

Fernando Pessoa

## CHANGE

### CHANGE

All things changing, says Heraclitus, no knowledge is possible.

My answer is that, all things changing, myself change with them, and so am in a relative stability. Subject and object changing perpetually are stable one in relation to the other.

The world is only in perpetual change when contrasted to something immutable. What is this thing which does not change? Descartes will hope to answer with: «It is myself, as a thinking subject.»

I believe that Descartes was in this nearly right. I believe that he is wrong in placing the principle of stability in an <ego> changeable and sensible thing. It seems rather to me that the principle of unchange is not myself as a thinking subject not even my thought, but thought, pure reason, inconditioned and absolute.

\*

I do not agree that by *pensée* Descartes means consciousness. I believe that he means, as he says, thought. «*Res cogitans*»<Pzes\_cogitans>, such is man, he says, a thinking thing. What he means I believe to be this: I in all my life must think of something. Even in hours of laziness I think, I ruminate, I dream — all that I stand for is in my thought.

One reason why Descartes should not mean consciousness by *pensée* is that famous passage where he says that his reason for saying that the soul thinks (*pensée*) always is the same as urges (makes) him to believe that light shines always although no eyes look upon it. If by *pensée* he means consciousness, how can he speak of it as unconscious? On the other hand unconscious thought is conceivable. It is, at least, more conceivable nowadays (in the sense of reasoning) than it was then. However it may be unconscious thought, even in that time, though obscure may be conceived. But unconscious consciousness, being a contradiction in terms, is entirely inconceivable.

For the rest I have no doubt whatever that Descartes often meant consciousness by *pensée*. But the confusion was natural, Descartes being an intellectualist [...] of an intellectual nature.

Again, the expression *res cogitans* the thing that we think always is most proper to Descartes, as man. [...]

It is true that Descartes has no strong sense of what conscious is, in the metaphysical sense he mixes it with thought. There is in Descartes the germ of the theory of the epiphenomenon. The only thing he required to be proved to such a conclusion is that which he had not, and could not then have meant, the knowledge of the relationship of men and of beast, the theory of evolution. [?]

1911?

**Textos Filosóficos** . Vol. I. Fernando Pessoa. (Estabelecidos e prefaciados por António de Pina Coelho.) Lisboa: Ática, 1968 (imp. 1993): 113.