

Eucalyptus rubida

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Left: August, and the wattles are a riot again



The Ecology of the Heart - II

It seems that one could speak and write forever on the ecology of the heart, but the topic today is how the heart talks to the brain, and hence by implication to the mind, however you might like to define the term. Really a word like body-mind might be more satisfactory as we shall see.

The very first cell to see the light of day 3.8 billion years ago was basically a primitive brain - it had to deal with all the functions of life, especially its survival. As life developed, even among the single-celled little people, they had to manage how to move towards or away from events like heat, nutrients, predators. The 'brain' seemed to be distributed among the various parts of the cell rather than as a centralised entity.

An early evolutionary brain is the reptilian brain. Reptiles obviously have a brain like this, and so do we. Evolution has remembered its particularly important place in life's story. Basically this part of our brain has its origins especially in its ability to deal with survival matters like eating and alimentation, running towards or away from things, reproduction and so on.

The next interesting development was the Old Mammalian Brain or Limbic Brain, which grew to surround the reptilian brain as the name limbic suggests. This is sometimes called the emotional-cognitive brain, and this brain can instantly and without logical reasoning inform us about the value or emotion that a particular event calls us to. Have you ever fallen in love at first sight? Now the interesting thing is that our heart which has a high percent of neuronal (or brain) cells has a permanent link to this part of the brain. The theory is that there is an intelligence of the heart, different in kind to that we will find in the next brain, and is not dependent on verbal, logical or linear thought.

The mystics have always told us that the heart speaks to the brain, and now we have some evidence for it. They (the mystics) have always sited the ground of being (or God, theologically) in the heart

The next brain just referred to is the New Mammalian Brain or neocortex, which brain forms mainly in the latter part of gestation and then also immediately after birth. We are told that Homo sapiens developed this brain in the vicinity of 40,000 years ago, and this was essential for the formation of language and (hence) logical, linear thinking. The neocortex also links

directly to the heart.

There are other important parts of the brain not mentioned here. The intent is to highlight the evolutionary sequence of the triune brain as it is usually referred to. The theory referred to is also not universally agreed on. This can be expected when what might be called mystical insights are developed from the science. However the absolute consonance of these insights with so many traditions is quite amazing. It gives new impetus to phrases like 'heart-centered spirituality.'

So what does this say to our cosmology? There has been a very old cosmology about a pervasive but etherial presence or factor or ground of being that underpins life. Some language around this comes out as 'there is but



one heart in the universe and all our hearts are attuned to it', or it might be described as '*anima mundi*' or soul of the world. Note that the Latin word *anima* is used in the feminine gender, not *animus* which is the male usage. The earliest traditions have always figured the feminine as the founding principle. Might we say here that our monotheistic male deity does not sit absolutely comfortably with this concept..

There is the beautiful Hindu concept of the heart-lotus which signifies not only the jewel of man's divinity living within the lotus (the cosmos), but also the jewel of cosmic divinity living within the lotus (man). This kind of duality I can live with. It is also reminiscent of Meister Eckhart's notion of God in us and we in God, or possibly Teilhard de Chardin's "you are forming your own self within the world, and you are helping the world to form itself around you."

For us heart-bearing folk, the heart seems to be the interface between the possible (the

ground of being) and what we present to the world through our lives. I would like to make the sweeping statement that every heart (human included) because it is the point of entry of spirit, is the source of authentic intuition and hence can always be trusted.

Where there is a potential for things to go wrong is when the intelligence or wisdom of the heart has to cope with a brain that has become 'enculturated' and has acquired hard-wired habits of thought and action. Here is where a transformation of consciousness is so important for the modern human who has largely become separated from the greater universe under our feet and above our heads, and more particularly from its source which resides within us.

So everybody is divine: everybody carries the universe within themselves: everybody is forming the universe just as it is forming them within itself. This has to do with the genderless and nameless god-head that mystic traditions speak of.

It is about the 'creator-created' connection that is with us every moment of our lives. The small child playing house is creating their little universe and at the same time being created in the process. We adults sometime play with our children, watching them grow in stature just as we also grow into greater maturity. And as we adults play our serious 'games' in life, that is precisely what we are doing. If our play in the universe is

heart-inspired and heart-filled, we can expect that our body-mind will also grow in stature as we mutually grow ourselves into the flowering universe. This is the only way. We just might have to reject patterns of culture that have evidently come to their use-by date. We need to continue to create our beautiful universe but in a new way.

We and the world we live in are connected in a synergistic fashion. That means that we can only progress together. We must love the earth if we expect it to in turn love and nurture us. The newly conceived embryo's heart commence to beat 21 days after conception, and it beats at the same rate as the mother (for a time). We need to lay down on the earth ourselves and let our heartbeat and the heartbeat of the earth come into resonance. This could be a consciousness-changing little ritual. Try it!

Trevor Parton