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At the heart of our life's stories lies the heart: On making (fictional) sense of reality[1]

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The heart is the perfection of the whole organism.
Therefore, the principles of the power of perception and the soul's ability to nourish itself must lie in the heart
(Aristotle)

Abstract

In our multifarious (contextual) ways of making sense of reality as embodied personhood, lies the heart: an embodied heart. From a powerful historical and multi-disciplinary exploration of the metaphoric significance of the "heart" and its constitutive fictional role in making sense of our realities, my article argues for a broader and life-affirming understanding of a model of rationality, shaped and constrained by our evolutionary biological makeup and our cognitive-affective ways in relating to, experiencing and engaging with our realities. It's not an argumentative plea for irrationality, but for a deeper and broader multi-disciplinary pursuit for the understanding of the manners in which being human as personhood finds clues in our linguistic traditions in the context of theology-science discourses for (wholeheartedly) making sense of reality, and the contextual capturing of the meaningfulness of life.

Keywords

affectivity; emotions; heart as metaphor; model for rationality; sensemaking of reality; embodied personhood; consciousness

1 Reworked paper that was read at the bi-annual ESSSAT Conference, Split University, Croatia on 29th August 2024.

Introduction

Biology precedes biography. It not only precedes biography but fundamentally determines and shapes our contextual efforts as we, communally, long and strive to capture meaningfulness in our sensemaking and scientific endeavours, interpretatively finding our biographical ways in the world. Put differently: We are embodied persons that consciously interact with reality, and as embodied persons, the reality that we interact with invites us to "name" our realities, to semantically make sense of our realities – the very realities in which we relationally move and have our being. Our historical-contextual movements, our interpretative movements are multi-dimensional and deeply layered as we discover and find – together and in otherness – our relational-semantic ways in making sense of the experienced realities.

My focus in the article is only on and limited to the question: what lies at the core, at the heart of our sensemaking efforts, of being/becoming human, embodied personhood, of consciousness, of relational and environmental connectedness, cultural explorations and expressiveness? In short: the capturing in multi-dimensional manners of our ways of being/becoming human in the world? A short answer to a deep-reaching question: the heart. The heart lies at the core. Therefore, my passionate efforts – writing and reflecting on the topic in the nearby shadows of the Cradle of Humankind (Krugersdorp, South Africa) – to interpretatively travel and explore the "road *mostly* travelled" but a methodological road on which many scholars feel that affectivity (emotions/ moods/ feelings) must be avoided, or "rationally" qualified, or politely or apologetically pushed aside or rejected with disdain as "subjective" or even "irrational"[2]. Put differently: The road mostly travelled is the very road on which "objectivity" and "rationality" are methodologically pursued and "subjectivity" and "emotional irrationality" are to be curtailed or eliminated to the best of our methodological abilities,

2 It has indeed often been the common philosophical accusation (e.g. John Locke, David Hume, René Descartes) in the past. Yes, I am re-introducing "irrationality" for precisely a deep critical reason of addressing and refuting the misplaced accusation of irrationality, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to present us with a far richer, deeper understanding of rationality.

but mostly with the ironic or dubious outcome that they sophisticatedly and innocently (?) cover, hide or mask (their own) deep subjectivity.

I will explore the significance of the heart as (metaphoric) concept that in my opinion represent the most fundamental, powerful and useful concept to capture the sensemaking significance of lived existence, of the whole person as embodied consciousness; not only capturing the whole person, but embracing integration and integrity in its wide-raging multi-dimensionality and relationality of "being-bodily-in-the world" that finds culturally expression in fathomless (scientific) manners.

My basic protest and plea are not something new: It is firstly to address the old and deep Western epistemological dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, especially the methodological stance within the sciences of (clinical) objectification. It is, however, a dichotomy that, in the Anthropocene, has taken on immensely dangerous, alarming, manipulative proportions, widely unmasked as manipulative, oppressive and especially dehumanising – despite amazing, overwhelming constructive scientific contributions and their exciting technological applications. Why such a negative stance? Our intimate, unconditional oneness, relationality, and embeddedness within nature have been vandalised, broken down and grossly impaired in realising our humanness. To give but two examples from two very different but influential contemporary discourses. In contemporary ecological discourses, the most recent contributions talk about "trauma" discourses, focusing on and emphasising the havoc, ruptures caused by our broken relationship with nature (Middleton 2026:3ff) in which he emphasises that climate change and biodiversity loss are driven by human greed, ignorance, and mismanagement. Middleton (2026:3) emphatically states: "We are on the cusp of the planet's sixth great mass extinction event, with rates of extinction tens to hundreds of times higher than they have been for the last ten million years". In the wide range of contemporary contextual theologies, such as Liberation Theologies, the systemic dehumanisation, oppressiveness and exploitation are crudely unmasked (see e.g. Solomons and Baron, 2024) in our discourses on realising humanness.

Secondly. In my deliberate choice for the heart as an integrative (metaphoric) concept, I will be extremely sensitive not to fall into the same (sensemaking)

pitfall of one the most important fallacies of our time within Western scientific scholarship. It is the mereological fallacy that has determined and distorted many of our scientific sensemaking efforts. To give but one very recent example from transdisciplinary reflection on consciousness by the South African New Testament scholar, Pieter Craffert (2024), in his *The fabric(ation) of consciousness. A neuro-ecological perspective.* For him, the question on consciousness represents the ultimate scientific question of the 21st century since it "concerns the very nature of what it is to be human, what human beings are made of and what kind of creatures we are, and, for many, it also includes the question about what the world is made of" (Craffert 2024:1). For Craffert, the mystery of consciousness is about the very fabric of the universe[3] and he critically unfolds it as a complex cultural concept and multiplex bio-neuro-ecological phenomenon. Important for me is his criticism of preceding neuro-scientific research in which researchers are, amongst others, guilty of the mereological fallacy, that is, of conflating consciousness with one of its mental aspects[4]. In my exploration of the heart, its integrative, guiding significance (bridging significance?) within science-theology discourses must be the (operational) focus and not an aspect of its metaphoric significance.

Thirdly. I would like to methodologically address and counter (not simply avoid) the alleged subjectivism that spontaneously faces us with the emphasis on the heart (and all its implications), but to argue for naming and taking our subjectivity – the "feeling of being alive" – seriously by methodologically working (read: scientifically) through our subjectivity (our moods, feelings and emotions) so that all of our "story-telling" efforts ("intersubjectivity") will incorporate and find expression, integration in our rational (that is, the so called objective) sensemaking in our oneness

3 I cannot agree more fully when he states: "What we take to be human has far-reaching implications for, and is fundamental to, not only our understanding and explanation of religion, ethics, medicine and other cultural practices but also for how we live and order our societies, how we treat other animals and how we think about life" (Craffert 2024: xxi).

4 Perhaps a brief explanatory note on an extremely important critical remark by Craffert on the mereological fallacy. It refers to a part-whole conflation where features of a part are attributed to the whole. It constitutes a fundamental fault line in consciousness research. On the three formats that it manifests in neuroscientific research, see (Craffert 2024: 7; 10; 34ff).

with nature and of the world. And at the very same time, as we are moving from and through our own subjectivity, we should develop and nurture a (self)critical sensitivity for the equivocal role of "an interior life of subjective feelings" that assumingly warrants an (uncritical) authoritarian sensemaking process. In short: It is to develop a new (*he*)*art* of living one's bodily life and of living-writing our biographies (and all our scientific efforts) together in otherness**.**

In my exposition to follow, I will firstly give a brief motivation for the heart as my conceptual choice; secondly: I will share an earlier Russian example of exploring the heart as concept of wholeness and integration, and thirdly: exploring and summarising the significance of the heart as concept of integration for our sensemaking efforts from a broader and deeper understanding of rationality – with a strong emphasis on the affective-cognitive character of our reasoning strategies in making sense of reality.

Why the heart?[5]

Of the three questions that I would like to address, the first one is most probably the easiest one to answer, but at the same time, the most controversial: Why the heart?

It is nothing new to emphasise the constitutive and shaping role of subjectivity and affectivity in all our sensemaking efforts of reality, whether negatively (to be methodologically avoided or curtailed) or positively (to deepen and broaden our anthropological models). However, to propose the heart within science-theology discourses as a metaphoric concept for integration from evolutionary epistemology is indeed new. A newness that has sprung for me from a deep intuition in my academic scholarship over the years, and especially in reflection on religious experience within

5 On a very interesting historical-etymological note: what semantic tracks can we discern for the symbol (found e.g. in emojis – 💟 – of the "heart"? In his gripping book *Heart: A History*, published in 2018, the Indian American cardiologist Sandeep Jauhar remarks that the shape of the heart – called cardioid – is common in nature. We find it in leaves, flowers, and seeds of many plants, including silphium, which was used for birth control in the early Middle Ages and may be the reason why the heart became associated with sex and romantic love. And from the 13th century, in paintings of lovers – restricted to aristocrats and members of the court – therefore called courtship – the preferred colour was red: the colour of blood, a symbol of passion and love

the highly sophisticated science-theology discourses over the last three decades. To be honest, I am on the one hand very (convincingly) excited to explore my intuition. On the other hand, I am struggling as work in progress to capture clearly my conceptual preference for the heart. It is therefore from a deep, vulnerable situatedness that I pursue the following from my experiential African context.

To return to my question on why the heart. Is there a more powerful and fluid metaphor in our everyday lives that captures/encapsulates such a depth/height/breadth of human embodied and contextual experiences than the heart as the seat of life/the fountain of meaning? The heart is surely not only an important physical organ that pumps blood[6], that too – but the metaphoric heart (interpretatively) pumps life itself in all its multi-various manifestations, since we as humans of "flesh and blood" are the way in which life makes ("movingly") sense of life, yes, "sense" of life.[7]

What has (intuitively) sparked in my own academic work within the exciting and ground-breaking theology-science discourses over the last few decades, the choice for and focus on the heart as a metaphoric concept to explore and pursue? A few academic scholarly contributions of note that fitted over the years – taking on shape almost like a puzzle – must selectively suffice.

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6 In *Medicine's 10 Greatest Discoveries*, Gerald Friedland and Meyer Friedman (1998) argue that William Harvey's discovery of the function of the heart and the circulation of blood was the greatest medical discovery of all time. Not only did it initiate the field of physiology, but it also introduced the principle of experimentation in medicine. He published a book on his discoveries in Latin in 1628. His major contribution to physiology was demonstrating that the heart acts as a pump, propelling blood through the body in a continuous circulatory system. It contradicted the long-held belief that the heart was a suction organ and that blood was produced in the liver and consumed by the body. His discovery of the circulatory system had a profound impact on medicine, leading to a new understanding of disease and treatment.

7 Just a few general examples – that speak for themselves – on the everyday powerful expressiveness of the heart metaphor that abounds on a wide-spectrum, as wide as life/lived existence itself from negative to positive, constructive to destructive: You can wear your heart on your sleeve/you can take something to heart/you can speak from your heart/set it on something/to win some-one's heart/to take heart/have a change of heart/heart goes out to some-one/be big-hearted/heart-broken/heart can rule your head/and strangely the heart can also wander: it may rise in your throat or sink into your stomach/empty your heart/it touches your heart – and it goes on and on and on … Also, importantly within a religious context, we find that the Christian message stresses that God invites us to entrust our hearts to God.

It all started with a short text from wisdom literature from the First Testament in Ancient Israel literature that stated: "Be careful with what is going on in your heart, since it determines your whole life" (my translation of Proverbs 4:23). And it continued and deepened with the significance of the heart in many explorative anthropological-theological models[8]. St Augustine[9] as the "church father of the heart" with his famous words "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you"; Pascal[10] with his "reasons of the heart"; the viewpoints of Damasio, LeDoux and De Sousa on consciousness and emotions;[11] Van Huyssteen's[12] post-foundational approach (embedded in evolutionary epistemology) and his emphasis on the biological roots of all human rationality; current EES

8 To give but one very insightful and influential example from scholarship within science-theology discourses within my African context is the work of Klaus Nürnberger, especially his "Dust of the ground and breath of life (Gen 2:7): The concept of "life" in ancient Israel and emergence theory" (2012). See also my response to him in Veldsman (2018).

9 There are numerous "heart citations" that can be quoted from his *Confessions*, but for me one of the most striking is the following remark: "Man is a vast deep, whose hairs you, Lord, have numbered, and in you none can be lost. Yet it is easier to count his hairs than the affections and motions of his heart" (*Confessions*, 4.14.22).

10 The soft, almost innocent remark more than three centuries ago by the French theologian-philosopher Blaise Pascal (1958:78) in his *Pensees* (1670) triggered and unleashed my pursuit of making bodily sense of his words, namely that "the heart has reasons of which reason is not even aware of".

11 For the Portuguese American neurobiologist Antonio Damasio (cf. 1999:42), emotion constitutes a support system without which the edifice of reason cannot operate. The American neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux (1996:33) understands the role and function of consciousness as follows: "(P)eople normally do all sorts of things for reasons they are not consciously aware of (because the behaviour is produced by brain systems that operate unconsciously) and that one of the main jobs of consciousness is to keep our life tied together into a coherent story, a self-concept". He furthermore takes emotions to represent the evolutionary embodiment of the logic of human survival. The logic is psychologically qualified by the Canadian philosopher Ronald De Sousa (2013) in his article on emotion, in which he writes: "No aspect of our mental life is more important to the quality and meaning of our existence than emotions. They are what make life worth living or sometimes ending".

12 The key insights and framework of evolutionary epistemology as developed by the South African theologian Wentzel van Huyssteen (1998:xiii–iv), who wrote: "Evolutionary epistemology … reveals the biological roots of all human rationality and should therefore lead precisely to an interdisciplinary account of our epistemic activities. The basic assumption of evolutionary epistemology is that we humans, like all other beings, result from evolutionary processes and that, consequently, our mental capacities are constrained and shaped by the mechanism of biological evolution".

(extended evolutionary synthesis) discourses;[13] even on a lighter academic note in the work of Brene Brown[14]; and lastly, the very recent neuro-ecological perspective of Craffert (2024) on consciousness.[15] And on my ongoing puzzling experience, I was challenged by the extremely negative viewpoints on religiosity that only masked their own subjectivity – in the name of objectivity, of scientific rationality![16]

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13 Within the realm of the current EES (extended evolutionary synthesis) that seeks to integrate developmental processes, extra-genetic forms of inheritance, and niche construction into evolutionary theory in a central way, the Israeli evolutionary theorist and geneticist, Eva Jablonka and zoologist Marion J. Lamb (2005:193–231) convincingly argues that what makes the human species so different and so special, and what makes us human, lies for them in the way we can organise, transfer, and acquire information. They conclude that it is our ability to think and communicate through words and other types of symbols that makes us different.

14 Brown (2021), who in her book *Atlas of the Heart,* explores eighty-seven of the emotions and experiences that define what it means to be human, and to map the necessary skills and an actionable framework for meaningful connections. On the back cover of her book, it is stated that Brown (2021) gives as the language and the tools to access a universe of new choices and second chances. It is a universe where we can share and steward the stories of our bravest and most heartbreaking moments with one another in a way that builds connections.

15 The South African New Testament scholar Pieter Craffert recently published an impressive overview of neuroscientific research on consciousness. Unintentionally ironic, he states in his book *The fabric(ation) of Consciousness: A neuro-ecological perspective:* "Understanding the mystery of consciousness goes to the heart of the human condition (Craffert 2024:1). For my own interpretative purposes, I "abuse" his metaphoric usage of the word *heart*. For Craffert (2024:295) consciousness is a process, and according to him, solving the mystery of consciousness will not come from more experimental work or brain imaging but through conceptual and theoretical work. Insightfully, he explains how the larger context that constitutes consciousness – in the sense of sentience or felt awareness – is biological. From his research, it becomes convincingly clear that consciousness is a life regulation process of the whole body in which the brain is embedded. In the case of human consciousness, the context is also psychological and social (cf. Craffert 2024:9). He therefore concludes that a neuro-ecological perspective brings the insights of neuroscientific research and the phenomenology of consciousness together in fabricating consciousness as a multiplex process, as a body–mind–environment complex. It is a neuro-bio-ecological systems phenomenon.

16 To give but one example: Richard Dawkins (1986), when he states in his book *The Blind Watchmaker*: "I have no explanation for complex biological design. All I know is that God isn't a good explanation, so we must wait and hope that somebody comes up with a better one. I can't help feeling that such a position, though logically sound, would have left one feeling pretty unsatisfied, and that although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist". It would have made sense – and even been acceptable as his personal viewpoint – if Dawkins had only taken the words of the French philosopher-theologian Paul Ricoeur, who always started his summer lecturers with the question "d'où parlez

3. A summarising note on the heart

We speak – as persons of flesh-and-blood – from our very different contexts as embodied consciousness, as embodied persons.[17] From a neuroscientific perspective, we are embodied consciousness.[18] Embodied consciousness as self-consciousness, deeply vulnerable because of our biological make-up, driven by desire and endowed with imagination that finds cognitive-affective expressions through our religious/moral awareness and our symbolic behaviour. For us as persons, from a psychological perspective, the heart emerges as the centre of the subjective self. And to the heart, relationships matter – or even better: the human heart is a matter of human relationships (cf. Veldsman 2023).

Therefore, my plea for a broader understanding of rationality,[19] and for a better understanding of being human in all our relationships and all of our scientific and conversational endeavours, is for the acknowledgement of the multi-dimensional significance of the cognitive-affective dimension of embodied personhood in all of our sensemaking. A few brief notes on

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vous?" ("From where do you speak?") seriously. What subjective convictions underlie your publicly proclaimed viewpoint as a so-called "scientific" viewpoint when you state that you "can't help feeling"? Dawkins (who even "objectively" turns a gene into a selfish gene!) is a prime example of turning a deaf ear to the ancient words of wisdom from the First Testament within the Jewish tradition that state in Proverbs 4:23: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life". Let us then at least take as a vantage point our "biological design" seriously.

17 Does this imply that there is also a viewpoint in which persons are primarily disembodied? No, with the term embodiment I have the precise opposite in mind: the secondary aspect is the primary one; that is, human consciousness is always already embodied.

18 There are insightful contemporary discourses and philosophical positions on embodiment with which I will not engage. To mention but one very recent publication: *The Unthinkable Body. Challenges of Embodiment in Religion, Politics, and Ethics* (2024). See bibliography for full details.

19 It is a plea that I develop along similar reflective lines of earlier efforts, such as those on the "embodied mind" (e.g. the neurobiologist Francis Varela and the philosopher Evan Thompson and their book published in 1993: The Embodied Mind). They are in their interdisciplinary philosophy of embodiment fundamentally committed to the view that the mind cannot be separated from the body but must rather be understood as the mode of being in the world in a bodily way. The human mind not only depends on the body, but it is even constituted and shaped by bodily activities. For them, the human mind is not the internal space of the human person, but it develops in actively engaging the environment (that is, an understanding of embodiment as environmentally embedded).

affectivity must suffice[20]. For me, affectivity consists of our moods, feelings and emotions – and it is the latter that "moves" us in all of our being human, that makes life in all its sensemaking activities, worth living – or not. Emotions are rooted in our biological nature. They have evolved over centuries from the basic instincts relating to mating, protection of territory, food, survival, fight or flight, and thus have an (evolutionary) cognitive core. Emotions are communicated non-consciously and consciously by means of various bodily systems and subsystems, consisting of neural networks and the blood network. Emotion constitutes a support system without which the edifice of reason cannot operate. Our emotions argue LeDoux – and I regard it as one of his most profound insights – represent the evolutionary embodiment of the logic of human survival. Our moods lay bare our existence, our "thrownness in existence" (Heidegger) and as "pure feeling", it represents our (sense)finding of our bodily "being in the world", our belonging to existence and to one another. Our emotions are consciously registered as feelings. Mood (and thus our undifferentiated feelings of belonging) and emotions converge in our thoughts and actions in our hearts. Feeling internalises and personalises "my thoughts"/ knowledge. The heart ultimately unites and integrates what reason/ knowledge separates and/or fragments.

In our personal heartfelt engagements with our experiential realities – from a philosophical-scientific perspective – comes the insight that all of our human experiences are interpretative experiences, and therefore, theory-laden. But from an evolutionary anthropological perspective, there is much

20 Since – to name but two seminal contributions in Western scholarship on emotions – the publications of Charles Darwin (*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 1872) and William James (*What is an emotion,* 1884), scholarship on the importance, nature, place and role of emotions, or for that matter, on affectivity has taken on vast proportions, especially in what has been called the Affective turn. The "Affective turn" refers to a paradigm shift across the humanities and social sciences from the 1990s in which "affectivity" (a broader, more impersonal and "less" conscious concept than emotions) has energised renewed focus on emotions, feelings, moods and bodily sensations in shaping all of our experiences. The wide-ranging contemporary (transdisciplinary) discourses on emotions in their multiplicity and complexity have, as Du Toit (2014:9) rightly stated already more than a decade ago, "made it difficult, if not impossible, to get a firm grasp on the emotional aspect of our humanness in which we act meaningfully, be inspired, wounded and healed". I will not engage with this vast scholarship due to my limited focus, but it represents the background to and framework for my protest and plea. See in this regard, Katie Barclay (2021) in her "State of the field: the history of emotions".

more to it. In our interpretative sense-making of our life experiences, we engage with our respective realities through all our senses, and therefore, it is at the very same time affective-laden[21]. When we (intersubjectively) make sense of life, when we "sharingly" spell out the meaning of life[22] formulated playfully, the consonants are cognitivity, the vowels are affectivity, and at the very same time, with the acknowledgement that we have apart from the 26 letters of the alphabet, also wordless symbols such as question marks, exclamation marks, full stops, commas, etc. – powerful symbols without words, but saying so much about life itself.

My protest, plea and efforts are not the first. I will subsequently share a recent effort that initially looked very promising to assist me in my work in progress.

(a) Sharing a contemporary Russian example[23]

In his article *The category of the heart in philosophy and religion: from mysticism to pragmatics* the Russian political figure Nikolay Rybakov[24] (2021) addresses – what he calls – one of the extremely urgent problems of modern anthropology, namely the problem of the whole person, more

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21 I intentionally use the word "sensemaking" with the emphasis that we connect, that we interact with our experiential reality by means of all of our senses. And that experiential sensemaking reality is neatly captured in our everyday language: Your kind words have touched me/I smell a rat in your description of the situation

Oh, it is so sweet to hear/you got under my skin/beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, and: eyes without speaking confess the secrets of the heart/I tasted death in that life-threatening situation.

22 In a recent presentation for the Oxford Centre, I explored the heart at the heart of all dialogue, stressing the ethical dimension that flows from this emphasis. It practically entails that we have intentionally "to (re)-move" ourselves to the realm of intersubjectivity – there, and only there we will be (emphatically) touched by the other, and otherness. There and only there our affective discernments can be judged, substantiated as genuine and authentic or unmasked as inappropriate, unjust and unfair, exploitive, oppressive or violent. Dialogue, deeply determined and guided by intersubjectivity, will become and be a concrete contextual skill with which we can explore and respect (Latin: respicere, to look again) differences/celebrate otherness/to relativise ourselves/invest in humility for the enriching sake of togetherness and co-operation – the latter being the best quality of our survival of the fittest: not power, but co-operation and wisdom (Veldsman 2023).

23 See Rybakov (2021) for literature and PhD studies in Russia and Ukraine on the concept of the heart.

24 Nikolay Rybakov is a Russian public and political figure, leader of the Russian United Democratic Party "Yabloko" since 2019.

precisely, the problem of the completeness of his (sic) nature. He poses the question of the existence of a centre that controls human activity as an integral being and answers it from the conviction: it is the heart as coordinating centre, in accordance with historical, philosophical and religious studies. According to him, body, soul and spirit (which form the trinity of man), are diverse principles. Man (sic), however, is a single, integral being. For the wholeness of a person, the intuition of a "whole person" must first "hover" in research, otherwise the very formulation of the question – in his own words – "will look like a miracle" (Rybakov 2021). He states that to unite heterogeneous parts into a whole, an organ must exist in human nature as a unifying and guiding principle, as a centre of spiritual-mental-bodily unity. Such an organ, according to the teachings of ancient church anthropology, in a human being is the heart, which itself must be at the same time a spiritual, mental and bodily organ, or, in other words, the focus of the spirit, soul and body (that is, the heart as the centre of the trimeria). For Rybakov, the concept of the heart carries a mystical (religious) meaning. At the same time, it has a universal (philosophical) meaning and a natural biological (scientific) meaning. Where does the deep challenge lie? To superimpose different planes of its study on each other and create a single universal-integrative doctrine of the heart, that is, a holistic understanding of the personality and the basis of its connection with society. Focussing especially on the viewpoint of the Russian philosopher A. S. Pozov, Rybakov argues for the heart as a unifying and guiding beginning of human nature, unfolding his understanding of the concept of trimeria and its structural dimensions: a person includes spirit, soul and body in his (sic) composition. Each of these elements, in turn, consists of three elements. The spirit includes three abilities: mind, will and strength. Spirit is the unity of mind, will and strength. The soul contains a small mind (logicon), desire (epithymy) and feeling (thymos). Finally, the body includes lymph, blood and the nervous system. All components of human nature are interconnected, but they do not suppress each other and do not mix. Following Pozov and his convictions of the heart as organ of the trinity of the trimeria, of spiritual-mental-bodily unity, Rybakov (2021:6) states that the role of the heart as a unifying centre is manifested, firstly, in the fact that it acts as the centre of each of the members of the human *trimeria* (the centre of the spirit; the centre of the soul; the centre of bodily functions), and secondly, in the fact that the heart connects all the

members of the three-measure with each other. In other words, the heart is the centre of life in all its aspects and manifestations. The heart acts as a bodily centre;[25] the role of the heart is also important as the centre of mental life (manifestations of feelings, impulses, emotions, passions, affects). The whole life of a person's *trimeria* is reflected in the heart, finds its response in it and manifests itself in the form of moods, likes and dislikes. And finally, the heart is the container of the spirit, the centre of a person's spiritual life and serves as a source of spiritual strength (with a mind of its own)!

Against the background of the Russian example, I turn to an evaluative and concluding paragraph.

(b) To move to and develop the (*he*)*art* of our lived biographies

I found the preceding Russian example *insightfully disappointing* – with a strong emphasis on both words! Yes, insightfully disappointing since it greatly assists me to see clearly on how not to pursue and explore the metaphoric significance of the heart – as "problem of the whole person", or more precisely, "the problem of the completeness of his (sic) nature" in which the question is posed of the existence of a centre that controls human activity as an integral being. For Rybakov it is the heart as a coordinating centre, and it is explored and unfolded insightfully as cosmological, biological force, but then highly speculative from an unacceptable anthropological perspective. I therefore, in reaction to Rybakov's exploration, propose the following (albeit on some points still rather vague)![26]

Since the physical heart is indeed an organ that pumps blood and represents in its physicality connectedness with all other bodily systems,

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25 Rybakov (2021:6) elaborates in detail: "The heart acts as a bodily centre – a regulator of blood circulation; it unites the feelings of a person, which are the responses of a single feeling of the heart; the heart, furthermore, is the regulator and distributor of the vital force in the body. The vital force, according to ancient church anthropology, enters the human body from the cosmos through breathing and digestion. From the lungs, the vital force enters the heart, where it is processed into the specific vital energy of a person, into the vital spirit. Further processing of this energy, carried out with the assistance of the nervous system, leads to its transformation into psychic energy. Outputs of this energy occur through the excitement of a person, as well as through his actions".

26 On a lighter note, I have in my formulation in the back of my head a saying by the renowned South African economist Clem Sunter (who recently passed away) that insists that it is better to be vaguely right than to be clearly/precisely wrong.

networks and organs, it represents in its metaphoric significance, bodily life – in all its relationality and in oneness with nature - itself. And to say life is to invite interpretations. We as embodied consciousness (and then consciousness understood as a neuro-bio-ecological systems phenomenon), that is, then, as embodied personhood, spontaneously pursue from a deep, undefined (self)awareness of our biological vulnerability and are driven by desire[27]. This is my concrete response to Craffert's earlier remark that the "mystery of consciousness goes to the heart of the human condition". He clearly indicates how the larger context that constitutes consciousness – in the sense of sentience, or felt awareness – is biological. From this very biologically determined "felt awareness", it becomes convincingly clear that consciousness is a life regulation process of the whole body in which the brain is embedded. And to that he adds: "In the case of human consciousness, the context is also psychological and social" (Craffert 2024:9).

To conceptually capture the constitutive, determined and shaping significance of our (biological) human condition, and especially of consciousness as a life regulation process of the whole body (in which the brain is embedded!), I propose the concept of the heart. I therefore take my lead from subjectivity (protoconsciousness, see Craffert 204:263ff) – as the feeling of being alive – as well as from our everyday linguistic traditions and their "lively" semantic "offering" of the metaphoric significance of the heart. It simply – from those very contextually-linguistically determined traditions – presents itself spontaneously and invitingly – but with astounding deep significance and wide-ranging "integrative" functionality.

Our pursuits as rational agents – to conceptually borrow from the work of Van Huyssteen's on evolutionary epistemology – of all of our sensemaking efforts (read: our reasoning strategies), spring/flow / come from our shared (life) resources. And then, and only then, do they take on methodological lives of their (disciplinary) own – for whatever reasons and within whatever

27 I mostly used the words "affectivity", "emotions", "feelings" and "moods" up to this point. In a recent influential anthropological-theological study by Jan-Olaf Henriksen (2023), he works with "desire". I will not engage with the wide-ranging discourses on the differences/similarities in emotions and desires, but since desires are indeed descriptively and conceptually "closer" to our biological make-up, I will utilise his preference.

contexts, and driven by whatever desires. And it is on these very highly sophisticated methodological, disciplinary roads that diverge sharply, not only between the natural sciences and humanities, but very much within these fields themselves as well, that my choice, foregrounding of the metaphoric significance of the heart, must operate and guide our contextually expressed subjectivity. It is then to subsequently "move" methodologically through our subjectivity to intersubjectivity. It is in our shared but then also distinct intersubjective realm of the articulation of our viewpoints, that the metaphoric conceptual significance of the heart must be laid bare, identified, bridged, and unmask the epistemological-hermeneutical nature and (unconscious/conscious) preferences of our (different) interpretative (rational) models. Models that should interpretatively operate from the (contextual) realising of our distinct humanness in its "*incorporation* of subjectivity", our (unnegotiable) oneness with nature and our constitutive relationality, and perhaps above all for the Anthropocene, will be taking ethical responsibility for all of our scientific endeavours in worlds deeply determined by pluralism[28].

To conclude. The initial quote of Aristotle (the heart is the perfection of the whole organism. Therefore, the principles of the power of perception and the soul's ability to nourish itself must lie in the heart) should therefore contextually be rephrased as follows: The heart as a concept represents the integrative principle of the whole organism, of being human as embodied personhood. Therefore, the principles of (conscious/unconscious)

28 The background to my formulation can be found in a very recent ISSR Blog written by Augustine Pamplany. For me, it represents (albeit but one example) the very "heart" of my own endeavours within the contemporary science-theology discourses that grapple deeply with our methodological preferences in very different contexts and with the acknowledgement of very hermeneutical models in a world with its pluralistic fibre. Pamplany (2026) states concerning India in the science-religion conversation: "At the heart of the Indian experience lies deep plurality. India is home to Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Islamic, Christian, and many indigenous traditions, each carrying distinctive cosmologies, views of the human person, and ways of knowing. For this reason, it is often more fitting in the Indian context to speak of science and spirituality or science and meaning rather than the more Western pairing of science and religion or science and theology. The latter terms presuppose institutional and doctrinal boundaries that do not always map neatly onto Indian realities. There is no single "Indian view" of the relationship between science and ultimate questions; rather, there are multiple strands shaped by region, language, and lineage".

sensemaking and embodied personhood's ability to nourish itself must lie in the heart.

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