



PEDRO ARRIAGA. DIÁLOGO CON MIRJA HELENA HARTIMO

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#### Resumen

Mirja Helena Hartimo es actualmente profesora en el Departamento de Filosofía de la Universidad de Helsinki. Se especializa en fenomenología de las matemáticas y recientemente publicó su primer libro sobre el tema. La profesora Hartimo habla amablemente con el Acta Mexicana de Fenomenología sobre su libro y su obra en general.

Palabras clave: Lógica | Matemática | Hartimo | Fenomenología |

#### Abstract

Professor Mirja Hartimo is currently a University Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy in the University of Helsinki. She specializes in the phenomenology of mathematics and recently has published her first book on the subject. Professor Hartimo kindly agreed to talk with the Acta Mexicana de Fenomenología about her book and her work in general.

Key words: Logics | Mathematics | Hartimo | Phenomenology |

Dear professor Hartimo, I would like to begin by asking how and why you chose to study Husserl's philosophy.

What a nice question! I was passionately interested in issues like logic, reasoning, and rationality already in the very beginning of my studies. However, I had great difficulties in understanding how logic, as studied in analytic philosophy, relates to reasoning or rationality, and it seemed to me that people doing logic did not even care about such questions. I first thought that Wittgenstein could help me in this, but soon realized that he is not really into giving any *answers* to philosophical problems. In contrast, in phenomenology one seriously tries to say something about the phenomena as they are, hence it struck me as a very honest and prudent way of dealing with philosophical problems. Furthermore, since Husserl was originally a mathematician one could assume that he knew what it is about. But initially I had no idea where this quest would take me.

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And, in the context of Husserlian phenomenology, what made you choose to concentrate on Husserl's relationship with sciences and humanities before analyzing his relationship with mathematics?

Hmmh, I don't think I really proceeded that way, but I gather you are referring to what I say in the foreword of my book. It all depends on how far back one goes in what I have done. I wrote my dissertation on early Husserl's view of mathematics. So I started my study of Husserl by trying to understand what he said about mathematics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. My dissertation was very limited in terms of Husserl's more general approach. But you know, in academic philosophy, at first you have to narrow down your interests to come up with anything at all. So only much later, after having published several papers on Husserl's view of mathematics I started to formulate a picture of his view of science in general and thought about writing a book on this topic. Then this started to appear far too expansive so that in order to publish something I had to narrow down my interests to Husserl's views on mathematics, which I was most comfortable with to begin with.

Talking about your book, I find it particularly interesting your intention to articulate Husserl's historical-scientific context with his current philosophical relevance. Was this a challenge or an advantage in the development of the book's argument? And, what has been the greatest lesson you have found in this articulation?

I think that looking at Husserl's philosophical claims against the backdrop of his historical-scientific context was valuable in bringing home the idea that phenomenology is a method rather than a fixed doctrine of any kind. So, phenomenology of science and mathematics grows and develops to-

gether with these disciplines. Husserl's remarks show how he was always more interested in what his colleagues were trying to achieve rather than what they in fact managed to accomplish. This was of course an advantage to the book's overall argument as it showed how his statements about logic and science are descriptions about the scientists' goals rather than descriptions of what they are doing. This is the point of Husserl's natural *Besinnung*, and hence it shows how Husserl actually carries out what he preaches in the introduction to *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. The challenge was, as always with Husserl, to actually make sense of some of Husserl's remarks.

I believe that a central issue in your book is your interpretation of the *Besinnung* concept, because you assert that for Husserl, *Besinnung* is a method to build a relationship with the mathematician's labor, and then, this would be useful for a phenomenology of mathematics. However, in *Transcendental and Formal Logic*, Husserl seems interested mostly in using *Besinnung* as a general method to introduce transcendental phenomenology in general. According to your conception, how is it possible to reconcile these two uses of *Besinnung*?

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This is a great question! I think it is perfectly possible, in fact necessary, to reconcile these two uses of *Besinnung*. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic* Husserl follows the path from science to transcendental phenomenology (as opposed to e.g., the Cartesian approach or the way via psychology). So, to do so, one first has to find out what science is. For this reason Husserl first sets out to find out what mathematics is for the mathematicians, "according to their living intentions," with natural *Besinnung*. In the second part of the book, Husserl starts to inquire into transcendental conditions of possibility of this account. This then takes him to transcendental *Besinnung* and general problems of transcendental phenomenology. For short, if you want to take the path from the sciences to the transcendental phenomenology, you just first have to engage in natural *Besinnung* after which you can engage in its transcendental reflection – how else could you do it? But note that this is a somewhat simplistic way of putting it: for Husserl these two tasks are intertwined, so the transcendental reflection guides the natural *Besinnung*, too. I try to make this relationship clearer in my latest publications.

One of the reiterated ideas about *Besinnung* in your book is that Husserl is close to Penelope Maddy's naturalist position, because they both take the scientific practice as a starting point, contrasting it with the objectives she proposes. Don't you think Husserl is very close to some pragmatic positions on this regard?

Well, yes, I think that there are similarities between e.g., Peirce and Husserl in this regard. Maddy articulates her position interestingly so that it is easy to distinguish between the naturalist approach and the empirical metaperspective of the Second Philosopher. This makes her view easy to deal with, because the Husserlian phenomenologists replaces the empirical

metaperspective with a transcendental one. Many pragmatists have transcendental aspects often mixed with some philosophy-first metaphysical claims, which makes them less easy to compare to. For example, Peirce has non-phenomenological, metaphysical claims combined with his view of math. I wonder which pragmatists you have in mind?

You point out the fact that Husserl separates from Maddy, since he proposes a transcendental philosophy. How do you perceive Husserl's place in the contemporary philosophy of mathematics in which, I believe, not many are in favor of a transcendental position?

Oh yes, I think people in contemporary philosophy of mathematics do not really know what is meant by the transcendental position as how Husserl has it, and the term 'transcendental' can acquire quite strange meanings in some other contexts. But if they are good philosophers, they will not stop at the term, but will find out what it means. Then they may also find out that it is not anything particularly magical or nebulous, and that it may indeed be interesting for their own approach. The phenomenologists have a bit of the same problem in hating "naturalism" without paying attention to what the term refers in its context. Mathematical naturalism is not reductive about abstract ideas and goals. But in general, I think phenomenology is very useful for philosophy of mathematical practice, and I think many people working on such issues should find Husserl's approach congenial. In that regard, Husserl was hundred years ahead of his time: he did not even try to come up with philosophy-first foundationalism like Frege, Brouwer, and so on. He wanted to analyze "the living intentions of the mathematicians" of his time, and hence his project is about philosophy of mathematical practice that is increasingly popular these days. The commentators' apriori normative views about what mathematics and science should be and the consequent attempts to force Husserl into a foundationalist straight-jacket are, in my view, the reason for people to think that he has nothing particularly fruitful to say about mathematics or science in general. Husserl should not be approached like that – he is a phenomenologist, out to describe what the scientists think science should be together with the transcendental clarification and critique of this.

Finally, I would like to ask you about your current work and its direction. What are you working on now and which is your current research project?

I just finished writing a booklet on Husserl's philosophy of mathematical practice, invited for the Cambridge Series of Elements in Philosophy of Mathematics. I try to clarify many of these discussed issues in it. Next, I plan to work on Carnap. I am interested in a kind of Enlightenment "voluntarism" that characterizes Carnap's view and to some extent can also be found in later Husserl.

Is there something else you would like to add?

What I say above sounds rather simplistic and straightforward. For references, subtlety, and arguments, please, consult what I have published. But other than that I wish to thank you very much for your interest in my views and the chance to clarify some issues – I am very much flattered by it.

Thank you so much for your time.