

# Nietzsche's and Pessoa's Psychological Fictionalism

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## Keywords

Nietzsche; Pessoa; Vaihinger; Mead; Fictionalism; Subjectivity; Neo-Kantianism.

## Abstract

In a note to G.R.S. Mead's *Quests Old and New*, where he found a section devoted to Hans Vaihinger's main ideas, Fernando Pessoa reflects on the consequences of the fictionalist approach to both our perception of the I and the value of consciousness. These questions correspond to some statements that we find in Nietzsche's writings, which in particular Vaihinger refers to in his *Die Philosophie des Als-ob*. Our aim is thus to compare Nietzsche's and Pessoa's view of the I and consciousness, and to deal with their psychology by making reference to Vaihinger's fictionalism.

## Palavras-chave

Nietzsche; Pessoa; Vaihinger; Mead; Ficcionalismo; Subjectividade; Neokantismo.

## Resumo

Num apontamento relacionado com a leitura de *Quests Old and New* de G.R.S. Mead, que revisita as teses principais de Hans Vaihinger, Fernando Pessoa reflecte sobre as consequências de uma abordagem ficcionalista quanto à percepção do eu e ao valor da consciência. As questões que Pessoa coloca encontram correspondência com os escritos de Nietzsche a quem Vaihinger se refere, em particular, no seu livro *Philosophie des Als-ob*. O nosso intuito é o de aprofundar a comparação entre a concepção do eu e da consciência em Nietzsche e Pessoa, reconstruindo as posições de ambos nos moldes do ficcionalismo de Vaihinger.

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*Sou nada...*

*Sou uma ficção...*

*Quando eu a querer de mim ou de tudo neste mundo?*

(PESSOA, 2014: 311-312)

## 1. Introduction

Fictionalism is a contemporarily discussed philosophical position that can roughly be characterized as the view that claims made within a region of discourse “are not best seen as aiming at literal truth but are better regarded as a sort of ‘fiction’” (EKLUND, 2011). Recently, several scholars have defended fictionalism about mathematical discourse and scientific theories, ordinary object discourse, and finally, about truth and value judgements (moral fictionalism).<sup>1</sup> All of these positions are grounded on a crucial distinction between a *linguistic* and an *ontological* thesis. According to “the linguistic thesis [...] utterances of sentences of the discourse are best seen not as efforts to say what is literally true, but as useful fictions of some sort. The ontological thesis, by contrast, is the thesis that the entities characteristic of the discourse do not exist, or have the ontological status of fictional entities” (EKLUND, 2011). The very root of philosophical fictionalism is Hans Vaihinger’s *Die Philosophie des Als-ob* [*The Philosophy of “As if”*] (1911). In that book, Vaihinger gave fictionalism its most complete expression and therefore, Vaihinger’s work is a fundamental reference for understanding the contemporary debate on that concept.<sup>2</sup> As will be shown, Vaihinger particularly focuses on the practical function of human intellect and “supports the thesis that we must not see scientific theories as representing outer reality, but only as instruments to manage it” (CEYNOWA, 1993: 9). Thus, basically, Vaihinger is interested in epistemology and in the practical consequences of our being conscious of the fictional character of our world-description. In what follows we will address fictionalism according to Vaihinger’s view. Moreover, in this paper “psychological fictionalism” means a fictionalist conception of the subject, that is, the view that claims that psychological entities such as subject, I, *ego*, or soul are only useful fictions, and that our consciousness of their being fictional entities has important practical consequences.

This is the necessary premise of this paper, the aim of which is to compare Nietzsche’s and Pessoa’s conception of the subject. In particular, we shall argue that both Nietzsche and Pessoa defend a psychological fictionalism, and that that position is the ground of some of their most important reflections. Moreover, the comparison between Nietzsche’s and Pessoa’s fictionalist conception of the subject

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<sup>1</sup> For an exhaustive bibliography on this topic, see EKLUND (2011). On moral fictionalism see also DÖRING and BAHADIR (2014). It is worth noting that over the last decade some scholars have discussed the possibility of ascribing Nietzsche a fictionalist interpretation of value judgements (see, e.g., Hussain 2007).

<sup>2</sup> On this point, see NEUBER (2014).

is possible *via* Vaihinger – and maybe only through him. In fact, as will be shown in what follows, Vaihinger is the indirect connection between Pessoa and Nietzsche on this particular topic.

First, Vaihinger developed his fictionalism by making reference to a neo-Kantian framework, the same framework that influenced Nietzsche. Second, Vaihinger made reference to Nietzsche himself and quoted several unpublished writings where Nietzsche talks about the I and the subject as mere *fictions*. Finally, Vaihinger's view was later summarized by George R. S. Mead in his *Quests Old and New* (1913), which was subsequently read by Pessoa. Thus, in Mead's book Pessoa found an outline of Vaihinger's fictionalism, which, in turn, was grounded on an interpretation of several Nietzsche's statements. In fact, as we can see from a note written in the flyleaf of Pessoa's personal copy of Mead's book, Pessoa developed Vaihinger's fundamental thesis into a non-substantialist view of subject and consciousness.

In what follows, the attention will be first directed to Nietzsche's conception of the I and subject, where we particularly focus on his stating the fictional character of all these notions (section 2). Accordingly, we then provide a brief outline of Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of "As-if,"* paying special regard to those chapters where he defines the concept of "fiction" and stresses that nineteenth century psychologists agree "that the concept of 'soul' is only a fiction" (section 3). Finally, we turn to Pessoa, and deal with the psychological fictionalism that emerges from the unpublished note on Vaihinger (section 4).

## 2. Nietzsche: the I as a "fiction"

The I becomes a particularly important object of investigation in Nietzsche's late writings because it is one of the distinctive elements of the Western worldview and its metaphysics of substance. Nietzsche's most significant reflections on the I – which he sees as the question on the substantial referent of psychic phenomena – occur in the first book of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* [*Beyond Good and Evil*] devoted to the "prejudices of philosophers", and are later developed in *Götzen-Dämmerung* [*Twilight of the Idols*]. In these works, Nietzsche presents the final outcome of a theoretical discussion of the subject (particularly of the "I" *qua* subject) that he developed since the early 1880s and that we also find treated in his notebooks.<sup>3</sup> From this theoretical discussion emerges Nietzsche's non-realist or fictionalist conception of the subject, which is the topic of this paper.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> On this topic see LUPO (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Sebastian GARDNER (2009: 1) argues that "there is a striking lack of fit between the (non-realist or fictionalist) conception of the self that emerges from Nietzsche's theoretical discussion of the self, and the (realist, or at any rate non-fictionalist) conception of the self that is presupposed by his practical philosophy" (we prefer to talk about "subject" (or "I") instead of "self", since in Nietzsche

In the first book of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche takes a stand against all philosophical approaches that are unable to give up the common sense view of the I and thus calls into question the legitimacy of using the proposition “I think” as an immediate certainty (BGE 16).<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche argues that, in order to be able to discuss this issue, one would have to answer “a set of bold claims that are difficult to establish”, and concludes that

[...] in place of that “immediate certainty” which may, in this case, win the faith of the people, the philosopher gets handed a whole assortment of metaphysical questions, genuinely probing intellectual questions of conscience, such as: “Where do I get the concept of thinking from? Why do I believe in causes and effects? What gives me the right to speak about an I, and, for that matter, about an I as cause, and, finally, about an I as the cause of thoughts?”

(BGE 16)

The kinds of problems raised by Nietzsche are clear. He particularly focuses on the popular belief in an I as substance, that is to say, in the existence of a causally efficacious substrate of our psychical activity. This, according to Nietzsche, is a fundamental error of our self-representation, as he famously argues in *Twilight of the Idols*. First, in TI, “Reason” in Philosophy, 5, Nietzsche blames the “basic presupposition of the metaphysics of language – in the vernacular: the presuppositions of reason” for clearing the way to a “crudely fetishistic mindset. It sees doers and deeds all over: [...] it believes in the ‘I’, in the I as being, in the I as substance, and it projects this belief in the I-substance onto all things. [...] Being is imagined in everything – pushed under everything – as a cause.” Then, in TI, *The Four Great Errors*, 3 (“Error of false causation”), Nietzsche states that “the conception of a consciousness (‘mind’) as a cause, and then that of the I (the ‘subject’) as a

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*Subject* (or *Ich*) and *Selbst* are quite different concepts. See e.g. Za, *On the Despisers of the Body*). In this paper we aim to outline Nietzsche’s psychological fictionalism and will thus not deal with the question posed by Gardner. Nevertheless, as Gori recently stated, Nietzsche’s rejection of the I on the theoretical plane does not necessarily contrast the psychology presupposed by his practical philosophy (in other words, it is arguable that “Nietzsche’s critique of the I [...] does not prohibit the human being from referring to its own subjectivity – provided, however, that the latter is conceived of in a different way, that is, stripped from its metaphysical surface.” (GORI, 2015a: 192). Moreover, as we shall show at the end of this section, Nietzsche’s fictionalist conception of the subject plays a fundamental role in his late practical philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> Quotations from, and references to, Nietzsche’s writings make use of the following abbreviations: ‘GS’ for *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft - The Gay Science*, ‘Za’ for *Also sprach Zarathustra - Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘BGE’ for *Jenseits von Gut und Böse - Beyond Good and Evil*, ‘GM’ for *Yur Genealogie der Moral - On the Genealogy of Morality*, ‘TI’ for *Götzen-Dämmerung - Twilight of the Idols*, ‘PF’ for *Posthumous Fragments*. Nietzsche’s works are cited by abbreviation, chapter title or number (when applicable), and section number. Posthumous fragments are cited by year, group and, fragment number, as they appear in the Colli and Montinari standard edition (NIETZSCHE, 1967-). The posthumous fragments marked with (\*) are quoted in the final chapter of Vaihinger’s *The Philosophy of “As-if”: Nietzsche and his Doctrine of Conscious Illusion* (VAIHINGER, 1925: 341 ff.).

cause are just latecomers [‘inner facts’] that appeared once” that of “*will as causal agent* [...] was established and given.” But, continues Nietzsche, “the ‘inner world’ is full of illusions and phantasms: will is one of them. [...] Not to mention the I! That has become a fairy tale, a fiction [*Fiktion*], a play on words: it has stopped thinking, feeling, and willing altogether!”

In these published writings Nietzsche deals with the problem of subjectivity by arguing that the concept of “I” (or “subject”) is only surreptitiously introduced into a purely necessary dynamic. The value of that concept is therefore merely logical, and in no way can we affirm its existence on the ontological plane. As we suggested above, this view is the final outcome of a reflection that Nietzsche developed during the 1880s, and in the notebooks we find his psychological fictionalism most clearly stated. In several notebooks Nietzsche particularly focuses on the purely fictional nature of the I, with emphasis on the general characteristics of the activity of thought, which he describes in purely physiological terms. The I is considered as the product of a secondary activity of thought which intervenes in ascribing a subject to a process that is constitutively free of it:

I don't concede that the “I” is what thinks. Instead, I take the I itself to be a construction of thinking [...]; in other words, to be only a regulative fiction with the help of which a kind of constancy and thus “knowability” is inserted into, invented into, a world of becoming. [...] It is only thinking that posits the I: but up to now philosophers have believed, like the “common people”, that in “I think” there lay something or other of unmediated certainty and that this “I” was the given cause of thinking.

(PF, 1885, 35 [35]\*)

The I, as a product of thought, is nothing more than a conceptual entity whose value is limited to practical usefulness with a view to a categorization of the world. According to this perspective, the I belongs to the sphere of those substantial elements to which one is used to attributing absolute existence and whose origin lies in the translation of the outside world into a language that can be understood and used by our intellect.<sup>6</sup> In Nietzsche’s view, however, the I has a feature that distinguishes it from other substantial entities that arise from the simplification of a chaotic multiplicity through isolation of fixed and uniform forms. In order to give unity to feelings, perceptions, and memories one looks for something that is able to act as a source of such dispositions – as their “cause.” The unification of the multiplicity of sensations is made through identification of a spiritual entity, whose delimitation is not made otherwise than from its ability to act and for this reason it has no sense wanting to ascribe an existential value to it, as if it were possible to indicate and describe that from which an action springs in

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<sup>6</sup> On this topic see GORI (2009). On the adaptive value of substance concepts see also GS 110 and 111.

instances where all that is possible to ascertain are the effects of the action itself. In Nietzsche's interpretation, the subject is nothing but a creation of the activity of representation, an erroneous simplification generated by thinking that one can "designate as such the force which posits, invents, thinks, as distinct from all individual positing, inventing, thinking" (PF, 1885, 2 [152]).<sup>7</sup> We are moving within the general perspective that is synthetically expressed in Nietzsche's conclusion in GM I 13, according to which "there is no 'being' behind the deed, its effect and what becomes of it; 'the doer' is invented as an afterthought, – the doing is everything."<sup>8</sup> If we apply this remark to the case of psychic phenomena, we easily see that it answers the question about the relation between body and mind. Nietzsche reflects in particular on human thought, noticing that it is not distinguished from the physiological activity that determines it and that, as a result, there is no subject-object dualism to substantiate it. There is no author of thoughts. The latter arise from the organism's inner processes.<sup>9</sup> In the same way, there is no subject distinct from the sensations generated by our perceptive faculty: they appear spontaneously to us and only afterwards do they enter consciousness and are, thus, organized and understood. It is only at this point that the I's "regulative fiction" steps in. The latter is nothing but a logical support for the categorization of sensations (that are thus related to a unitary substrate), its usefulness being as undeniable as is its ontological inconsistency.

Stripped of the ontological value traditionally ascribed to it by psychology and of its autonomy from the chain of sensations, the I reveals its logical-fictional

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<sup>7</sup> The will to find a subject-agent located beneath the unfolding of events is a theme Nietzsche has addressed at length, deploring, in particular, the human being's tendency to anthropomorphize natural dynamics. This is evident, for example, in the case of the interpretation of the link between cause and effect. The latter is the model of a purely necessary dynamic, which, however, is commonly described in terms of human agency, even an intentional one. The tendency, that is, is to project in things a familiar model of activity that ascribes subjective characteristics to the force that moves material reality (see PF, 1885: 2 [83] and 1888: 14 [95]).

<sup>8</sup> This conclusion is incorporated in the above quoted passage from TI, "Reason" in *Philosophy*, 5 and in PF, 1887-1888: 11 [113]\*, where Nietzsche states that "both doing and doer are fictions" (see note below).

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche's most explicit discussion of the physiological conception of thought can be found in PF, 1884, 26[92] and 1885, 38[1]. In these notes Nietzsche refers to a form of conscious thought, which he considers a simple *sign* of an activity that takes place at a "pre-psychological" level (see LUPO, 2006: 107 ff. On this topic see also ABEL, 2001; EMDEN, 2005; and GORI, 2015a). Nietzsche's claim of a "superficial" character of consciousness (GS 354) leads to the open debate about whether Nietzsche defends a strong epiphenomenalism or not. Such a view is developed in LEITER (2002) and in RICCARDI (forthcoming), while KATSAFANAS (2005) argues against the strong epiphenomenalist reading. LUPO (2009) also argues that Nietzsche rejects a metaphysical view of consciousness (as a *faculty*), but accepts an epiphenomenal view of it (even if not a strong one). We basically follow Lupo, since it seems to us that his view is the most coherent with Nietzsche's statements from the notebooks from 1884-1885. Nevertheless, it is not our intention to intervene in that debate which exceeds the aims of this paper.

character. A few years later, Nietzsche takes his argument to extremes and suggests the complete exclusion of the subject-act dualism as a fiction:

“Thinking”, as posited by the theorists of knowledge, simply doesn't occur: it is a quite arbitrary fiction achieved by selecting one element from the process and subtracting all the others, an artificial trimming for the purpose of intelligibility... The “mind”, something that thinks: maybe even “the mind absolute, pure, unmixed” – this conception is a derivative, second consequence of the false self-observation that believes in “thinking:” here first an act is imagined that doesn't occur, “thinking,” and secondly a subject-substratum is imagined in which every act of this thinking, and nothing else, originates; i.e., both doing and doer are fictions.

(PF, 1887-1888, 11 [113]\*)<sup>10</sup>

In this passage Nietzsche is, of course, referring to a form of conscious thought, the culmination of a chain of processes enacted at a physiological level, of which only the final outcome can be apprehended. Both agents in this relation are the product of the translation of physiological dynamics in a language we can understand. Thus, they are mutually dependent on a logical level, and, as is the case with the “true” and “apparent” world spoken of in *Twilight of the Idols*, the elimination of the one entails the elimination of the other. For Nietzsche, there is actually no “thinking” except as the ceaseless articulation of drives and instincts in the organism, just as there is no “mind,” a subject identifiable as “*something that thinks.*” Mind and thought can be defined only in relation to each other; once the former's ontological inconsistency is revealed, the latter loses meaning as well. Dualism is, therefore, overcome. In fact on this conception, it is completely eliminated.

As has recently been demonstrated, Nietzsche's reflections on whether and on what basis is it possible to speak of the I as the cause of thoughts, are grounded on a neo-Kantian framework.<sup>11</sup> In particular, Nietzsche's rejection of Descartes' “I think” can be contextualized by making reference to the contemporary debate on

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<sup>10</sup> In the notebooks from 1880 to 1888 we find other textual evidence of Nietzsche's fictionalist conception of the subject. For example, in PF, 1880, 6 [340]\* Nietzsche argues that “it is probably due to our lack of development that we believe in things and assume something permanent in becoming, that we believe in an ego,” whereas “the subject is only a fiction, and there is no *ego*, either” (PF, 1887, 9 [108]\*). Nietzsche, in particular, denies the causal efficacy of the subject (“the ‘subject’ is not something that *effects*, but merely a fiction,” PF, 1887, 9 [91]\*), and rejects the popular view that there is a *substratum* of our psychical activity (“‘subject’ is the fiction implying that many *similar* conditions in us are the effect of a *substratum*... this is to be denied,” PF, 1887, 10 [19]). Finally, Nietzsche also argues that “the ‘soul’ itself is an expression of all the phenomena of consciousness which, however, we *interpret as the cause of all these phenomena*,” and, consequently, “‘self-consciousness’ is a fiction” (PF, 1885-1886, 1 [58]\*).

<sup>11</sup> On this topic, see LOUKIDELIS (2013) and GORI (2015a).

“scientific psychology” that included Friedrich A. Lange.<sup>12</sup> The I of which Nietzsche speaks in BGE 16 does not differ from the soul discussed by Lange in his *History of Materialism*, nor is it different from what the Austrian physicist Ernst Mach called, in the same years, the “ideal mental-economic unity” that science claimed to be able to locate within the brain.<sup>13</sup> In particular, the main problem Mach addresses is the relation between body and I (matter and spirit), an issue widely debated during the nineteenth century by those thinkers who privileged scientific themes in the work of Kant - particularly those relating to problems of psychology and anthropology.<sup>14</sup> Both Mach and Lange faced the limitations of the explanations of the body/soul relation provided both by the materialism and the physiology of sense organs typical of psychology, and raised the possibility of establishing a “psychology without a soul.” In so doing, they became spokesmen for a goal of considerable philosophical significance; the fact that contemporary psychology no longer needed to refer to a substantial ground of psychic functions is what brought about its liberation from the old scholastic metaphysics.

As can easily be seen, scientific psychology’s demand to get free from the remnants of an age-old metaphysics that surreptitiously attempted to introduce something that it could not specify or measure, corresponds to Nietzsche’s stressing the pure fictional character of the I. Moreover, it is arguable that Nietzsche is referring (most likely *via* Lange) to scientific psychology’s widely debated outcomes when he claims that “*nowadays* we do not believe” in the illusory character of our “inner facts” (TI, *Errors*, 3), or when he argues that “*we have become* quite convinced that our concept of ‘I’ guarantees nothing in the way of a real unity” (PF, 1888, 14 [79]\*. Our emphasis). But what characterizes Nietzsche’s view is the attention that he pays to the practical consequences of our having finally become aware of this fictionalism. This is particularly clear if we consider the aim of Nietzsche’s late philosophy – with special regard to TI, where Nietzsche explicitly states the fictional character of the I.

First, TI can be ascribed to Nietzsche’s general anti-Christian aim. In that book, Nietzsche particularly focuses on the negative consequences that Christian morality had on the human type and attacks its basic principles. The belief in an “I” as cause of our own actions is one of those principles. In fact, without the reference to it, no guilt or responsibility can be ascribed to anyone. Thus, stressing

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<sup>12</sup> As stressed e.g. in STACK (1983), Lange’s *History of Materialism* strongly influenced Nietzsche. In Lange’s work Nietzsche found a detailed and updated exposition of the latest publications in psychology. This reference is quite important in this paper, since Lange also influenced Vaihinger (see below, section 3).

<sup>13</sup> MACH (1914: 22). Mach already focused on this topic in his *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen*, published in 1886 and purchased by Nietzsche (see GORI, 2009 and 2015a).

<sup>14</sup> On this topic see LEHMANN (1987).

the fictional character of the I deprives Christianity of its power.<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche clearly shows this in the section on *The Four Great Errors*, which particularly concerns the concepts of “false causation” and “imaginary causes,” to which belongs “the entire realm of morality and religion” (TI, *The Four Great Errors* 6). As regards causation, Nietzsche stresses that “people have always believed that they knew what a cause was,” and “that our acts of will were causally efficacious.” Moreover, as for Nietzsche, no one “could deny that thoughts have causes” and “that the ‘I’ is what causes thoughts.” Otherwise, he concludes, “the action could hardly be considered free, and nobody could really be held responsible for it” (TI, *The Four Great Errors* 3). This stance is quite problematic, however, since, as Nietzsche argues, we get this belief “from the famous realm of the ‘inner facts,’ none of which have ever proven factual.” On the contrary, “the ‘inner world’ is full of illusions and phantasms” and the “‘I’ (the ‘subject’) [...] has [nowadays] become a fairy tale, a fiction, a play on words” (TI, *The Four Great Errors* 3).

The practical consequences of Nietzsche’s fictional conception of the subject are even clearer if we consider a second point, i.e. the specific aim of TI and its relation with Nietzsche’s attempt to provide a *revaluation* of the traditional values. In particular, Nietzsche expects his attack on the “eternal idols” generated by Western (Platonic and Christian) metaphysics to have a *transformative* effect on human beings.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Nietzsche’s “diagnosis” of the realized human being suggests that the human being who believed in the value of substantial entities such as “I”, “will”, etc., out of the mere practical plane, finally becomes smaller, weaker – *décadent*. In Nietzsche’s view, in order to provide a counter-movement against Christian morality, we must contrast this belief, and that can be done by “sounding out” the idols, thus revealing their hollowness (TI, *Preface*). As we can see, according to this view there is no need to completely reject these idols. In fact, Nietzsche denies their value on the metaphysical plane, but also stresses their “biological utility for human being’s preservation” (PF, 1888, 14[153]). According to him, “the aberration of philosophy is that, instead of seeing in logic and the categories of reason means toward the adjustment of the world for utilitarian ends [...], one believed one possessed in them the criterion of truth and reality” (PF, 1888, 14[153]). This belief is what actually produced a weak human being, and this is thus what “future philosophers” must avoid. Therefore, for Nietzsche, the awareness of the pure fictional (i.e. logical) character of such concepts as that of “I”

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<sup>15</sup> The question of the I can be extended to include that of the soul. By doing this, we move from a classical problem for philosophy and psychology to more delicate issues concerning religion in general and Christianity in particular. See BGE 54, where Nietzsche develops his criticism towards Descartes’ “I think” and argues that modern philosophy is “*anti-Christian*”. On the question of human guilt and responsibility see also BGE 21.

<sup>16</sup> On the aims of TI and its relation with Nietzsche’s projected *Revaluation of all values*, see GORI (2015b).

would have a strong transformative effect on the type of man. In other words, according to him, it makes a big difference for the human being to conceive the I as causally efficacious, or to conceive it *as if it were* causally efficacious. This is actually crucial for Nietzsche, since on this difference lies the possibility of generating a higher human type. Roughly put, while common people believe in the *existence* of an I as the cause of thoughts, “future philosophers” will consider it as a mere *tool* for practical purposes – thus, not completely getting rid of it.<sup>17</sup>

As we shall see in the following section, Nietzsche’s claim – grounded on the outcomes of scientific psychology – that “we have become quite convinced that our concept of ‘I’ guarantees nothing in the way of a real unity” (PF, 1888, 14 [79]\*) and that, consequently, we can finally see it only as a *tool* in order to orient ourselves to the world (and not as a substance concept), correspond to Vaihinger’s fictionalist perspective.

### 3. Vaihinger: fictionalism, or the “critical standpoint”

In *The Philosophy of “As-if”* (first published in 1911 after almost 30 years of work), Hans Vaihinger presents an original philosophical perspective grounded on 19<sup>th</sup> century neo-Kantian epistemology. This book is particularly important for the recent debates about philosophical fictionalism, since it constitutes the very root of that position. In fact, in *The Philosophy of “As-if”* we find an in-depth and exhaustive investigation of the concept of “fiction”, the basis of which Vaihinger programmatically aimed to lay out, as the subtitle of his main work suggests: “A system of the theoretical, practical and religious fictions of mankind” (NEUBER, 2014: 9). Given the aim of this paper, we shall only briefly outline Vaihinger’s view in order to show the similarities with Nietzsche – similarities that Vaihinger himself noticed and stressed in the final section of his book (*Nietzsche and his Doctrine of Conscious Illusion*).

As summarized by Ceynowa (1993: 9), “*The Philosophy of ‘As-if’* supports the thesis that we must not see scientific theories as representing outer reality, but only as instruments to manage it.” This thesis is particularly “grounded on the idea that the human intellect has a fundamental practical function,” since it creates a manageable world-image that helps human self-preservation (1993: 9). Vaihinger (1925: 170) explicitly states that “knowledge is a secondary purpose, [...] the primary aim [of logical thinking] being the practical attainment of communication and action.” This is better argued in the opening page of the first part of *The Philosophy of “As-if,”* where Vaihinger presents the basic principles of his view:

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<sup>17</sup> This view has been recently defended in GORI (2015b), with particular reference to the concepts of “I” and “freedom”.

The object of the world of ideas as a whole is not the portrayal of reality – this would be an utterly impossible task – but rather to provide us with an *instrument for finding our way about more easily in this world*. Subjective processes of thought [...] represent the highest and ultimate result of organic development, and the world of ideas is the fine flower of the whole cosmic process; but for that very reason it is not a copy of it in the ordinary sense.

(VAIHINGER, 1925: 15)

It is easy to see that Vaihinger's fictionalism is first contrasted with a correspondence theory of truth – that is, the idea that our knowledge is a copy of outer reality. In his view, human knowledge is only the final product of a biological development and its value is merely *instrumental*. Moreover, Vaihinger holds that our mind is “assimilative and constructive,” and that “logical thought is an active appropriation of the outer world, a useful organic elaboration of the material sensation” (VAIHINGER, 1925: 1).<sup>18</sup> Thus, according to him, the “psyche” (to be understood not as a substance, but rather as “the organic whole of all so-called ‘mental’ actions and reactions”, *ibid.*) is *an organic formative force*, which independently changes what has been appropriated (VAIHINGER, 1925: 2). Finally, Vaihinger considers scientific thought as a function of the psyche and calls “fictions” the products of its activity: “The fictive activity of the mind is an expression of the fundamental psychological forces; *fictions are mental structures*” (VAIHINGER, 1925: 12).

This view is strongly influenced by Lange's *History of Materialism*.<sup>19</sup> In that book, Vaihinger found an exposition of the most important topics debated by German neo-Kantian thinkers and scientists during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, Lange made reference to the studies of the German physiologist Johannes Müller and focused on the epistemological value of sense organs (see CEYNOWA, 1993: 134 f.). As for Lange, “pure” knowledge is not possible; anything we know is first moulded by our sense organs, and therefore by our intellect and its logical structure. This is coherent with the development of Kant's epistemology that Lange aimed to provide and whose radicalization led to Vaihinger's philosophical position.<sup>20</sup> In Vaihinger's view, his own fictionalism – that is, the idea that “psychical constructs [...] are only fictions, i.e. conceptual and ideational aids,” and “not hypotheses relating to the nature of reality” – is in fact a “‘critical’ standpoint” (VAIHINGER, 1925: 177).

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<sup>18</sup> Michael HEIDELBERGER (2014: 53) directly compared Vaihinger's view of human thought as a “biological function” with Ernst Mach's epistemology.

<sup>19</sup> As we read in Vaihinger (1925: xxxv), in Lange he found “a master, a guide, an ideal teacher.” Vaihinger particularly devotes to Lange's “*Standpoint of the Ideal*” one section of the third part (*Historical Confirmations*) of his *The Philosophy of “As-if.”* On the influence of Lange on Vaihinger see CEYNOWA (1993: chap. 3) and HEIDELBERGER (2014).

<sup>20</sup> See HEIDELBERGER (2014: 51) ff. and VAIHINGER (1925: xxxvi, n.1).

The reference to neo-Kantianism is particularly important in order to understand Vaihinger's philosophical perspective, since it leads to the fundamental and widely debated question of the "thing in itself", and consequently, to the problematic concept of "subject" or "soul." From what has been shown above, it follows that Vaihinger considers the scientific concepts as having a merely logical value. Vaihinger particularly stresses this point, and in a way comparable to Nietzsche's stating the *four great errors* of human reason, deplores the traditional "error" of "attributing to the means value which really belongs exclusively to what is achieved by the means" (VAIHINGER, 1925: 167). In other words, Vaihinger argues that, whereas "concept and proposition serve merely as a means for communication [...], the psyche believes that it has grasped something when it has merely applied its fictional categories to the sensation-complex" (VAIHINGER, 1925: 169). The final result of this fundamental error is thus the creation of the concept of substance, which – to use Nietzsche's words – is "pushed under" the world of experience:

We get the fiction of a substance, supposed to exist outside the realm of experienced objects, which then become mere *attributa* or *modi* of the substance. In the same way there arises the fiction of an absolute cause of which the world of experience is supposed to be the effect; [...] and finally we get the fiction of the "Thing in itself" which is supposed to be the essence of phenomena. All these are unjustified transference-fictions, since a relationship which only has a meaning within the sphere of experience is extended beyond this into the void.

(VAIHINGER, 1925: 165-166)

That of "thing in itself" is maybe the most representative case of a fiction whose value has been misunderstood, as if it were not merely logical. In dealing with that concept, Vaihinger particularly draws his view, and introduces the question of the subject:

Only within the world of ideas are there things, things that are causes; in the real world these ideas are but empty echoes. The fiction of the *Ding an sich* would be the most brilliant of all conceptual instruments. Just as we introduce into mathematics and mechanics ideas which facilitate our task, so Kant introduces a device in the form of the concept *Ding an sich*, as an *x* to which a *y*, the ego, as our organization, corresponds. By this means the whole world of reality can be dealt with. Subsequently the "ego" and the *Ding an sich* are dropped, and only sensations remain as real. From our point of view the sequence of sensations constitutes ultimate reality, and two poles are mentally added, subject and object.

(VAIHINGER, 1925: 75-76)

In complete agreement with Lange and other contemporary neo-Kantian thinkers (see e.g. MACH, 1914: chap. 1), Vaihinger argues that the "ultimate reality" is constituted by sensations. For him, the logical fictions are only means to make reality manageable, for example, by marking relatively stable complexes of sensations, or by introducing imaginary causes, thus giving direction and –

particularly – *meaning* to the flux of sensations. The two substance concepts of subject and object are therefore a product of what we could call the “error of the unjustified extension” deplored by Vaihinger. According to his “critical standpoint”, there is no “subject” as much as there is no “object”: they are both only creations of our thought, “*instruments for finding our way about more easily in this world*” to which anything out of the world of our experience does not correspond.

As can now be seen, Vaihinger’s view can be compared with that of Nietzsche: they both claim the pure logical value of the categories of reason; they both stress the role of these categories as tools for the preservation of the species; and finally, they both evaluate the introduction of imaginary causes of the empirical world of experiences as a fundamental error of popular thought. It is worth noting that Vaihinger acknowledged this similarity and mentioned Nietzsche among the “historical confirmations” of his own philosophical perspective. In the final section of his book, Vaihinger particularly stressed that Nietzsche recognized “that life and science are not possible without imaginary or false conceptions” and “that false ideas must be employed both in science and life by intellectually mature people and with the full realization of their falsity.” Finally, he argued that “it was Lange, in all likelihood, who in this case served as his guide” (VAIHINGER, 1925: 341).<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot adequately develop this topic in this paper. In the few pages left, before turning to Pessoa, we will just make one final step to show Vaihinger’s view of the concept of “soul.”

Vaihinger’s psychological fictionalism directly follows from his general view of scientific concepts and since the latter is grounded on the neo-Kantian debate, corresponds to the perspective of scientific psychology that we presented in the previous section. In particular, Vaihinger considers the concept of “soul” as one of the several “verbal fictions [...] employed in all the sciences.” According to his fictionalism, these are “nothing but summational expressions for a series of interconnected phenomena and interconnected processes, [...] although [they] were formerly, and are still to-day regarded as expressions for real and existing entities” (VAIHINGER, 1925: 211-212). Furthermore, Vaihinger states that:

[...] in the scientific world to-day everyone is agreed that the concept of “soul” is only a fiction. We still speak of a soul as if there were such a thing as a separated, integral and simple soul-entity, though we are quite conscious that it is only a fiction. The “soul” is

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<sup>21</sup> Just a few lines below this passage, Vaihinger states once more that “Nietzsche, like Lange, emphasizes the great significance of ‘appearances’ in all the various field of science and life,” and then claims that “this Kantian or, if you will, neo-Kantian origin of Nietzsche’s doctrine has hitherto been completely ignored. [...] As a matter of fact there is a great deal of Kant in Nietzsche [...], of the spirit of Kant, of the real Kant who understood the nature of appearance through and through, but who, in spite of having seen through it, also consciously saw and recognized its usefulness and necessity” (VAIHINGER, 1925: 341-2).

simply a summational fiction without any reality. [...] On our “critical” view, the “soul” is simply a convenient aid for indicating the totality of psychical phenomena. We speak *as if* a soul existed.

(VAIHINGER, 1925: 213)

We can also directly compare Vaihinger’s and Nietzsche’s views on this point. As we have shown, Nietzsche was influenced by the neo-Kantian framework too, and on that ground he developed his fictional conception of the I. Moreover, Nietzsche stressed the practical usefulness of that concept and only rejected the idea of a causally efficacious I, that is, of an I as substance. In so doing, Nietzsche implicitly agrees with Vaihinger’s “critical” view, according to which it is important to consider the “verbal fictions” as “convenient aids” or “fruitful errors” (VAIHINGER, 1925: 169), with no need to completely get rid of them. In other words, both Nietzsche and Vaihinger think that we can keep on making reference to these concepts in our self- and world-description, but only by speaking *as if* they were existing copies of reality.

Thus far, we have briefly given a general view of fictionalism as it emerges from Vaihinger’s main work. His philosophical view is also outlined in George S. R. Mead’s *Quests Old and New* (1913), a book that Pessoa read and that – as we can see from a note written in the flyleaf of Pessoa’s personal copy of Mead’s book – influenced his view of the subject. In the following section we shall argue that Pessoa also supported a psychological fictionalism and that his view can be compared with Nietzsche’s precisely because it is grounded on Vaihinger’s philosophical perspective.

#### 4. Pessoa: truth as a fiction

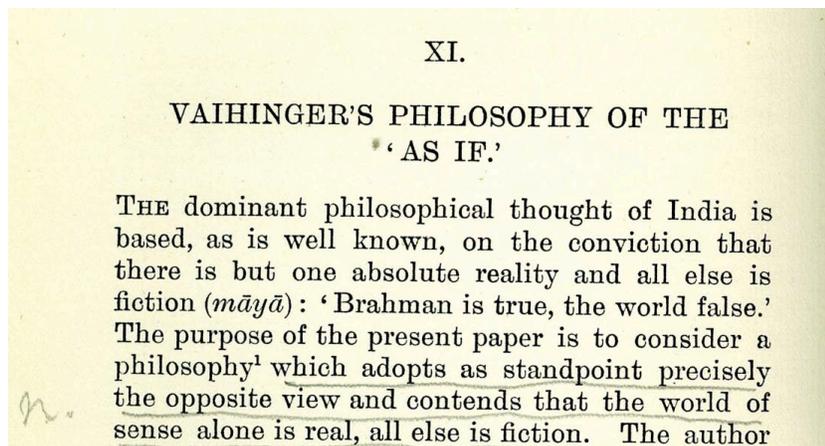
The first section of Pessoa’s private library, labelled “Philosophy and Psychology,” consists of 163 books, less than half of which actually deal with purely philosophical topics. Among those books, we find works from Blaise Pascal, Herbert Spencer, and Alfred Espinas, all of which Nietzsche also read. Given the past studies on the correspondences between Nietzsche’s and Pessoa’s private libraries, this is not surprising.<sup>22</sup> Nor are we surprised to find Pessoa’s name related with philosophical inquiries, since we know that he was interested in that field of study, and particularly, that he devoted himself to it during 1905-1906 and 1915-1916.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, between 1915 and 1916 Pessoa read George S. R. Mead’s *Quest Old and New*, first published in 1913. Mead was one of the main members of the Theosophical Society from 1884 to 1909. He worked as a translator, editor, and

<sup>22</sup> On this, see e.g. GAGO (2009: 135-154).

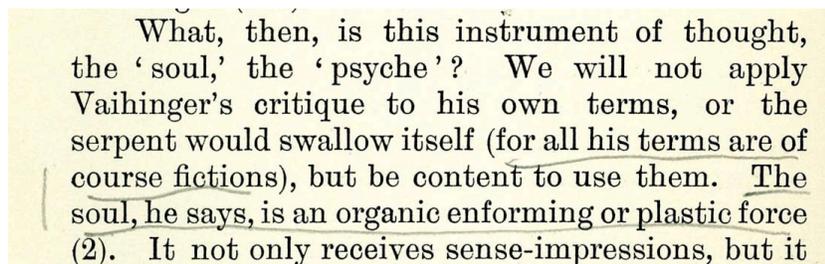
<sup>23</sup> The first publication of Pessoa’s philosophical writings (PESSOA, 1968) showed his interest in philosophical inquiries. Starting from that book, several scholars carried on studies on that topic, and other more complete editions of Pessoa’s philosophical writings are forthcoming.

historian and was particularly interested in the gnostic and hermetic drifts of ancient religions. In fact, a large part of his *Quests Old and New* is devoted to exactly that topic and the several underscores and reading marks that we find in Pessoa's personal copy of that book show us that he found Mead's investigations stimulating. But Pessoa's interest was not limited to Mead's dealing with ancient religions. Pessoa also deeply read the eleventh chapter of *Quests Old and New*, which is devoted to *Vaihinger's Philosophy of "As if."*

Once more, the reading marks that we find in Pessoa's personal copy of Mead's book are revealing. They show us that Pessoa was particularly intrigued by Mead's arguments that (a) we can consider the world of the sense alone to be real, all else being only a fiction (MEAD, 1913: 248; see Fig. 1); (b) the soul can be seen as an "organic enforming or plastic force" (MEAD, 1913: 254; see Fig. 2); and (c) according to Vaihinger, "the division into inner and outer is simply an expedient of the psyche," and "subject and object [...] is at best an artificial and not a real division" (MEAD, 1913: 260; see Fig. 3).



**Fig. 1. Fernando Pessoa House, call number 1-105**  
George Robert Stow Mead, *Quests Old and New*, 1913, p. 248. Detail.



**Fig. 2. Fernando Pessoa House, call number 1-105**  
George Robert Stow Mead, *Quests Old and New*, 1913, p. 254. Detail.

we shall see, on the philosophy of Vaihinger  
 would transcend subject and object. For Vaihinger  
 tells us, for instance, that the division into inner  
 and outer is simply an expedient of the psyche.  
 To treat the soul as if it had arisen out of the  
 contrary notions of two things—subject and object,  
 to make the distinction of material and spiritual  
 things, is at best an artificial and not a real  
 division(84). Moreover, however positive Vaihinger's  
 standpoint may be, it is idealistic and not material-

Fig. 3. Fernando Pessoa House, call number 1-105

George Robert Stow Mead, *Quests Old and New*, 1913, p. 260. Detail.

It is worth noting that Pessoa does more than underscore these passages of Mead's book. In the flyleaf at the end of his personal copy of *Quests Old and New* there are some marginalia that reveal Pessoa's particular interest in those topics (see fig. 4). This document consist of two pages of rough observations, which can hardly be interpreted either as mere notes to the chapter on *Vaihinger's Philosophy of "As if"*, or as the structure of a projected philosophical essay. Regardless, what is most interesting is the topic which Pessoa deals with in this flyleaf, that is, the rejection of the traditional contraposition between subject and object and of the view of consciousness as an objective phenomenon. Moreover, in stating the fictitious character and ontological inconsistency of notions such as "subject", "I" and "(self-) consciousness," Pessoa criticises the idea of a "pure subject" in a way that recalls Nietzsche's criticism towards the concept of "pure mind."<sup>24</sup> Given the importance of this document, we publish it here in its entirety accompanied by an English translation (see Fig. 7).<sup>25</sup>

Vaihinger: Porque não dizer que o mundo externo é uma  
 ficção para lidarmos com o mundo abstracto?

Assim como um objecto material pode ser ao  
 mesmo tempo, e com igual realidade o que  
 é exteriormente e no conjunto chimico e  
 physico *imperceptivel*, assim tambem uma  
 cousa pode ter côr e beleza com igual  
 "materialidade", exterioridade.

O sentimento do Eu? a /anticonsciencia?/ –  
 Depende de um sentido especial? Como?

O erro essencial é *attribuir objectividade á consciencia*.  
 Todos outros erros são filhos d'este – são, melhor, só  
 este. O erro é este, o erro em si.

Vaihinger: Why not say that the external world is a  
 fiction in order for us to deal with the abstract world?

Just as a material object can be at  
 the same time and with the same reality that which  
 is exterior and, together, chemically  
 and physically imperceptible; so also can a  
 thing have colour and beauty with the same  
 "materiality" or exteriority.

The feeling of the I? /anti-consciousness?/ –  
 It depends on a special meaning? Such as?

The essential error is to attribute objectivity to consciousness.  
 All other errors are inheritors of this, and this alone.  
 The error is this: the error itself.

<sup>24</sup> In a posthumous fragment also quoted by Vaihinger. See above, § 1.

<sup>25</sup> The document has been transcribed by Antonio Cardiello, Patricio Ferrari, and Jerónimo Pizarro. English translation by Bartholomew Ryan.

O infinito é uma ficção como o metro ou o gramma.<sup>26</sup>  
A sua attitude é principalmente mathematica.

Hypothese: Visto que *Sujeito Puro* é inexistente, só pode existir Sujeito não-puro, sujeito-objecto. Isto é, o sujeito é puro manifestar-se sem haver *quê* que se manifeste. Não *ha* consciencia; isto é, não ha consciencia-em si. *Ha só conscientes*.

Só quando a consciencia obedece á lei da pluralidade que é a 1ª lei da Realidade, só então a C[onsciencia], deixando de existir como consciencia, passa a existir como Realidade, passa a existir, *tout court*. Nos sentidos é que se */vive/*, só nos sentidos. Não ha sentido da Consciencia, mas só do eu consciente, só do erro sensual, só do *eu* enfim.

O erro é uma realidade limitada, ou, melhor, relativa. (?) – O erro-sonho, o erro-erro (e.g. 2 + 2 = 5 em qualquer irrealidade de *pensamento*<sup>27</sup>), o erro-ficção (e.g. infinito, gramma, metro)

Erro-sonho: confusão  
erro-erro = imperfeição de  
sentidos etc  
erro-ficção = □

O erro é sempre  
uma imperfeição;  
O *sonho*, de  
sentidos; o *erro*  
de pensamento<sup>28</sup>; a  
*ficção*, de vontade. (?)

Infinity is a fiction like the metre or the gramma.  
Its attitude is principally mathematics.

Hypothesis: Since the Pure Subject is non-existent, then the non-pure Subject can only exist, as subject-object. That is, the subject is pure, manifested without having that which is manifested. There is no such thing as consciousness; that is, there is no such thing as consciousness itself. There are only the conscious.

Only when consciousness obeys the law of plurality which is the 1st Law of Reality, then C[onsciencia]ness [5] ceases to exist as consciousness, it comes to exist as Reality, it comes into being, *tout court*. It is through the senses that one/ lives/, through the senses alone. There is no meaning of Consciousness, but only of the conscious I, only of the sensual error, only of the I itself.

The error is a limited reality, or, rather, it is relative. (?) - The dream-error, the error-error (e.g. 2 + 2 = 5 in any unreality of thought), the fiction-error (e.g. infinity, gramma, metre)

Dream-error: confusion  
error-error = imperfection  
of meanings, etc.  
fiction-error = □

The error is always  
An imperfection;  
The *dream*, of  
meaning; *the error*  
of thought;  
the *fiction*, of will. (?)

This document clearly shows that Pessoa's reading of *Quests Old and New* led him to strongly criticise a view of the subject as a substance, as an *individuum*, and this allows us to argue that he developed a fictionalist view of psychology. Indeed, in Pessoa's observations we find the fundamental elements of the point of view that we sketched in sections 1 and 2. As stated above, Pessoa claims that "the Pure-Subject is non-existent," and argues that "the non-pure subject can only exist, as subject-object." That is, Pessoa rejects the idea of a subject *in itself*, absolute, completely isolated. Rather, the only subject we can talk about is a subject that *we know*, and therefore something that rises from a relationship and a creative process – the process of knowing. In that sense, according to Pessoa, the subject is an object. Furthermore, Pessoa criticises as an "error" the idea of "attribut[ing] objectivity to consciousness". In his view, "there is no such thing as consciousness, [...] as consciousness in itself," but "there are only the conscious." Thus, in agreement with some neo-Kantian positions that we also find in Vaihinger and Nietzsche, Pessoa conceives of consciousness as *a process* instead of as a substantive concept.

<sup>26</sup> <kilogr> [↑ gramma].

<sup>27</sup> [↑ em qualquer irrealidade de *pensamento*]

<sup>28</sup> atenção [↑ pensamento]

We can find these psychological views developed in other philosophical fragments that Pessoa wrote between 1913 and 1916 and that testify his attempts to gain self-knowledge. Among these writings, we find a text that would have been an integration of the philosophical novel *O Eremita da Serra Negra*, signed by the fictitious writer Pero Botelho. Botelho worked between 1912 and 1913, and foreran the age of *sensacionismo* and the attempts to take the dissolution of the subject as an aesthetic and philosophic ground, something that Pessoa developed in 1914 with Campos and the first orthonym statements.

O sujeito ao ser pensado como sujeito é objecto...

O<sup>29</sup> não-ser para ser não-ser precisa *ser*, isto é, ter ser; isto é abstracto mas o argumento agora versa abstracções.<sup>30</sup> Metaphysicamente, a inversa é igualmente certa. O ser para ser não-ser precisa não-ser.

Isto vem tudo de que não-ser e ser são para nós *idéas*; nunca os podemos considerar absolutamente. Estão por isso sempre desmentindo-nos. Não são senão *pensados*. Ha sempre mesmo abysmo entre elles e a nossa idéa<sup>31</sup> d'elles. [...] O unico noumenon é o pensamento em si. [...] O p[ensamento] deixa de ser em-si por ter objecto. A philosophia que é o pensamento reflexo, é acto divino regresso do mundo a Deus, pela consciencia da illusão<sup>32</sup> (ou é a *causa* d'este sujeito a illusão d'elle, a *fé* que d'elle nasce). [...] o Universo não existe. O que existe não sabemos. O U[niverso] com as suas obras, o □ nem sequer é uma illusão. O sujeito puro é impensavel. As maiores abstracções — ser ou não-ser — são ellas proprias contradictorias e *Objecto*.

(BNP/E3, 22-33 a 35; cf. PESSOA, 1968: 46-48)

In this excerpt, Pessoa already criticises the idea of a “pure subject,” and states that both “self” and “not-self” are *abstractions*. Moreover, Pessoa argues that self and not-self are mutually fundamental. In fact, as we read in the second line of the quoted note, “o não-ser para ser não-ser precisa *ser*.” This claim leads to a non-metaphysical view of the objectivity of the subject, to the idea that insofar as we think of a subject, *we make an object out of it*. What is particularly interesting for our present investigation is Pessoa’s focus on his own inner space. This attempt to gain a self-knowledge that accompanies the growth and development of his poetic and thinking activity – both from an aesthetic and a psychological point of view – is characterized by a view of the “I” as a non-substance concept.

We find a first draft reflection on a psychic entity external to consciousness in the early poem *Abdicação* (1910), but only in two excerpts from 1914 can we see the seeds of the following works. In these fragments Pessoa outlines a kind of individuality, or subject, which lays in the indefinite space between transcendence

<sup>29</sup> <Se> <o>/O\

<sup>30</sup> isto é <abstracto> [↑ abstracto mas o argumento agora versa abstracções.]

<sup>31</sup> a [← nossa] idéa

<sup>32</sup> /acto divino regresso do mundo a Deus, pela consciencia da illusão/

and immanence. This subject is therefore split between these two existential realms, and we cannot find it given the impermanency and indefiniteness of the place that hosts it. But that place is not unconscious. It is, rather, an extension of the consciousness, a kind of *hyper*-consciousness that bears the weight of that *other* which is this extended consciousness itself.

Ficarei o Inferno de ser Eu, a Limitação Absoluta, Expulsão-Ser do Universo longinquo!  
Ficarei nem Deus, nem homem, nem mundo, mero vacuo-pessoa, infinito de Nada  
consciente, pavor sem nome, exilado do proprio mysterio, da propria Vida. Habitarei  
eternamente o deserto morto de mim, erro abstracto da criação que me deixou atraz.  
Arderá em mim eternamente, inutilmente, a ansia esteril do regresso a ser.

Não poderei sentir porque não terei materia com que sinta, não poderei espirar alegria, ou  
odio, ou horror, porque não tenho nem a faculdade com que o sinta<sup>33</sup>, consciencia abstracta  
no inferno do não conter nada, Não-Conteúdo Absoluto, Suffocação absoluta e eterna!

(BNP/E3, 20-47; cf. PESSOA, 1966: 60)

Não sei quem sou, que alma tenho.

Quando fallo com sinceridade não sei com que sinceridade fallo. Sou variamente<sup>34</sup> outro do  
que um eu que não sei se existe, (se é esses outros).

Sinto crenças que não tenho. Enlevam-me ancias que repudio. A minha perpetua atenção  
sobre mim perpetuamente me aponta traições de alma a um carater que talvez eu não  
tenha, nem ella julga que eu tenho.

Sinto-me multiplo. Sou como um quarto com inumeros espelhos fantasticos que torcem  
para reflexões falsas uma unica anterior realidade que não está em nenhuma e está em  
todas.

Como o pantheista se sente onda e astro e e flôr, eu sinto-me varios seres. Sinto-me viver  
vidas alheias, em mim, incompletamente, como se o meu ser participasse de todos os  
homens, incompletamente de cada, individuado por uma suma de não-eus synthetizados  
num eu postiço<sup>35</sup>.

(BNP/E3, 20-67; cf. PESSOA, 2003: 151)

In these excerpts, with a negative rhetoric which is peculiar to him, Pessoa argues that, in order to find the “true” self,<sup>36</sup> one has to recognize and finally accept that his own subjectivity is far from being the origin of his psychic activity, or, least of all, the substantial reference of his self-knowledge. Similar to Nietzsche, in Pessoa we find the idea that the contraposition between “self” and “other” is *internal* to the subject, and we can thus talk – using an oxymoron – of a *plural*

<sup>33</sup> [↑ porque não tenho nem a faculdade com que o sinta]

<sup>34</sup> Sou <outro> variamente

<sup>35</sup> eu <postiço> postiço

<sup>36</sup> The “self” Pessoa talks about, here, is not the one of common sense psychology, the egoistic one that hypostatize himself or the individual that, from time to time, he inhabits. It is not a substance self, but a dynamic and impermanent one.

*individuality*. Due to this plurality, the subject cannot look at itself and find something fixed, nor even becoming that something fixed. On the contrary, in this game between the identical and the different, the independency of these two poles is preserved, and they give birth to an endless and ever-changing dynamic. Thus, the subject, the individual, looks at itself as a totality, as “mais diverso do que o universo espontaneo” (PESSOA, 2014: 176).

In order to make this view of the self possible, Pessoa develops a poetics grounded on the epistemic value of intuitive feeling and knowing, a poetics that never restricts itself to a single voice, but looks for a chorus, a multiplicity of voices which are harmoniously related and generate a *dynamic singularity*. Moreover, his poetics is grounded on an equilibrium between the many sides of the Self, and stresses that anytime someone faces his own Self, he finds himself as different from the image he has of it. Pessoa’s attempt to approach something which is different from the knowing subject and cannot be reduced to an inert substance, along with his arguing that anything which is not internally plural is only an illusion, had noticeable effects on his later work. Two fragments written between 1914 and 1916, attributable to Pero Botelho and Raphael Baldaya, are particularly interesting for this topic:

Mas momentos tenho em que carnalmente sou idealista.

Ante as cousas quedo-me1 □; vejo-as sem comprehender que as estou vendo, e do que é estar vendo.

Á tona carnal da minha alma sobe<sup>37</sup> o mysterio das cousas. Vejo, ouço, tacteio<sup>38</sup> alheiadamente ao que em mim vê, ouve e toca.

Separei-me de mim de repente. Olho, de mim e de longe, as minhas sensações e ellas parecem, além de como que visiveis, pertencentes a outro, movendo-se em mim por obscenidade e por grandeza

(PESSOA, 2013a: 352)

Tudo é illusão.

A illusão do pensamento, a do sentimento, a da vontade. Tudo é criação, e toda a criação é illusão.

Crear é mentir.

(BNP/E3, 22-32r; cf. PESSOA 1968: 44)

The opening statement “tudo é illusão” [everything is illusion], from the philosophical fragment *O Desconhecido*, leads us back to Vaihinger and his fictionalist reading of Nietzsche. In *The Philosophy of “As if,”* Vaihinger states the purely fictive character of notions such as “point,” “surface,” “infinite,” “matter,” and “thing in itself”: these are all fictions to us, since we cannot attribute them a real existence, but rather, we use them as mere tools for our world-orientation and

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<sup>37</sup> /sobe/

<sup>38</sup> /tacteio/

world-description, *as-if* they have an actual place in the world. According to Vaihinger, our practical life is grounded on a conventional belief, according to which we conceive a mere product of our intellect as if it were real. Thus, the relationship between the testimony of our senses – the “apparent” world, the *only* world that we can know – and the realm of fictions, acquires quite a new meaning. St stake here, is how to conceive the traditional concept of “truth.” According to Vaihinger, what we call “truth” is only a collection of necessary errors, without which we could not will, act, and judge – in a word: live. In agreement with Vaihinger, António Mora outlines the principles of his own aesthetics:

Vivemos de ficções porém não ficticiamente. Fora de nós apprehendemos uma realidade exterior e um destino imutavel, nem justo nem injusto, alheio assim ao<sup>39</sup> bem como ao mal, que nos rege a nós e a ella. Tudo mais fingimol-o ou sonhamol-o, é sonho consciente ou inconsciente. Fingimos e sonhamos para poder viver. Assim como não comemos nós a mor parte dos alimentos, assim tambem não vemos sem disfarce a mor parte do que chamamos factos. [...] Não é sonho a vida: é-o, porém, toda interpretação da vida. [...] Ficção da intelligencia: creamos ficções puras, “força”, “matéria”, □ – cousas que nada são, nada representam, a nada<sup>40</sup> correspondem: o materialismo e o idealismo, irmãos-gemeos, diferentes apenas por não serem um só<sup>41</sup>. Força, materia, actos, tudo é ficção, e da ficção mais ficticia que pode haver, a ficção do abstracto que se julga correcto. [...] Vivemos pelos sentidos, convivemos<sup>42</sup> pela intelligencia. Assim, pois, desligada dos sentidos, sendo que existe apenas para servil-os, a intelligencia opera no vacuo, é no vacuo de conhecer que<sup>43</sup> convivemos e que nos entendemos uns aos outros. A vida social é uma ficção.

(BNP/E3, 12<sup>1</sup>-94 e 95<sup>r</sup>; cf. PESSOA, 2013b: 170-172)

Moreover, after having described three kinds of fiction – religious and metaphysical, moral, and aesthetic – Pessoa concludes: “Servem as primeiras<sup>44</sup> de guiar-nos nas nossas relações universais; as segundas nas nossas relações sociais; as ultimas<sup>45</sup> nas nossas relações com nós-proprios” (BNP/E3, 12<sup>1</sup>-96<sup>r</sup>; PESSOA, 2013b: 172).

Fictions are unreal, but they cannot identify the fictive character of the world in itself. Rather, they suggest that the world is moulded in a fictional drama. Thus, the reference to fictions as principle elements of that theatre that is our world, leads to the idea of poetry and writing as a philosophical method.

Another consequence of this way of reasoning relates to the useful value that pertains to maintaining beliefs and theories of various sorts. In that context,

<sup>39</sup> alheio [↑assim] ao

<sup>40</sup> [↑a] nada

<sup>41</sup> em [↑por] não serem o mesmo [↑ serem um só]

<sup>42</sup> sentidos, <convivemos> convivemos

<sup>43</sup> vacuo [↑ de conhecer] que

<sup>44</sup> [↑ Servem] As primeiras <servem>

<sup>45</sup> as <terce> ultimas

the notion of truth is only a tool, whose truthfulness follows from its usefulness. Pessoa, also conceives of the truth as a tool. For him, she is in fact a symbol, she refers to something else. But there is no fixed reference, actually, and the truth only leads us to a view of knowledge as an everlasting process. In a fragment that should have been included in the preface of *Ficções de Interlúdio*, Pessoa shows us the method he thinks we can follow once we give up the traditional concept of truth as a “universally valid and binding designation of things” (to use Nietzsche’s words from *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-moral Sense*):

Negada a verdade, não temos com que entreter-nos senão a mentira. Com ella nos entretenhamos, dando-a porém como tal, que não como verdade; se uma hypothese metaphysica nos occorre, façamos com ella, não a mentira de um systema (onde possa ser verdade) mas a verdade de um poema ou de uma novella - verdade em saber que é mentira, e assim não mentir.

(BNP/E3, 28-22; cf. LOPES, 1990: II, 114)

In this excerpt, Pessoa argues that truth and lies are both fictions. The subject of this judgement is the pretending artist, who sees the fictions as devices that make our relationship with the world possible and let us inhabit it and communicate with other people – given that, in art “honest” communication is not possible. Moreover, the context of this discourse is the generation of heteronyms. As is well-known, in Pessoa, heteronym is much more than a mere literary fiction and it cannot be reduced to a mere aesthetic resource. For him, heteronym puts the very notion of subject in question and looks at the dynamic, non-substantial conception of the self as a providing better access to our inner side, both from a psychological and an epistemic point of view. Moreover, heteronym leads to a new view of fiction itself: as for Pessoa, any product of our thought, and above all, the heteronyms, are real fictions (where “real” is assumed in the sense of the reality that Pessoa attributes to his heteronyms) that acquire a truth-value from their own existence as a field of thought.

In other words, Pessoa thinks that to pretend does not mean to leave the realm of truth, that is, the hypothetical individual identity of our personal existence. When we pretend, we enter a realm where our activity generates what we call “truth.” In that realm, honesty is the place where we are always absent and the name of the heteronym that, time-after-time is regarded as someone other than the actual writer, is a symbol for that place. From that point of view, “truth” is subordinate to the moral commitment according to which any thought must be seen as a fiction, that is, as regarding only a limited *field of truth*.

With all this in mind, Pessoa, pretending to be who he actually was, invites us to feel everything in every way in order to manage the multiple characters of the subject by incorporating what we perceive as other than us. Once we understand that it is not possible to give up the fictions, Pessoa not only stresses

the creative character of life, but also asks us to choose a life that cannot be chosen. In fact, as António Mora remarks, “força é que finjamos esse destino, para nos guiarmos na vida” (BNP/E3, 12<sup>1</sup>-94<sup>v</sup>; PESSOA, 2013b: 171).

## 5. Conclusions

Our investigation of Nietzsche’s and Pessoa’s views of the subject led to several outcomes. First of all, as argued above, we can argue that both authors defend a psychological fictionalism, that is, they both consider psychological entities such as subject, I, *ego*, or soul as mere creations of thought whose metaphysical objectivity must be rejected. Their views agree with some inquiries from the late nineteenth century, inquiries that developed Kant’s psychological investigation in a purely scientific way. We can properly talk about a “fictionalist” view and attribute it to both Nietzsche and Pessoa, for the latter had an indirect knowledge of Vaihinger’s “system of the theoretical, practical and religious fictions of mankind,” while Nietzsche – the “*Kantian Nietzsche*” – is a primary reference of Vaihinger himself. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this fictionalist psychology is only the starting point of both Nietzsche’s and Pessoa’s work. Both of them developed some original philosophical reflections and, for Pessoa, an original poetics, on the ground of their criticism towards the traditional substance-subject distinction. Thus, they both prove to have been capable of growing the seeds of an epistemological debate that has been often criticized as less philosophically relevant.

The second outcome pertains to Pessoa-studies and follows from what we have just stated. The document found in the back flyleaf and back inside cover of Mead’s book is one more testimony of the deeply philosophical content of Pessoa’s literary production. Moreover, those marginalia prove that Pessoa’s philosophical observations are not just scattered thoughts, mere intuitions on philosophically relevant topics. On the contrary, these thoughts arise from Pessoa’s interest in a rich and wide debate that was particularly fertile between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth-century.

Finally, the correspondence between Nietzsche’s and Pessoa’s views of the subject is of recent interest for several scholars. Our research shows that this correspondence can be explained by making reference to the cultural context of these two authors, to the debate they both made reference to. Thus, there is no need for thinking that Pessoa could have read (directly or indirectly) some of Nietzsche’s statements on that particular topic. On the contrary – and this is our argument – Pessoa sometimes just reflects on basic assumptions or on some main outcomes of the scientific and philosophical investigations of his time, investigations that developed the debate that interested Nietzsche and that also strongly influenced his thought.

This last outcome leads to a final methodological conclusion. Insofar as we can shed light on Pessoa's literary and poetic production by making reference to some of the texts he read, and on the content of which he deeply reflected (but scarcely mentions, also in his manuscripts), an investigation of the sources of Pessoa's work is therefore of primary importance. Moreover, Pessoa-studies could be inspired from of European Nietzsche-studies and try to focus on what Mazzino Montinari (the "father" of the critical edition of Nietzsche's writings) called the "extra-text."<sup>46</sup> With this expression Montinari points to what lays beyond the text but is nevertheless deeply involved in the genesis of the text itself (e.g. a book or an ongoing debate). According to Montinari, most of the time this "extra-text" is "more relevant than what we read in the text itself," since the meaning of the text, its real content, its significance, lays in what the author left unexpressed. The present research is an example of this kind of investigation. From a name that appears in a marginal text, we can draw out the picture of a wide network, which lays unexpressed under the surface of Pessoa's published texts. That network connects Pessoa to many other authors, some of whom are related to him in surprising ways, and gives meaning to his statements and aesthetic choices. In doing this, we can appreciate the richness of Pessoa's literary production, the intensity of his view of the world, and the deepness of his reflections on the crisis of modernity even more.

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<sup>46</sup> See on this CAMPIONI (1999: 202).

## Annex – Documents

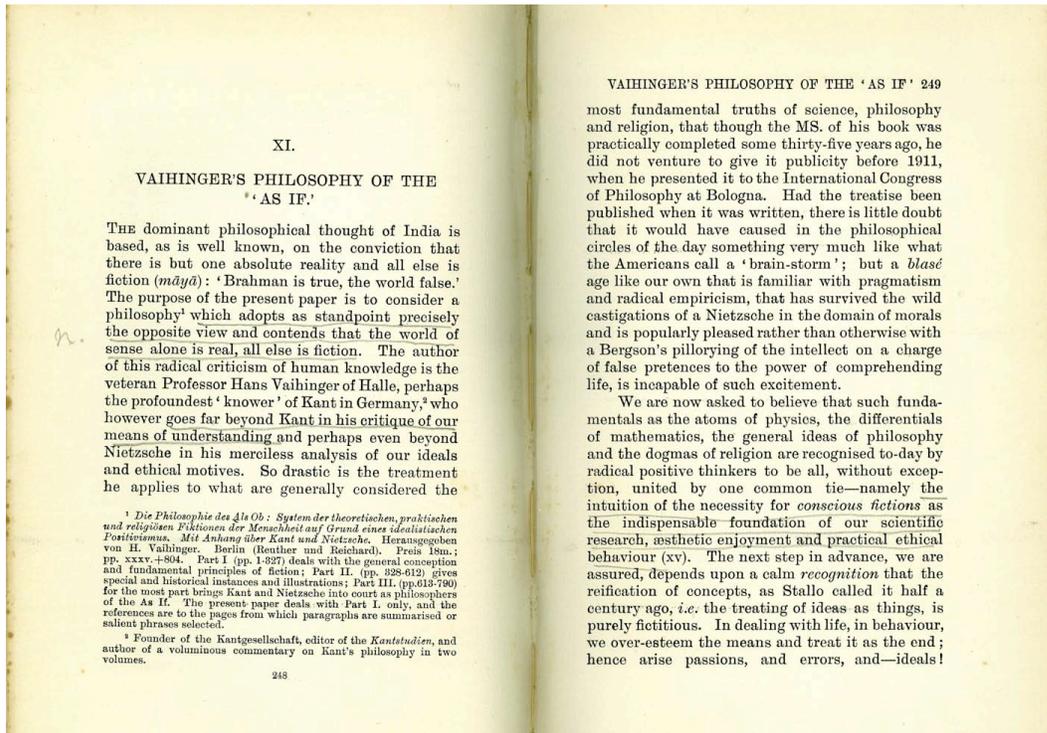


Fig. 4. Fernando Pessoa House, call number 1-105  
George Robert Stow Mead, *Quests Old and New*, 1913, pp. 248-249.

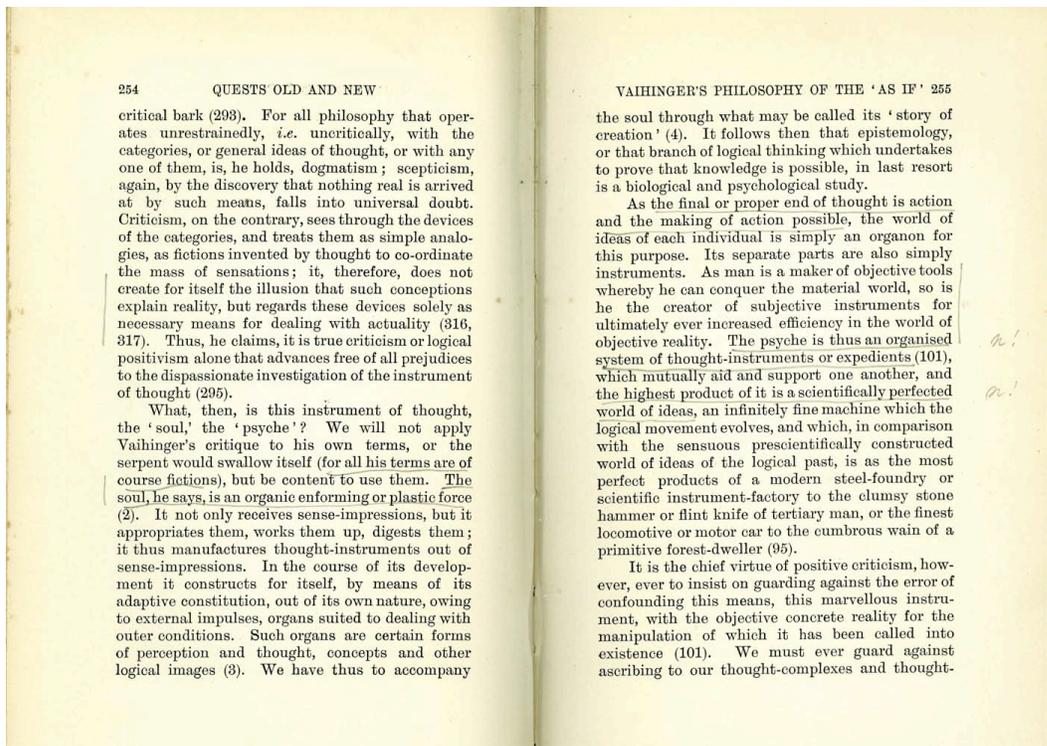


Fig. 5. Fernando Pessoa House, call number 1-105  
George Robert Stow Mead, *Quests Old and New*, 1913, pp. 254-255.

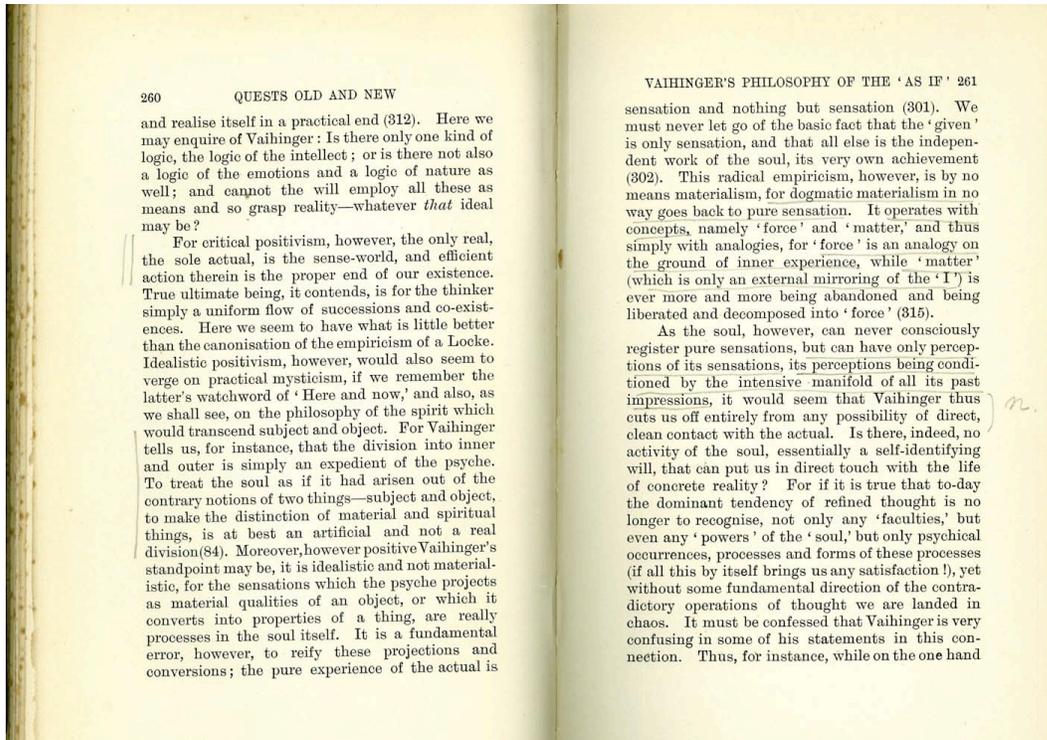


Fig. 6. Fernando Pessoa House, call number 1-105  
George Robert Stow Mead, *Quests Old and New*, 1913, pp. 260-261.

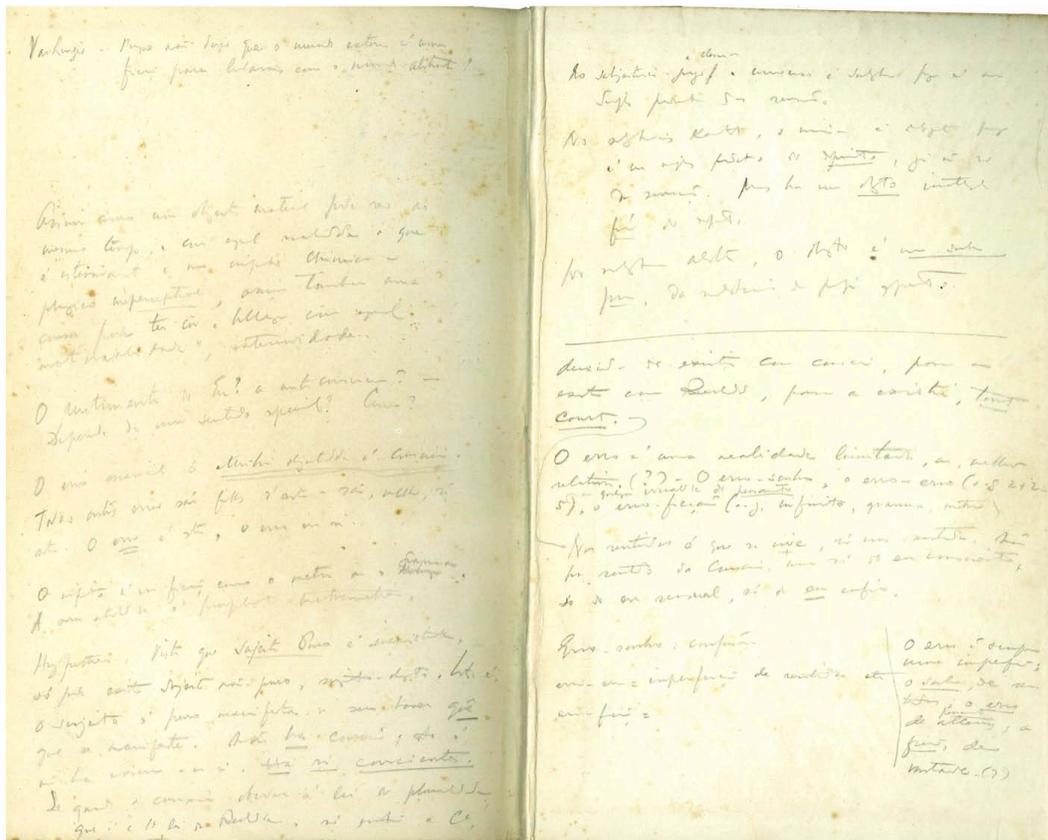


Fig. 7. Fernando Pessoa House, call number 1-105  
George Robert Stow Mead, *Quests Old and New*, 1913, back flyleaf and back inside cover.

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