



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Philosophy Faculty Works

Philosophy

2006

Review of Jordi Corominas and Joan Albert Vicens, Xavier Zubiri: La soledad sonora

Brad E. Stone

Loyola Marymount University, brad.stone@lmu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/phil_fac



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Digital Commons @ LMU & LLS Citation

Stone, Brad E., "Review of Jordi Corominas and Joan Albert Vicens, Xavier Zubiri: La soledad sonora" (2006). *Philosophy Faculty Works*. 58.

https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/phil_fac/58

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Philosophy at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

* * *

Jordi Corominas and Joan Albert Vicens, *Xavier Zubiri: La soledad sonora*, Madrid: Taurus, 2006, 917 pp. with photos, paperbound, 28.50€

Miguel de Unamuno wrote in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* that to understand a philosopher's positions one must first understand the philosopher, the man of flesh and bone, he whose life is being played out in his philosophy. Corominas and Vicens have achieved this in *La soledad sonora*, a book which gives us, with great detail yet in a very readable manner, the flesh and bone of Xavier Zubiri. While clearly beneficial for a wider audience, this book is ideal for those who are already familiar with Zubiri's writings but need to learn more about the man who wrote them. I can personally say that the light this book shed on the philosopher's life and historical situation made me more greatly appreciate Zubiri's writings.

This book is not a mere introduction to Zubiri; very few of the 900+ pages address any specific theme in Zubirian philosophy. What the book *does* offer, however, is a rich account as to why Zubirian themes are what they are, and this approach makes it a wonderful addition to any Zubirian's library. It is an equally helpful resource for anyone interested in 20th Century Spanish and European history because the authors have taken great care in describing the political and intellectual climate of both Spain and Europe in the first half of the 20th century. In short, this is a book about a man and his times, and how a man and his times bring forth such a rich philosophical system as we find in Zubiri.

The book is divided into three main parts, each of which could be a book unto itself. The first part of the book, "El dolor de verlo todo transformarse en problema," covers Zubiri's life and times, from his birth in 1898 to 1931. It consists of thirteen chapters, each devoted to the major stages of Zubiri's education. Of particular importance in this part of the book is the intellectual crisis that ensued as Zubiri was torn between his own modernist sympathies and the Church's anti-modernist stance. This crisis was so acute that it had somatic consequences, plaguing Zubiri's education with illness. He received an excellent Catholic education nonetheless (though he would sneak modern philosophers and pragmatists to read at night) and passed the *bac*. He then entered seminary, where the crisis worsened to the point that he left for the Universidad Central, where he was able to pursue modern thought as a student of Ortega y Gasset (he even wrote an 80-page *trabajo* on pragmatism). Zubiri traveled to Louvain, where he studied. While at Louvain, he earned his Doctorate of Sacred Theology degree from the Gregorium in 1920. He received his *license* at Louvain, his *doctorado* in philosophy from the Universidad Central, and was ordained a priest, all in 1921. However, due to some heterodox beliefs expressed by Zubiri in a letter while he was at Louvain, he was briefly excommunicated in 1922. In 1923 he began teaching at the Universidad Central, becoming a *catedrático* in 1926. After an intense personal relationship with María Zambrano in 1927, and desiring to not actively participate in his office as a *sacerdote*, Zubiri went to Germany in 1928 to study with the great German thinkers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sommerfeld, Schrödiger, Zermelo, Einstein, and

Planck. It is in Germany that Zubiri met Américo Castro and his daughter Carmen, with whom Zubiri fell in love. This love for Carmen sets the stage for a major moment of Zubiri's life.

The second part of the book, "No hacemos sino comenzar," covers Zubiri's life and times from 1931 to 1945, and is composed of fifteen chapters. This part of the book is full of information concerning the Second Republic, the Spanish Civil War, and the Second World War, and is a great resource for those interested in such topics. It also focuses on Zubiri's departure from the priesthood and his professorship at the Universidad de Barcelona. Upon returning to Madrid in 1931, rumors were already in circulation about Zubiri and Carmen's relationship. Zubiri became involved in the journal *Cruz y Raya*, whose first edition was published in 1933. It was also in 1933 that Zubiri requested to leave the priesthood. In 1934 Zubiri was released of his priestly duties, but not from the vow of celibacy. He would later be released from those vows in 1936, the year in which Zubiri married Carmen. In order to prevent a scandal, the Zubiris moved to Rome. Their stay was short, however, as the Italian government expelled them from the country due to foreign policy changes by Mussolini's government. They went to Paris in the same year. After the Spanish Civil War came to an end in 1939, the Zubiris returned to Spain. Living in Barcelona, Zubiri joined the faculty at the Universidad de Barcelona. In 1941 Zubiri renounced his chair there, never to officially teach in a university again. In 1942, the same year Zubiri finished *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios*. It would take two years for the book to get through the censors, but it was published, *Nihil obstat*, at the end of 1944. During that process, the Zubiris returned to Madrid.

The third part of the book, "Desfallecí escudriñando la realidad," consists of nine chapters that cover Zubiri's life and times from 1945 to his death in 1983. In 1945 Zubiri was encouraged by friends to offer the now famous *cursos privados*, beginning with "Ciencia y realidad: Introducción al problema de la realidad." In 1946 the Zubiris went to the United States to visit Carmen's father Américo Castro, who had immigrated there in 1944 after having been deported from Spain for rebelling against the *Dictadura*. Back in Spain, with the encouragement of Juan Lladó and the Banco Urquijo's financial backing, the Sociedad de Estudios y Publicaciones was created. The society funded not only Zubiri's private courses but also the work of other independent scholars. In 1950 he rejected a proposal to teach at the Universidad de Chile on behalf of the Spanish government (and the 75,000 peseta salary) because he did not want to bind himself with the Franco regime. Zubiri continued to teach his own courses throughout the 1950s. In 1961 Zubiri met Ignacio Ellacuría, a young Jesuit who was writing his doctoral thesis on Zubiri's work, and their philosophical relationship would continue for the rest of Zubiri's life. In 1962 Zubiri published *Sobre la esencia* which was an immediate success in the bookstore, but the academic reception was ambivalent, primarily due to the book's density of thought. Zubiri continued teaching his private courses throughout the 1960s. In 1967 Ellacuría was sent to El Salvador to serve as a professor at the Universidad Centroamericana, the Jesuit university in San Salvador (he would be assassinated there in 1989), but was allowed to visit Zubiri for several months each year. In 1970 Zubiri met the current director of the Fundación Xavier Zubiri, Diego Gracia. The Seminario Xavier Zubiri, a colloquium series dealing with a variety of philosophical topics presented by a variety of speakers, was created in 1972. 1975 marked the end of the *Dictadura*, followed by the coronation of Juan Carlos I (who had attended one of Zubiri's lectures on the question of space in 1973). In the last years of the decade, Zubiri started to write *Inteligencia sentiente*, his noological trilogy. The first volume was published in 1980, the second in 1982, and the final volume in 1983. In 1980 Zubiri was diagnosed with intestinal cancer, and three years later he died, on September 21, 1983. His final words were "En esta vida ... uno está solo, y no es de extrañar que muera solo" (705).

This book contains much more than what is presented here; it is very thorough and well-detailed, even including passages from letters and reconstructed dialogues

based on testimonials. The authors have taken great care to introduce the reader to the real Zubiri, whose grand intellect was the by-product of a *soledad sonora*. Although *sonora* means clarity, it also connotes harmony. The book excels at showing the life and historical impulse that led Zubiri to such a clear, harmonious philosophical view.

BRAD ELLIOTT STONE

Loyola Marymount University