

Wells College
Aurora, New York
January 20, 1959

Dear Mr. Ferrater Mora,

I didn't write to you during the summer because I didn't have very good news about my thesis to pass on to you. And I haven't written all during this first semester at Wells because I haven't had very good news about my position. I am sorry, however, that I have let so very many months pass without sending you any word whatsoever of what I've been doing.

I did finish at Bryn Mawr this summer doing all I am going to do preparatory to writing that thesis. I need to spend a few days organizing some things now, and then I can begin to write. I expect the spring semester to provide me with considerable opportunity to write, and I intend to take advantage of it.

Wells College itself pleases me very much in many ways. I like the students--bright ones are not infrequent among them, and they all work reasonably hard. I am delighted with many of the faculty members, particularly with some in the History, English, and Economics Departments. I've friends here, and I could continue to work here with much pleasure, I believe, if it weren't for the peculiar Department Chairman whom I have. He is genuinely peculiar, something that I think the fact that practically everyone here on the faculty dislikes him testifies to. But his peculiarity hits me perhaps unusually hard, because it stems from his being extraordinarily naive in philosophy, something I don't much admire. Sometimes during this year I've wondered if I am perhaps so stubborn and dogmatic myself that I can't get along with other philosophers. But, taking the two-thirds time that Jaffe is not teaching this year is a young man, from the U. of California, an old friend of Jaffe's, with whom I disagree about many things but with whom I get along very well indeed. His actual positions in philosophy are not far removed from a good many of Jaffe's, but it is a pleasure to argue and joke with him.

I think I have done my work reasonably well this fall, but sometimes it has been difficult to do because I have been so upset through having to deal with Jaffe and through worrying, of course, about whether or not I'll be invited back here for next year. I think it unlikely that I shall be invited back (the young man on a two-thirds time, temporary appointment wants to come back, too, and he is not only quite able, but, as I've indicated, is an old friend of Jaffe's). Jaffe must feel, of course, uneasy with me, though I've always tried to be courteous with him. I did seriously consider for a week or so during the last week of November simply resigning and having done with all this foolishness.

What is this foolishness? Jaffe is a pragmatist, surely the most naive, dogmatic, pompous, conceited one in the country. He is devoted to the ideals of democracy, of liberalism, etc. He deals with faculty members in other departments here and above all with the members of his own department (his young friend has obviously been as much taken aback as I have by some of the things that Jaffe pushes off on us) in a rigidly authoritarian manner and never with the slightest suspicion that he daily makes a mockery of his own principles. His technique is quite interesting; it never involves the least sacrifice of sincerity. He simply doesn't allow himself to understand that other people ever are disagreeing with him. Their seeming disagreement (and he doesn't permit himself to acknowledge that there's much seeming disagreement with him) stems from the fact that they haven't yet heard him explain whatever matter is under discussion fully. Therefore, he answers arguments put against him by repeating, in words not different from those he has been using all along, what he is saying. He is willing to repeat in this fashion for three hours at a time. After a time his opponents are, of course, exhausted.

Several discouraging things have happened during the fall. When I first arrived, I discovered that three of the five senior students had been turned into fanatics by my predecessor, Mattern. He had taught them to view the history of philosophy through the eyes of one Neumann, a follower of Jung. Each of them proposed to devote a thesis to this Neumann. To be sure, one of them proposed handling Anaximander, Plotinus, and Neumann; another was bent on Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Cassirer, Jung, and Neumann; while the third proposed to be content with just Jung and Neumann. Jaffe had told these girls that I'd doubtless be very happy to direct such theses because of my having previously worked in psychology. I gently disabused him of this notion, but it was three or four weeks before my colleague, Arthur Cody, the friend of Jaffe's, succeeded in disabusing Jaffe of the notion that we stood with him in his belief that a student could write on absolutely anything she might set her heart on. They're all handling reasonable topics now (any topics among about fifteen thousand topics in philosophy would meet my approval, of course).

All our departmental meetings have been fantastic, but it's my Thursday morning conferences with Jaffe that are my particular nightmare. My load is this. I teach a Logic class (which has gone quite well) of eleven students (it will be succeeded by a Descartes seminar this spring; a consequence of that is that I'll teach on four days a week instead of the six that I've had to teach on all fall). I teach a History of Philosophy class of six students (this is an "advanced" course; Jaffe considers it "technical,"--and dull and unimportant; he encourages the majors not to take it until they are seniors). I direct the five seniors in their theses, meeting them for an average of an hour apiece each week. Then I "participate" in the teaching of the Introductory course. Of course, I've been told a number of times that I share responsibility for the course on a completely equal footing with Jaffe. That is not a sound theory. I'm actually nothing more than his assistant. He gives two lectures a week and grades no papers. That he calls being on one-third

time. I attend those lectures (he has told me several times what a privilege it is for me to be able to do so, and he has also several times suggested that I praise him for them), I meet with him on Thursday mornings to decide what I shall talk about on Friday and Saturday to the same students (the sixty-three students are split into two sections; I repeat the same session with each half of them), I grade the quiz and the final each term from each of the 63 students plus three papers each term from each of the students--for the year that makes 630 papers--and I "interview" each student. The "interview"? Well, I was told that I should use it for the purpose of "encouraging students to major in philosophy," in order to "aid the students in establishing better study habits," and to "help the student resolve her personal problems." I suggested, gently, that I'd feel a little easier devoting the sessions to talks about the papers (short papers--all of them are on the same given assigned topic, such as Tawney's Acquisitive Society, a book they're supposed to look on as a "modern-day formulation" of the Platonic society) that the students would have handed in by the middle of November. I had all the interviews, in consequence, during November and December. I ended seeing most of the 63 students for about an hour apiece. I saw them during about four weeks, and I had only one or two afternoons free during that time.

Back to the Thursday morning sessions. Jaffe and I settle during these times what I'll talk about on Friday and Saturday of the week. My "mission" (his term) is to "deepen and clarify" what he has said in his classes. Hence, he suggests themes that grow out of what he has said. The fall part of this introductory course involves the students' reading the Republic, the Apology, the Crito, T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, Tawney's thing, Orwell's 1984, and Mill's On Liberty and On Utilitarianism. Not too bad a list. But the gross interpretation of the Republic--his childish interpretation of the Republic and of everything else he talks about in philosophy--leave me in great trouble in view of the fact that I am supposed to accept his interpretations and "deepen" them. Samples: he opens the course mentioning that some philosophers believe that philosophy "begins in wonder", but that others (these others he indicates clearly enough to be his team) believe that it "begins in indignation." Naturally, it turns out that one of the leading attributes of the philosopher-king (who is, however, only a symbol of the ideal of rule by reason"; Jaffe believes that Plato intended each man to become his own philosopher-king) is his possession of "philosophical indignation". Plato's "functional society" itself is to be evaluated in terms of the major goals for which he says all societies aim: health, social progress, order, personal achievement, security, brotherhood, and God knows what else. Of course, Jaffe has assured me more than once that I am "completely free" to speak about whatever I want to in my "sections." A hollow assurance, believe me. On Thursdays he proposes outlandish things to me. I accept them if they are only mildly outlandish, telling him that yes, yes, I think that a consideration of the tautologous nature of the Golden Rule in terms of the segregation crisis is just what the students need. But usually we have to discard several really crazy ones, before we hit on one that I think I can make any sense of at all. This process dismays and pains Jaffe. Apparently, the two people who preceded me in this job were more submissive; I don't know.

Anyway, one consequence of my stubbornness is that he patronizes me somewhat less now than he did initially. Sample conversations:

Me: "I can certainly understand that your interpretation of Plato as the progenitor of all collectivist systems of society is defensible. It's not one, however, that I myself have come to. I rather tend to think of Plato as proposing an essentially aristocratic society."

Jaffe: "Well, Julia, I certainly am going to be disappointed if you don't agree with my interpretation after you hear my lectures during the next two weeks." . . . Me: "But what do you make of the fact that the collectivism proposed by Plato is reserved for the guardians [he teaches his students that all people in the Platonic society have the collectivism of the guardians]?"

Jaffe: "You've worked on Plato yourself, then, as a graduate student?" Me: "Yes." Anyway, when we agree on a topic, Jaffe proceeds, by means of suggestions, to outline my talk for me.

Naturally, what he says goes in one ear and out the other and I say what I please. I am supposed each week, after I've talked, to hand him outlines of all the points I've made, but I don't do it. He's very fond of dichotomies, of "conflicts" between such things as "altruism" and "egoism."

As often as not, of course, I can't accept his dichotomies, but he puts great pressure on me to put on exhibition debates (me taking both sides) about these phony issues before the students. Of course, you understand, I wouldn't care how phony his issues were if he just taught one section of this silly introductory course and let me teach another one. The really horrifying and pathetic thing about this situation is that he has no consciousness at all that he grossly curtails the freedom of his captive instructor. He is the biggest defender of academic freedom here, you see.

By the way, one Thursday he couldn't see me in the morning. He didn't call me on the telephone until 11:00 that night. We talked until 11:45, finally agreeing on a topic. I hung up, prepared the lecture in ten minutes, got up and gave it the next morning at 9:30.

One more conversation to indicate to you how naive the man is. One day he patronizingly began to talk to me of some of his higher needs.

Jaffe: "I want to learn to do creative scholarship. I want to develop a style of writing of my own. Do you find it difficult to write?"

Me: "Yes, I do." Jaffe: "Well, it shouldn't be difficult. One should be able to get up at eight in the morning, and write all day in a perfectly routine fashion. It ought to be easy, simple. One shouldn't dislike writing." Me: "I don't dislike writing; I like it very much."

Jaffe: "How can you, if you find it difficult?" Me: "But I find writing painful and a great delight, both." Jaffe: ~~Why~~ "If you like it, it ought to be easy. Now that I have mastered the art of teaching, I feel that I need to learn to write, to write easily, to do real creative scholarship. Do you actually feel that you can write?" Me: "Yes."

I shall understand your taking all this, or trying to take all this, quite sceptically. I hope, of course, that you do believe that I am not spinning out wild tales of my own invention. I have tried to see this situation clearly, and time and time again through new fantastic happenings I've been driven to the opinions I've written down. One of the most trying features of my relationship with Jaffe is that I know he does want to be kind and that he does of course believe himself very kind. It is difficult when I am with him not to respond straightforwardly and sincerely when he does try to show good will. In fact, I do usually respond ~~in~~ that way. But then I feel guilty for entertaining no respect for him. And I can't conjure up ~~the~~ respect.

I'll let you know when I learn whether I am axed or not. I suppose that I should come down to Bryn Mawr and talk to you and Mr. Nehm. I have, you should know, indicated in early December to Mr. Nehm that I thought it quite possible that I might not be reappointed here, and I have asked him to keep me in mind if jobs come up. I told him in my note merely that Jaffe and I have serious differences of opinion about the nature of philosophy. He hasn't written to me.

By the way, in case you wonder if I get along with my students, I think I do. They are open and easy with me, especially those of the Logic and History of Philosophy classes. And I have been pleased that about eighteen students in the College (including one I've not yet met) have signed up to do their ~~XXXX~~ two-weeks "independent study" with me. That period of time begins next Monday. During the time students work under the direction of anybody they want to on anything they want to. Eighteen is considered a reasonably good bag in this popularity contest. Most of them are to work on Plato, but one will work on Pascal and another, courageous soul, will continue a bit of logic.

If I should be reappointed for next year, I see little point in my thinking in terms of my being asked back for a third year or of my staying, for that matter, were I accidentally asked back. Too bad. I do like this College. And, though I had to live rather uncomfortably in a bad little apartment until Christmas, over Christmas I moved into the extremely attractive apartment that was originally assigned to me but was not vacated and made ready for me until late in the term.

I have heard from Mrs. Carland of how busy a fall you've had. I am very much pleased to learn from her, too, that you've given the Princeton lectures at Bryn Mawr.

Sincerely,

J. L. -

28-I-59.