

# Notre Dame University of Nelson

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NELSON, BRITISH COLUMBIA

P. O. Box 340  
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Professor J. Ferrater Mora,  
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Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania 19010,  
U. S. A.

Dear Professor Ferrater,

At the expense of being impertinent I have resolved to write to you for some advice or orientation.

I shall be graduating with this year's class (B.A. Philosophy major). Also, I have been a Teaching Assistant in the Modern Language Department for the past three years--a most fortuitous opportunity since I hold no credentials. I am 27 years of age, found my new home in Canada five years ago, from Spain.

To put things in context: I left school formally at the secondary level owing to the circumstances at home at that time. Nor did Father make us feel badly about it; he never doubted there should be a way out for us--in Spain! Paradoxically indeed, for he has always remained a non-conformist at heart (till 1954 he stood up eight times for trial as an ex-volunteer, General Staff member, in the Republican Army; set free having had no post-war "activities", no civil crimes). I held jobs --among other-- as a translator and secretary. I recall I always took to my work earnestly, got on my bearings comparatively quickly and was relatively successful in my endeavour to enlarge the scope of my vision as far ahead as possible in the field. At 17, the typical religious crisis --from youthful scepticism to fervent evangelism-- left me with "deep" personal experiences. I co-operated in the activities of several of these groups but, in the end, could never identify myself entirely with any one of them. Then came the "cultural stage", when I sought private tuition, attended lectures, wrote, and, above all, read voraciously. Incidentally, "Ortega" left me (the first time) dazzled, but unimpressed; immediately afterwards I came across "Unamuno" and--well, you know, it made the entire difference. To-day Don Miguel's harsh echoes sound remote and somewhat disjointed, but still dearly to me.

A pinch of the romantic, too. As a child of two I already had, I am told, certain "bourgeois" tastes. Apparently Madrid's suburban life and an attachment to the Castilian soil, never prevented me from developing an ideal for green lands and cottage-life, "Europe" and girls foreign.

.../...

I owe Canada, and the Mass Society, the realization of these once-just-boyish-reveries. And much, much more! For one reason, I came to understand the meaning of 'we', of a corporate reality which is the opposite of an illusion. For another reason, here one can still --if he so intends-- look at the four cardinal points, live rather realistically in a sober bourgeois fashion, without having to be a bourgeois. I could make mine J. Marias's description of, if not altogether his prescriptions for, the American society. The latter are perhaps too "Spanish", too vehement, I think.

Notre Dame University has provided me with unusually good opportunities. A small, but burgeoning institution, it has enabled me to keep the family together at home, round out my Library training (vital to my interests as it is), and be a staff member at one Department, while studying at another--giving me an adequate salary to allow me to live independently, but all those essential books which are not usually found in the Library. I have been a keen student, but remain largely an uncommitted observer. If I am still to be trained, yet I have developed some judgment of my own with regard to the future. The curriculum, here, is broad enough to give us a smattering of the Arts and the Sciences, social and exact. There are, inevitably, lacunae in the systematic approach to Philosophy: the bogey of "Logical Positivism" (?), for example, precludes our formally studying subjects such as Symbolic Logic. The rest of them revolve around the Scholastic (mostly Thomistic) tradition, but there are good seminar-tutorial courses in the History of Philosophy.

I find Philosophy can be, in my case, a vocation, and the best way of avoiding vicious academic professionalism. At this stage I face a problem in selecting the place where to go on studying. I believe scholarship to be the sine qua non, the pre-requisite for all further endeavours. I have felt exasperated often times while taking a course in Existential-Phenomenology, and I remain wary of sensationalism and dilettantism at large, even of the "scientific-theology" of T. de Chardin's. By the same token, while believing in "system" and realizing Philosophy might have to do with wisdom, I am impatient with imprecisions. Otherwise I enjoy common sense and analysis, yet have found some British-American philosophy almost undigestable, especially relating "Ethics" and some epistemology. Although I fear the aestheticist strain that might be at the back of my mind, I have been primarily interested in ontological questions. But it is too soon to "get professional." To start with, could one, by breaking barriers between disciplines, arrive at conclusions which no discipline has reached independently?

You might understand, from the foregoing, that I have no lack of a certain orientation. I would like to pursue in due time, yet am at a loss as to how to proceed. The Guide to Graduate Studies has not been of assistance ~~either~~. I must work my way up, and this means I will have to go along one beaten path for some time. I could enquire about the possibility of being granted sabbatical leave (with some pay), though I wonder whether it would be of interest to me further to study at a Catholic institution. Otherwise I have been led to think there is generally a lack of an "atmosphere" in some Philosophy departments across the United States, perhaps Canada as well, from reports given by my own

brother-in-law, who recently chose to study Epistemology, on a Woodrow Wilson, fellowship, in Michigan.

I like the professional's life here because it need not be 'public life'--he can take advantage of many opportunities available, yet remain independent. At the same time, I wonder whether lack of co-ordination of one's tentative goals and the means provided by an institution might not result in ~~an~~ irreparable losses to the development of the individual, ~~even in the~~ unexceptional cases. This need not be elaborated. Yet if one is to ~~remain independent~~ one cannot be isolated.

Could you name an institution, or perhaps better, somebody teaching in North America, that I might possibly refer to? It might be, I thought, just as easy for you to do so, kindly. To be sure I am not thinking of the best, but rather positively in terms of possible "betters"; sincerely aware of my limitations. I have read a few works reflecting the contemporary scene in Philosophy and Science, those of Sciacca's, G. Picón's, Morton White's, Kaplan's, and recently your Philosophy Today. I had previously read Xavier Zubiri's first philosophy and began (incorrigibly!) to dream of ever getting to assimilate his thought, even write something myself on his work. This, I now realize, reveals a naïveté to be paralleled only to my writing this three-page rhapsody to you. I have lost more than an hour's sleep lately considering what good could I do otherwise, not wishing just to write to the nearest universities and settle for the highest figure in financial assistance they might offer.

I had enjoyed your essays in Cuestiones Disputadas (especially "Mea Culpa" and the last on Wittgenstein), then I read your article on X. Zubiri (Insula) and I decided to write to you. I was first astonished, then became discouraged from sheer awe when I began to gauge the scope of your work and your personality. I refer to Being and Death and your ontology-in-progress. Two weeks ago I became acquainted for the first time with your encyclopedia (that tour de force which is the fifth edition) and now more than ever I decided I had to muster up my courage to address you. I even hoped for an appointment with you, at your convenience, sometime before the New Year. Even if too prematurely at this stage, it would be an unforgettable experience to meet you and ask a few questions in the context of this letter. The inspiration I would derive as a student would be worth the trip.

I arrived, independently, at the therapeutic stage as I was reflecting this Summer upon individual and group dynamics and had the sudden flash that "there is nothing like Heredity or Environment...Body or Mind...absolute Individual or Social Whole...a Cause and an Effect, from the initial consideration that, on the social plane, 'the long-term effects of an 'innovation' are largely unforeseeable." --Or even more particularly the realization that when we are in a position to work with an entity that we experience at one level, the entity as experienced by us at the other level disappears; the general problem of a 'thing' and its successively included and inclusive hierarchical structure that "exists" in nature in more or less empirical ways. Of course, since a 'thing' and what it does has traditionally been one of the pillars of the notion of causality, such realization leaves us baffled as to where to

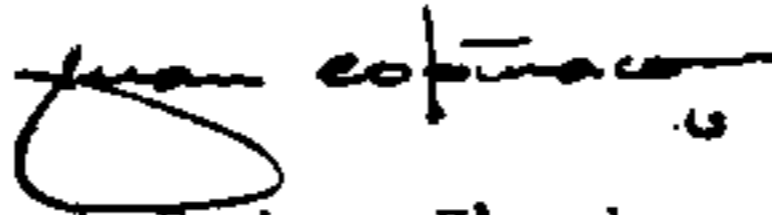
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turn....

But enough of what might be by now "Bunkumism" or reason's underworld.  
I beg to enclose copies of some papers, which might be as relevant as an up-to-date  
résumé, (which I presently lack the time to spell out).

Thank you for your fine attention to this letter.

Yours faithfully,



J. Espinaco Virseda

6.12.66