

# Maria Lasonen-Aarnio

THE ACADEMY'S PRIZE for the Humanities was awarded in 2018 to Maria Lasonen-Aarnio, associate professor of philosophy at the University of Helsinki. "I became interested in philosophy at a very young age, though the books I was trying to read were too difficult for a 12-year old. I then devoted many years to music, first the violin and then composition. When I eventually took a philosophy course at the University of Helsinki, it just felt very natural to me; I had found my own way of thinking."

She gained her doctorate from the University of Oxford in 2010 and was a professor at the University of Michigan in the USA from fall 2010 until 2018. While still finishing her doctorate, she was a Fellow at Merton College, Oxford. She has a part-time appointment at the University of Southern California. She gained her master's degree at the University of Helsinki in 2002 and was appointed docent in philosophy there in 2014.

"I was offered a tenure track position at the University of Michigan in 2010, and

was tenured there in 2015. It was inspiring to see how seriously distinguished philosophers with a long career behind them take their duties to students, putting a lot of effort into teaching. Professors certainly do not brag about how little teaching they have. Of course, devoting a lot of time to teaching leaves less time for research, and since our children were born during those years, too, time was very scarce", she explains.

Lasonen-Aarnio's research in philosophy has been focused on epistemology and its applications, and she is now in charge of an ERC Starting Grant project entitled "Success and Competence in Epistemology and Beyond", which will continue until 2022. The aim of the project is to develop and apply a new approach in epistemology. Lasonen-Aarnio has published her research in various high-quality international journals and is herself an editor of *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

"ERC grants are a unique opportunity, and the unavailability of longer-term re-

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search grants in the US made me apply for one. I was awarded an ERC grant of 1.5 million euros extending over five years. As a result I came back to Finland and was offered an associate professorship at the University of Helsinki. I am now able to carry out a bigger research project together with a team of post-docs. My immediate aim is to write a book, to be published by Oxford University Press."

"My research is connected with whether the norms governing both belief and action have a similar structure: I claim that they do."

"Only a small proportion of our knowledge is first-hand, as we obtain almost all

of our information through testimony, by trusting various sources. Knowledge is easy to obtain if one's epistemic environment is good. But people can get caught up in problematic epistemic structures that make it very difficult to acquire knowledge," she claims.

Maria Lasonen-Aarnio is an extremely talented and internationally promising philosopher of a younger generation. In 2014 she was awarded the Sanders Prize in Philosophy of Mind. Similarly, the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters decided that she should receive its Prize for the Humanities in recognition of her profound knowledge of her subject and internationally high-ranking academic profile.

*The Prize for the Humanities is awarded to a scholar of humanistic sciences in the beginning of their career who has already earned international renown.*

*Photo: Linda Tammisto*