're realist, then a lesson like Aristotle gives us about human teleology (what we are for?) is a very strange story. Then, your realism leaves you quite at sea, there's no proper answer. Maybe lying is always wrong, you might try, maybe it's not. Your realism doesn't actually give you any bearings and I think a great superstition of the modern debate is that lots of people like to call themselves moral realists, thinking they are clinging of to something solid, in cast iron and important. There I think they are clinging to conservative and defunct moral systems. I think if one is more resolutely quasi-realist or humean, then, that also

does gives you guidance into how it should be developed and all its functionalism, and then its importance on the defending when it's under attack.

***ethic@** - Have you thought about applied ethical issues, for instance, bioethical ones, or do you believe that they are outside the philosophical field?*

Yes. There are a lot of ethicists that think that my theory doesn't really do justice to applied ethics. But, that's actually the reverse of the truth. I think that the thought of moral realisms either leads to very conservative, elitist position, the aristotelians, or to possibly very insensitive deontological position, associated with Kant. I think that when you've got the nature of moralizing under control, you're in much better shape to go and say how it should be done. So, I turn that round, I said, "No!" I'm perfectly happy with the nature of ethics, its importance, how we conduct ethical arguments. As I said, the overall drift is towards something in the nature of indirect-utilitarian, which has several applications in bioethics.

***ethic@** - Is there anything else you would like to say?*

I think the last remarks I make would really be the practical ones. I dare myself to have a very profound or subtle views, or interesting new views about the moral problems like, capital punishment, or distribution of wealth, or abortion, whatever. I'm very suspicious of the professional ethical scene, which I think has to concentrate on issues of often obsessive importance to certain kinds of middle-class Americans. For example, you find probably 10 articles in the ethical journals on the rights and wrongs of abortion for 1 article you find on the distribution of resources to healthcare, for example, between the poor and the rich, which seems to me a far more important problem: the fact that the rich command all the health resources available. So, if I were to become a first-order moralist, on these matters, I'd become a first-order political theorist. It seems to me that actually the fundamental moral problem faced in the world is the distribution of wealth. It has nothing to do with whether women should have control over their bodies, or if we should be allowed to read pornography, or whatever might be. These things are side shows. The real ethical issues are the different life-expectancies in different countries, and the different access to the necessities in life makes people. So, if I were to moralize, that's the way I'd start to moralize. But I always feel uncomfortable with telling other people what to do. I think, like Hume, I live remote from business.   (Transcribed by Sofia Helena Gollnick Ferreira)