



TEMPLE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19122

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

September 18, 1973

Professor José Ferrater Mora, Chairman  
Department of Philosophy  
Bryn Mawr College  
Bryn Mawr, Pa.

Dear José:

I'm canvassing opinions on the desirability of organizing a press for the publication of quality scholarship in philosophy (with the eventual prospect of comparable arrangements in other specialties). My notion, very simply, is that printing and distribution costs ought to be cut to the lowest possible figure in order to be able to accept manuscripts exclusively on their merit. In effect, the venture would be as close to a non-profit operation as possible in terms of maintenance over a long interval. It would eventually require multiple university support at a modest level. But the financing does not concern me at the moment. I'm persuaded that soaring publication costs, the closing of university presses, the relative lack of distinction between commercial and university presses, and the effective "capture" of key presses by distinct schools and schools of thought constitute a barrier to the free flow of professional work and, at times, a form of censorship. Particularly with the cutback in Federal and state aid to universities, the changing position of the United States in the international community, and general inflation, it seems a good time to consider the possibility of providing a kind of free market of ideas and enabling American scholars to have their work properly available to the professional community at home and abroad. There would, obviously, need to be arrangements for library acquisition, author's profits, and the like. But the initial question is merely that of the desirability of and need for a venture of this sort, managed in a professionally scrupulous way, with suitable editorial advice and open to the widest range of professional contributions consistent with high quality.

You probably know of university presses that are failing or that regularly turn down philosophy manuscripts as financially inadvisable. And you will undoubtedly have noticed the extraordinary prices that are beginning to appear in the relevant



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commercial press lists. One professor recently told me that his book--on certain aspects of Greek philosophy--would appear for \$40.00 (I believe it ran about 200 pages) and was to be paperbacked for \$17.50. Philosophy, precisely because it is such a small market, runs the serious risk of being cut back very far in its publication opportunities. And yet, I feel, professional philosophy makes a disproportionately large contribution to every other discipline of importance.

If you find the idea of an inexpensive philosophy press congenial and needed, I would appreciate your writing me at length to that effect--with whatever relevant detailed ideas and suggestions and worries you may have. Your support will be appreciated.

The entire venture, of course, is premised on there being important, quality manuscripts that are increasingly difficult to have published through the available channels. These include the neglected or unpublished work of well-established or classic figures, monograph-sized manuscripts that are almost impossible to publish, selected books by contemporary philosophers, collections of choice papers, and the like. Again, what is being published is increasingly too expensive for professionals and graduate students alike. My thought here is that it would be feasible to run a first edition of given manuscripts in the cheapest possible way consistent with acceptable quality--and with provision for library acquisition--and then to allow authors to renegotiate with other presses if they wished to and if their books showed a prospect of some commercial value. With the proper selection of an advisory board, it should be possible to provide a forum for work of the highest quality within the widest range of professional taste.

I look forward to your reply.

Cordially,

*Je*

Joseph Margolis

JM:rb

23-10-73.