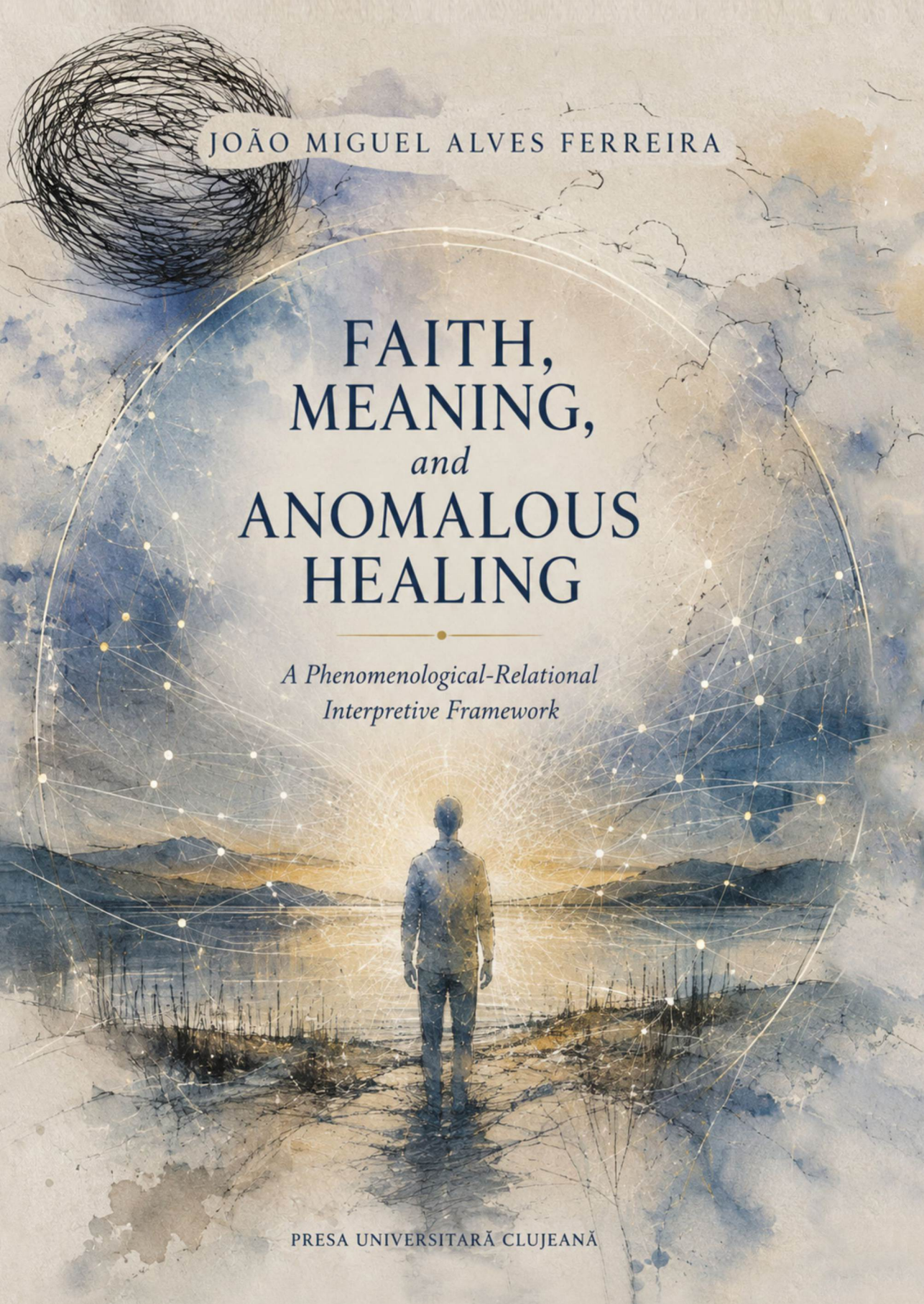




JOÃO MIGUEL ALVES FERREIRA

FAITH, MEANING, *and* ANOMALOUS HEALING

*A Phenomenological-Relational
Interpretive Framework*

PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ

“ *A thoughtful and intellectually ambitious contribution to centemporary discussions on consciousness, healing, spirituality, and meaning.* ”

Josefa Ros Velasco, Madrid,
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

“ *This volume advocates for a more humane and integrative understanding of the healing process and, in today's world, I find it of utmost importance.* ”

Irina Frasin, Iași

Faith, Meaning, and Anomalous Healing offers a pioneering phenomenological-relational interpretive framework that explores the profound interplay between faith, meaning-making, and anomalous healing experiences.

Drawing from philosophy, psychology, theology, and empirical research, this work bridges scientific inquiry and lived experience, illuminating how transformative healing events challenge conventional paradigms and invite a deeper understanding of human potential.

This book is an invitation (to scholars, clinicians, and seekers alike) to dialogue across disciplines and worldviews in pursuit of a more integrative, compassionate, and meaningful understanding of healing.



João Miguel Alves Ferreira

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2026

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Abstract

Reports of healing associated with faith, contemplative practice, prayer, ritual, and interpersonal intention persist across cultures and continue to challenge purely reductionist interpretations. Responses to such phenomena are often polarised between dismissal as artefact and affirmation as proof of supernatural or contested causal interpretation. This monograph proposes a phenomenological-relational interpretive framework for anomalous healing reports. Faith is conceptualised not as magical belief, but as a lived configuration characterised by intentional alignment, existential surrender, affective trust, and perceived embeddedness within a wider field of meaning. Such states may influence healing through interacting pathways including expectancy, psychoneuroimmunology, autonomic regulation, behavioural transformation, relational support, and altered self-processing. The work further examines whether concepts derived from Weak Quantum Theory and generalised entanglement may be used cautiously as heuristic vocabularies for contextuality and relational non-separability in complex human systems, rather than as established physical mechanisms. Drawing on neuroscience, contemplative science, anomalistic psychology, phenomenology, and medical humanities, the monograph argues that anomalous healing reports deserve neither credulous acceptance nor reflexive dismissal, but disciplined interdisciplinary interpretation. The framework remains provisional, empirically revisable, and open to multiple ontological readings.

Keywords: *faith, healing, phenomenology, anomalistic psychology, placebo, contemplative neuroscience, meaning response, relationality, generalized entanglement, spirituality.*

Acknowledgements

This work emerged gradually across years of reflection situated at the intersection of neuroscience, philosophy of mind, contemplative studies, anomalistic psychology, spirituality, and the enduring human confrontation with suffering, healing, and meaning. Although the arguments developed throughout this monograph remain provisional and exploratory, the intellectual journey behind them has been shaped by numerous thinkers, traditions, conversations, and existential encounters that deserve acknowledgment.

First and foremost, I wish to express deep gratitude to the many scholars whose work made this interdisciplinary exploration possible. In particular, I am indebted to the pioneering contributions of Harald Walach, Harald Atmanspacher, Walter von Lucadou, and colleagues for developing Weak Quantum Theory and the concept of Generalised Entanglement, which provided an important conceptual stimulus for several interpretive dimensions explored in this book. Whether future developments ultimately support, modify, or reject these frameworks, their intellectual courage in attempting to address unresolved questions concerning consciousness, relationality, and healing deserves serious recognition.

I am equally indebted to the broader traditions of phenomenology and neurophenomenology. The works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Shaun Gallagher profoundly shaped the conviction that first-person experience cannot be reduced without remainder to third-person description. Their influence permeates the entire orientation of this monograph.

The philosophical spirit of William James has also accompanied this work from beginning to end. His radical empiricism, intellectual humility, and refusal to dismiss difficult human experiences prematurely remain exemplary models for any inquiry attempting to navigate the uncertain boundary between scientific rigor and existential openness.

I also wish to acknowledge the fields of contemplative science, psychoneuro-immunology, affective neuroscience, placebo research, and medical humanities, whose cumulative findings increasingly reveal the profound entanglement of meaning, embodiment, expectation, emotion, sociality, and physiology. Even where this

monograph ventures beyond current consensus, it does so while recognising the indispensable contributions of these established scientific domains.

Special gratitude is owed to clinicians, researchers, contemplative practitioners, patients, and individuals whose reports of healing, surrender, transformation, and existential crisis continue to challenge simplistic models of human experience. Regardless of one's metaphysical commitments, such experiences demand careful listening rather than reflexive dismissal.

This work was also shaped indirectly by many conversations occurring across disciplines often separated by institutional boundaries: neuroscience and theology, psychiatry and philosophy, medicine and spirituality, skepticism and mysticism. The tensions between these worlds are not obstacles to understanding but conditions for deeper inquiry.

I further acknowledge the importance of scientific criticism and skeptical scholarship. Thinkers such as Ray Hyman, James Alcock, Mario Bunge, Massimo Pigliucci, and many others have articulated essential warnings concerning methodological rigor, epistemic overreach, category errors, and the misuse of scientific language. Their critiques are not enemies of inquiry but necessary safeguards against intellectual self-deception. Any responsible exploration of controversial phenomena must remain accountable to such criticism.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the existential dimension underlying this project. Questions concerning faith, healing, suffering, interconnectedness, and consciousness are never purely abstract. They emerge from the human condition itself: vulnerability, mortality, uncertainty, longing for meaning, and encounters with experiences that exceed ordinary explanatory frameworks. Whatever the ultimate validity or limitations of the ideas explored in this monograph, the deeper motivation has always been the search for a more humane, integrative, and intellectually honest understanding of mind, embodiment, and healing.

Any errors, conceptual limitations, speculative excesses, or interpretive shortcomings remain entirely my own responsibility.

Foreword

Across the modern scientific era, few subjects have generated as much fascination, controversy, skepticism, and existential significance as the relationship between consciousness, healing, spirituality, and anomalous human experience. Reports of extraordinary recovery, contemplative transformation, distant intentional influence, mystical states, and profound experiences of interconnectedness continue to emerge across cultures despite the extraordinary explanatory successes of contemporary biomedical science. Yet such reports often occupy an uneasy intellectual territory: too persistent to disappear entirely, too controversial to be assimilated comfortably into prevailing explanatory models.

The present monograph enters precisely this difficult territory.

Importantly, this work should not be read as a rejection of modern neuroscience, medicine, or evidence-based science. On the contrary, one of its central strengths lies in recognising the immense achievements of reductionist methodologies while simultaneously asking whether certain dimensions of lived experience may require broader interpretive vocabularies capable of integrating phenomenology, embodiment, relationality, contemplative practice, and meaning.

The book's central proposal (namely that faith may be understood phenomenologically as a relational experiential configuration involving intentional alignment, existential surrender, and perceived interconnectedness) constitutes an ambitious attempt to move beyond simplistic oppositions between materialism and supernaturalism. Rather than presenting faith as magical belief or theological dogma, the author explores whether certain faith-related states may function as psychologically, biologically, socially, and perhaps relationally significant configurations within complex healing contexts.

Particularly notable is the manuscript's sustained effort toward epistemic caution. The author repeatedly distinguishes heuristic analogy from empirical demonstration and avoids many of the stronger metaphysical claims often associated with speculative consciousness literature. Concepts derived from Weak Quantum Theory and Generalised Entanglement are employed not as established physical explanations, but as exploratory conceptual tools intended to model contextuality, complementarity, and relational non-separability across experiential systems.

Whether readers ultimately agree with these proposals or remain skeptical of them, the work raises questions that deserve serious interdisciplinary engagement. How should science approach anomalous but persistent human reports? What role do meaning, ritual, surrender, expectation, and existential orientation play in healing? Can first-person experience be fully integrated into scientific accounts of consciousness without reduction or mystification? What conceptual resources are required when current explanatory models appear incomplete?

These questions are not merely theoretical. They bear directly upon medicine, psychiatry, spirituality, contemplative practice, public health, philosophy of mind, and the future direction of consciousness studies itself.

The present work belongs to an emerging intellectual movement attempting to reopen dialogue between domains that modernity often separated too sharply: science and spirituality, phenomenology and physiology, subjective meaning and objective measurement. Such dialogue is necessarily difficult and carries substantial risks of both credulity and premature dismissal. Yet intellectual progress has often depended precisely upon the willingness to explore uncertain conceptual frontiers while remaining accountable to rigorous criticism.

Readers approaching this monograph should therefore do so in the spirit in which it was written: neither as a definitive theory of anomalous healing nor as an endorsement of uncritical post-materialism, but as an exploratory interdisciplinary investigation seeking a more adequate language for complex dimensions of human experience that continue to resist easy categorisation.

At its best, this work is less an attempt to provide final answers than an invitation to sustained inquiry.

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Scientific Reviews

Scientific Review by Prof. Dr. Josefa Ros Velasco

THE THEME ISSUED BY THE AUTHOR

This monograph addresses one of the most challenging and interdisciplinary topics in contemporary consciousness studies: the relationship between faith, meaning, healing, and anomalous human experiences. Drawing on philosophy of mind, phenomenology, neuroscience, psychoneuroimmunology, contemplative studies, and theories of generalized entanglement, the author develops an innovative interpretive framework for understanding reports of faith-related healing phenomena.

The work seeks to move beyond simplistic oppositions between materialist reductionism and supernatural explanations by proposing a phenomenological-relational model in which faith is understood as a complex experiential configuration involving intentional alignment, existential surrender, and perceived interconnectedness. The manuscript offers a broad historical, theoretical, and methodological exploration of these issues while maintaining a commitment to interdisciplinary dialogue and scientific reflection.

DISTINGUISHED ASPECTS/ SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION

The principal merit of this work lies in its ambitious interdisciplinary synthesis. The author successfully integrates literature from neuroscience, psychology, phenomenology, consciousness studies, spirituality research, and medical humanities into a coherent conceptual framework.

Particularly noteworthy is the effort to reinterpret concepts derived from Weak Quantum Theory and Generalized Entanglement as heuristic and phenomenological tools rather than as direct physical explanations. This careful positioning allows the author to engage with controversial topics while maintaining an explicitly exploratory and epistemically cautious stance.

The monograph also makes an original contribution by conceptualizing faith as an active relational operator characterized by intentional alignment, existential surrender, and ontological commitment to interconnectedness. This framework generates novel theoretical perspectives and opens potentially fruitful avenues for future empirical and interdisciplinary research.

The work further contributes to ongoing discussions concerning the limits of reductionist explanations in consciousness and healing research and encourages constructive dialogue between scientific, philosophical, and contemplative traditions.

METHODOLOGY/MODELS USED BY THE AUTHOR

The author employs an interdisciplinary theoretical methodology combining conceptual analysis, phenomenological interpretation, historical reconstruction, critical literature review, and comparative theoretical evaluation.

The manuscript systematically examines relevant contributions from neuroscience, psychoneuroimmunology, placebo research, contemplative science, anomalistic psychology, philosophy of mind, and consciousness studies. It also develops a structured conceptual model that integrates phenomenological insights with broader relational and systems-oriented perspectives.

The work demonstrates methodological awareness by explicitly discussing the limitations of existing evidence, replication challenges, alternative explanations, and the provisional character of its theoretical proposals. The inclusion of methodological recommendations and future research protocols further strengthens the scientific value of the monograph.

BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES

The bibliography is extensive, relevant, and appropriate to the interdisciplinary scope of the work. The author demonstrates familiarity with both classical and contemporary literature across multiple fields, including philosophy of consciousness, phenomenology, neuroscience, spirituality studies, anomalistic psychology, and healing research.

References are generally well selected and support the theoretical arguments presented throughout the manuscript.

The bibliography reflects a balanced engagement with both supportive and critical perspectives, contributing to the overall scholarly rigor of the work.

I consider the reviewed material to be original.

OTHER COMMENTS/ COMMENTS

The manuscript represents a thoughtful and intellectually ambitious contribution to contemporary discussions on consciousness, healing, spirituality, and meaning. Its interdisciplinary scope, conceptual originality, and commitment to epistemological caution make it a valuable addition to the growing literature exploring the relationship between subjective experience and human flourishing.

Although some of the theoretical proposals remain necessarily speculative, the author consistently acknowledges their exploratory character and encourages future empirical investigation rather than dogmatic conclusions. The work is clearly written, well structured, and likely to stimulate productive debate among scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds.

I therefore recommend publication of the manuscript.

Madrid, 13/6/26

Scientific Review by Dr. Irina Frasin

THE THEME ISSUED BY THE AUTHOR

The book analyses an ancestral phenomenon, the healing associated with faith, under the magnifying glass of both science and philosophy. Arising out of the necessity to understand, as a result of the increase in complexity of reported phenomena, but also of cultural and scientific changes, this manuscript brings together methods from various fields: neuroscience, philosophy, psychology, medical humanities, anthropology, ethics, etc. All of this creates a unique image, developing unique and much needed research. This volume advocates for a more humane and integrative understanding of the healing process and, in today's world, I find it of utmost importance.

DISTINGUISHED ASPECTS/ SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION

The main contribution of this work lies in its effort to question reductionist explanations of healing and underline the importance of a more integrative and holistic way to understand it. By bringing together diverse theoretical perspectives, the manuscript makes a thoughtful and intellectually ambitious contribution to current explorations of consciousness, healing and spirituality.

Drawing on diverse bodies of scholarship—including neuroscience, psychology, phenomenology, consciousness studies, spirituality research, and the medical humanities—the author constructs a coherent and intellectually integrated conceptual framework. His careful conceptual positioning facilitates engagement with controversial questions while sustaining a reflective, exploratory, and epistemologically cautious approach, always reminding of limitations.

The monograph makes a distinctive contribution by framing faith as an active relational operator characterized by intentional alignment, existential surrender, and commitment to interconnectedness. This framework not only advances theoretical understanding but also identifies potentially fruitful pathways for future empirical investigation and interdisciplinary collaboration.

METHODOLOGY/ MODELS USED BY THE AUTHOR

The manuscript stands as a thoughtful and intellectually ambitious engagement with some of the central questions surrounding consciousness, healing, spirituality, and meaning in contemporary scholarship. Being an interdisciplinary work, the methodology varies from philosophical interrogation and phenomenological interpretation to case studies and historical reconstruction.

The manuscript critically examines relevant contributions from neuroscience, psychology, phenomenology, medical humanities, placebo research, consciousness studies, etc. in a systematic manner.

BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES

The bibliography is well chosen, relevant, rich and informative, being up-to-date and in correlation with the directions of analysis.

Iași, 17.06.2026

About the author



João Ferreira is a psychologist, psychophysiological, data scientist, and researcher in Health Sciences. Born in Portugal in 1994, he has built, at a relatively early stage of his career, a remarkably broad scientific trajectory, combining Psychology, Neuroscience, Psychophysiology, Data Science, Medicine, and Philosophy. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Master's degree in Social and Organisational Psychology, which he completed with a final grade of 20/20. He subsequently deepened his training in Molecular and Translational Neuroscience at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Coimbra and is currently a PhD candidate in Health Sciences at the same institution. His research focuses primarily on mental health, burnout, psychophysiology, EEG, ageing, social prescribing, neurological and neuromuscular diseases, and mechanisms associated with wellbeing.

From an early stage, his training was distinguished by a pursuit of knowledge well beyond the boundaries of a single scientific discipline. Throughout his academic journey, he has completed more than 380 additional scientific courses and training programmes, covering Neuroscience, Biostatistics, Data Science, programming, genetics, neuroimaging, rare diseases, geriatric medicine, laboratory methodologies, and translational research, among many other areas. He is also a certified Data Scientist by the Centre for Statistics and Applications of the University of Lisbon and by GADES, with a distinction for merit.

His scientific activity reflects this breadth. His output includes more than 30 scientific articles published or submitted, nine published book chapters, preprints, 16 conference papers, and other academic contributions, including 82 published conference abstracts, nine international scientific reports, 32 scientific translations, one book with Frontiers, and one review of a book from a European Erasmus+ project as lead reviewer. His research interests include functional connectivity in burnout using EEG, bullying, mental health, coping, ageing, technology, consciousness, and the human condition.

The international dimension is one of the most evident characteristics of his career. He is a member of the European Reference Network on Neuromuscular Diseases (ERN-NMD) and is also active within European networks dedicated to rare neurological diseases, including ERN-RND, where he is involved in several task forces. Over the years, he has also been part of scientific communities such as the European Academy of Neurology, British Neuroscience Association, International Parkinson and Movement Disorder Society, Marie Curie Alumni Association, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, TREAT-NMD, Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS), and ALBA Network, among others.

Alongside this work, he became an official translator of content associated with the European Reference Networks, contributing to bringing specialised medical knowledge closer to the people and families who need it.

This connection between science and society is a constant throughout his career. Over 18 years of volunteering, João Ferreira has worked in a range of social and scientific contexts, including the implementation of social and mental wellbeing programmes at the Quinta da Primeira Fase of Associação Arca da Vida, in Mira, as well as the translation and adaptation of medical literature concerning rare diseases. This trajectory was recognised with the Portuguese Volunteering Trophy, in the Revelation category, in 2024, a distinction that symbolises a dimension of his personality that does not appear in bibliometric indicators: the conviction that knowledge only acquires its true meaning when it can be placed at the service of others.

His career also includes a recognised literary dimension, with five prizes in literary competitions promoted by Caixa de Crédito Agrícola and, more recently, an Accésit (Honourable Mention) in the General Category of the XII Certamen de Microrrelatos Javier Tomeo, a social-themed competition promoted in Spain by the Asociación Literaria y Artística Poiesis and the publication *Compromiso y Cultura*.

At EBRAINS, Europe's largest infrastructure dedicated to brain research, his trajectory has taken on a particularly significant dimension. In 2025, he was appointed Student Ambassador, elected Student Representative by an absolute majority, and elected Chair of the 1st EBRAINS Student Conference on Interdisciplinary Brain Research by an absolute majority of the Student Ambassadors. In 2026, he was further nominated as a candidate for Co-Chair of the EBRAINS Education Task Force, becoming one of a restricted group of three candidates. He was also appointed a core member of the EBRAINS Education Task Force.

Scientific leadership, therefore, extends beyond participation in projects. João Ferreira has increasingly assumed responsibilities involving representation and community building, progressively establishing himself as a representative voice of a new generation of European researchers. At the University of Coimbra, he is a member of the governance of the Faculty of Medicine as a member of the Faculty of Medicine Assembly, serves as Faculty of Medicine Ambassador to NEDUC and to the University General Council, and has also served as Ambassador for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. For several years, he has been a member of the Organising Committee of PubHD at the University of Coimbra, contributing directly to science communication and the democratisation of scientific knowledge.

In terms of public scientific activity, his record includes 14 events organised and 450 scientific events attended, figures that illustrate not only active participation in academia but also a sustained presence across different scientific communities. His responsibilities have included science communication initiatives, university events, and international activities associated with EBRAINS and interdisciplinary research.

His scientific output is accompanied by a particularly notable level of peer recognition for a career that is still developing. He has delivered 131 oral communications and presented 61 posters at national and international conferences and has received distinctions including the Best Abstract Award at the mbt Conference 2.0 – Methods in Mobile EEG, an Honourable Mention for Best Paper at an international conference, the Certificate of Appreciation for Outstanding Presentation from the Asia Pacific Association for Medical Informatics, and other academic and scientific distinctions, totalling 42 awards and recognitions.

His career also includes three Marie Skłodowska-Curie grants, two National Merit recognitions from the Directorate-General for Higher Education (DGES), an FCT PhD scholarship, as well as several international travel grants and competitive forms of support.

Particularly revealing of the confidence placed in his work is his activity as a scientific reviewer. His 2026 record includes 88 peer reviews for 21 publications and projects. Among the journals and platforms for which he has been invited to conduct scientific evaluations are PLOS Digital Health, with 30 reviews; BMC Psychology, with 13; Stress and Health, with eight; Scientific Reports, with five; and Frontiers in Psychology, with three, in addition to Frontiers in Aging, Journal of Open Psychology Data, International Journal of Bullying Prevention, Frontiers in Physiology, Frontiers in Nutrition, BMC Genomics, BMC Medical Education, European Journal of Education, Frontiers in Cellular and Infection Microbiology, and other internationally recognised publications.

This places him, still at an early stage of his career, in a position in which he is already being called upon to contribute to the evaluation and selection of knowledge produced by other researchers and published in leading journals, reflecting a significant degree of international peer recognition.

His scientific engagement also extends beyond strictly academic work. He has been invited to participate in consultation and advisory processes relating to research and

science and health policy, including contributions to initiatives associated with European Commission BrainHealth, the development of neuroscience research infrastructures, the World Health Organization, and the Council of Europe, among other organisations.

This combination of training, scientific output, peer review, representation, and leadership is particularly significant when considered in light of his age. At 32, João Miguel Alves Ferreira has already accumulated a level of scientific and institutional experience that is unusual among researchers at the beginning of their careers.

Yet what makes this trajectory particularly distinctive is not simply the quantity of experiences accumulated. It is the speed, diversity, and coherence with which they have been integrated. Rather than building a career confined to a single academic territory, he has developed a scientific identity capable of crossing different scales and languages: behaviour and the brain, psychology and physiology, data and experience, fundamental research and healthcare applications, empirical science and philosophical reflection.

His trajectory therefore reveals a particularly precocious scientific profile: a researcher who does not merely seek to learn one field, but strives to master the languages required to understand complex problems; who does not merely participate in networks, but assumes responsibilities within them; who does not merely publish, but is called upon to evaluate the work of others; and who does not merely represent his institution, but is beginning to represent a scientific generation in leading European spaces.

It is this combination of interdisciplinary intelligence, scientific ambition, precocity, leadership capacity, and international visibility that best characterises his career.

João Ferreira is still at the beginning of his scientific career. Paradoxically, this is one of the most impressive dimensions of his trajectory: everything he has achieved so far has been built at a stage when, for most researchers, the process of establishing a consolidated career is only beginning.

What exists today is already a career of considerable breadth. What may be built upon it is, necessarily, a much larger question.

Rather than simply following the path opened by his generation, João Ferreira has increasingly begun to occupy a place among those who are helping to define where that generation will go.

His central ambition remains simple: to understand the human being more deeply in order to contribute to a more rigorous, interdisciplinary science capable of improving people's lives.

By Maria Fernanda dos Santos Carvalho and Raquel Carvalho