

Revealing Hearts

Paul Tillich's Concept of Revelation: an Application to Business Innovation

Kristin Falck Saghaug

is a PhD student at Center for Industrial Production, Department of Business and Economy, Aalborg University. She investigates the interaction between philosophical theology, artistic creativity and business practice.

George Pattison

is 1640 Professor Divinity at the University of Glasgow. He has taught in Oxford, Cambridge and Aarhus Universities and is a Visiting Professor at the University of Copenhagen. He has written extensively on existentialism and religion, especially Kierkegaard. His most recent book is Paul Tillich's Philosophical Theology: A Fifty-Year Reappraisal (Palgrave, 2015).

Peter Lindgren

is Professor PhD at Aarhus University, Business and Social Science. His research interest is Multi Business Model Innovation and Technology.

Abstract

Some small business owners want to balance personal values as well as economic values. "I have to follow my heart" or "it must be meaningful" some of them say. But how might they be able to *know* what gives meaning to the heart? The philosophical theologian Paul Tillich finds that the problem is that 'controlling knowledge' (e.g., technical testing) might be safe but unimportant, while 'receiving knowledge', that can only be verified by direct participation (e.g., intuition), might be important but uncertain. This paper shows how this tension can be made fruitful in relation to business innovation with reference to Tillich's account of the meaning of revelation through culture and art, summed up in the statement that "(...) revelation is the manifestation of the ground of being for human knowledge" (Tillich, 1951, p.94), which, we argue, can be extended to everyday experiences, for example, in business life. In Tillich's own

terms, even preliminary concerns may point at an ultimate concern (Tillich, 1964), which can also be understood as 'knowledge of the heart'. Our account is also connected to wider discussions concerning the nature of intuition.

Keywords Paul Tillich, values, business innovation, small business owners, revelation

Introduction

The background to this article is a sustained reflection from a theological perspective on the potential conflict between economic values and personal values among small business owners when they are creating something new within their businesses. A 2012 survey of 37 small business owners participating in an EU project on 'Innovation and Growth' indicated that for several of them personal values were just as important as economic values. 91% of the respondents answered that their own values were highly important as a strategic element for a future business model innovation¹. In connection to this we have pondered about phrases like: "I need to have my heart in it" and/or "it needs to be meaningful". These quotes stem from interviewee responses during the project and suggest that the notion of something being 'meaningful' seemed to be related to the needs of 'the heart'.

The main focus of this article is on applying the theoretical reflections of the philosophical theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) to revelation in art and culture.

Tillich argues that the traits of creativity that were formerly used to describe God have been turned into human qualities. But instead of depicting the heart of human activity they become a means of increasing production and profit in the mainstream economic understanding of value (Tillich, 1962; Tillich, 1964). This analysis is supplemented by material from participative observation in focus groups, from four semi-structured interviews, and from personal encounters (Davies, 2008) and illustrates how some business owners think of what gives meaning to the heart. Methodologically this article is based on an interpretative approach that seeks connections across different domains, an approach that Tillich's own 'method of correlation' richly exemplifies. We are by no means arguing that these few examples *prove* the reality of religious revelation but are merely indi-

cating how knowledge of the heart *can* happen for some people and how Tillich's thought provides one theoretical horizon that helps interpret what this 'happening' means (Gadamer, 2004; Tillich, 1951, 1947). What we call knowledge of the heart can be seen as relating to what is often called intuitive knowledge, so we begin with some preliminary remarks on intuition.

A short account of some research on knowledge through intuition

The origin of intuition stems from the Latin verb *in-tueri* – to look inside, or to know from within as in, contemplation (Zakay, 2009, p. 3). As a philosophical concept related to epistemology it has a long history. Spinoza, for example, regarded intuition as superior to discursive knowledge since it points to the concrete and the particular (Allison, 1998).

Although we cannot hope to give a conclusive account of a large and complex field of research, we note that some scientific researchers have moved away from what they claim to be the mainstream focus on intuition as a cognitive process. They have instead begun to address intuition as a sensuous feeling and they find that the heart is a locus of intuition (Bradley 2011; Tomasino 2011). The heart rate might literally indicate that the heart 'knows' about future events (Tressoldi et al. 2009) and the body, that is, the heart, may respond to some stimulus "before it is actually experienced" (McCraty et al. 2004, p.133). A more recent study also suggests that there may be tacit knowledge about the future that is perceived as a result of two bodies' psycho-physiological systems communicating passionately through resonating energies focused on a non-local object. When the individual experiences this bodily communication of energies, it calls it intuition (Bradley 2011). This tentatively gives a *scientifically-based* model of intuitive insight using physiological responses.

Intuition is often perceived as a 'gut feeling' that merely reflects the prejudices that we bring with us into a situation and that blind us to other possibilities (Bonabeau 2003; Myers 2010). However, Gigerenzer (2007) offers a more positive account, showing that there are a number of situations in which gut feelings are far more reliable than rational logic, even within areas including economy and finance. Intuition therefore offers possibilities for a kind of foresight. But it can also be seen as a way of focusing experience gained

through practice, exemplifying what Polanyi calls the tacit dimension of knowledge that emerges within the situation in which it is needed and is based on extensive experience that cannot, however, be reconstructed in a logically seamless way. This could be compared with the pottery maker knowing with her/his hands how much more she/he needs to work with the clay in order to bring the clay to its optimum shape. Herbert Simon's understanding of intuition amongst managers as a phenomenon related to their experience is in line with this (Polanyi 1961; Simon 1987). In these terms, intuition might even be described as constitutive of the very being of human life, even though it is colored by our prejudices, since these are, after all, integral to our humanity as such (Gadamer 2004; Gadamer 2006; Heidegger 1971). This idea has also inspired some qualitative, pedagogical as well as psychological research (Halling 2002; Hansen 2012; Janesick 2001).

Paul Tillich – knowledge through love

Bearing these approaches in mind, we now turn to the question of *the heart*. In Book 1 of his *Confessions*, Augustine (354-430CE) addresses his God: "For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee" (Augustine 2006, p.3). The heart is here understood as the center of personal life, but it is also restless because it is disconnected from a presence and a knowledge (i.e., the presence and knowledge of God) that is essential if the person is to live a happy and fulfilled life that exceeds their capacities, including the capacities of what is here identified as the heart. This Augustinian understanding of human existence is also present in the work of one of the 20th century's most influential philosophical theologians, Paul Tillich. Augustine and Tillich share a notion that this restlessness of the heart is visible in the human quest for meaning. In his sermon on *Knowledge through Love* Tillich says that: ... "our very being is a continuous asking for the meaning of our being, a continuous attempt to decipher the enigma of the world and our heart" (Tillich 1946, p. 111).

The following example illustrates how this might become concrete in the context of business practice.

Five business owners were gathered together in a room a cold winter's day at a so-called Growthgathering. When

they were asked about what the ideal network for their businesses would be like, one of them, the owner of a larger handicraft company, replied: "The network must give meaning here..." she knocked at her chest above her heart. The other business owners looked at her and some said "yes" and others nodded.

Between what the speaker says about the need for meaning and the hand knocking at her heart there is a movement expressive of despair. Why 'despair'? Because it was not enough for her just to *place* the palm of the hand above the heart. No, she *knocked* at it. Could this be a gesture related to this unspoken question: What gives meaning? But how might this relate to the religious category of revelation?

Tillich's characteristic expression for what Augustine talks about as the restless heart is *ultimate concern*, which he finds reflected in the first commandment: "You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul..." (Deut.6.5, Luke10.27). It is, metaphorically speaking, a question coming from *the heart* of human existence and, as Tillich defines it, this is the 'object' of theology and therefore theology should courageously (Cf. Lat. "cor" = 'heart') engage with areas where this ultimate concern is expressed. These may potentially be anywhere, because such concern permeates all human culture, indeed Tillich (1964, 1951) defines culture as a whole as expressive of human beings' ultimate concerns. In these terms, a workshop for business owners or a business owner's reflections is also a cultural expression and, as such, potentially a site of ultimate concern and revelation.

Tillich distinguishes between different kinds of knowing. On the one hand, he speaks about "*controlling knowledge*", which "is verified by the success of controlling actions" (Tillich 1951, p.100,102). Such knowledge may be perceived as secure but does not necessarily contribute to significance and meaning². On the other hand one could have knowledge that is not secure but is significant and meaningful. This would be a kind of "*receiving knowledge*" which is knowledge through participation (Tillich 1951, p.98)³. This would be the kind of knowledge relevant to intuition and the heart, and, insofar as it validates what we bring to a new situation, we can also see why it might allow for a certain kind of legitimate prejudice,

that is, an assumption or set of assumptions that we bring to a situation (Gadamer 2004).

In Tillich's generation this distinction was often addressed in terms of the tension between fact and value (i.e., between what 'is' and what 'ought to be'), a distinction especially associated with the Neo-Kantian movement (app. 1870-1920s).⁴ Within this philosophical environment, Tillich sought to find ways of achieving knowledge that took account of the facts but that also addressed human beings' ultimate concern. To this end, Tillich sees the desire for knowledge as a kind of *Eros* (the Greek word for love) since *Eros* is the power that strives for the reunion of elements that have become estranged (e.g., individualization and participation)⁵. As for Augustine, it is therefore love that provides Tillich with the key to overcoming the tension of fact and value and bringing us closer to the knowledge we need but lack. And again as for Augustine this is not just a matter of love in the modern sense of a certain kind of 'feeling' but love as revealing our very being. In Tillich's terminology, love has ontological force. In fact, Tillich believes that the question about the kind of being that human beings are (what he calls the ontological question) is "present to everybody at every moment" (Tillich 1954, p.25). Love therefore manifests life as it truly is, in its 'being', to use Tillich's terminology. And because love reveals the truth of human being and because everyone who exists has 'being', to participate in being is also to participate in love, even if in a fragmentary and estranged manner – not every love is a perfect love but, despite its imperfections, even an imperfect love can tell us something about who we really are.

But this still leaves the question as to how we might know about love or know what it is that love is telling us about our human situation. Here we turn to Tillich's views on art, which, like love, crosses the fact/value distinction. A work of art is a fact, a reality, but it is not 'just' a fact, it is also meaningful, expressive of deep value – of the heart. Art is therefore able to connect people to the ground of their being. It fragmentarily reveals the human situation of estrangement but also shows how the essential human being could be. In fragmentary ways it both opens the abyss (the 'groundlessness' of the human condition) and also discloses a potential ground. Art represents the fragments that, negatively understood, are only bits and pieces of what we may see – as St Paul wrote " (...)now I know in

part (...) “ 1 Cor.13:12. However, fragments are also gifts from God; in *Knowledge though Love* Tillich expresses how they are the openings that make it possible for us to see anything at all or to know that there is something and not just nothing. Even what he calls the shock of non-being, that is, the awareness of death and finitude that comes when we wake from a dreaming child-like innocence to the realities of life and becoming a fully actualized adult human being who is aware of their finitude may also reveal another side. Art gives us a privileged access to this other side, because art is the medium that, according to Tillich, points at the creative ground of our being and reminds us that knowing is a matter of reuniting what has been separated in existence or in life (Tillich 1948;1952; 1954; 1963).

In the light of this discussion, we turn to the next business owner, an architect and owner of a 20-year old company. Asked what she finds is most rewarding in her work she answers by saying “most fun?” and then she says:

C: The most fun is when you see the things, like when you have a kind of a...when you have a vision, in fact...

K: yes...

C: ...and this often happens when you are sitting together like this ...when you hear different things/stuff ...and in those different constellations with different people, and then suddenly ...Wow! You just like see it somehow... it is so damn funny! (She laughs)

I ask her to give an example. She chose to tell about a project where they were called out to a social housing area that was going to be upgraded due to the fact that the ground was sinking. They approached the area as a whole. Suddenly the problem gave her a visionary experience. She ‘saw’ how the current stairs could become a small supplementary-building that had its own underpinning. The solution was more expensive in the first instance. On the other hand it created value on several levels (e.g., energy saving, disability friendly). It made the area more attractive and gave people living there a possibility for an additional income by renting out the extra room they now got.

Collecting such bits and pieces is illustrative for the way she works and this illustrates how there seems to be more in play than a creative design thinking process at a purely conscious, rational level (Boland Jr et al. 2008). This business owner repeatedly said how important it was that she could work in a way where initial problems could be turned around and become a part of the final solution.

We suggest that the value that is being offered is in this case more than a service or a product. Having your heart in the business also seems to make the balance between economic and personal values become important for this business owner as the perspective at the 'whole' seems to be a focus for her business model. Following Joseph Beuys⁶ saying that "Everyone is an artist" (Mesch et al. 2007 p. xiv), we interpret business owners too as artists when they are creating something new in their businesses that serves a higher purpose than profit. Art as work is not so much the work itself but what the work creates as a process in which new possibilities of knowledge, new imaginings of something different, and new relationships come into view (Meisiek and Hatch 2008, Borriaud et.al. 2002). As such the work of the heart is transformative in the sense that it brings about change by generating new sets of relationships between people or between people and objects.

Our next business owner offers an example of what this might mean:

A young entrepreneur creating a business with digital services aimed at connecting people in new ways was asked about how she considers value. She answered just as the questions ended: "My motivation is not money at all, but only the value that the service may create for others".

This is further present in the previous mentioned architect's reflection below:

After she had been writing in a mail about her passion for the work she adds: "(...) I notice that the things that you engage yourself in actually make things happen".

To return to the question 'What gives meaning to the heart?' We argue that revelation offers more than 'meaning'; it also offers a spir-

itual presence that is beyond our control and that opens a room for contemplating the situation beyond the intuitive experience or the event. It takes both the suffering (passion) and the passion (love) and unites them - at least fragmentarily.

A final excerpt from another business owner may serve to illustrate this.

A former nurse was asked if there were any event that influenced her current focus in the service her business offered. She told that when her child became ill a number of years ago she heard about an alternative treatment abroad. Sitting on the plane towards the other side of the world she made a vow. If her child got well from the treatment she would tell about it and somehow give it further. The child recovered almost miraculously as she experienced it. Shortly after she left her old job and she started to educate herself abroad. She started her own practice and now she is also learning to give others the same treatment as her child received.

How is this little story linked to Tillich's revelation of the ground of our being as love?

The woman makes this vow in a situation of extreme distress of pain. However, this also becomes one of these decisive revelatory moments in life marked by the confluence of the abyss-like uncertainty of the situation and the love that creates a kind of double-sided knowledge that transcends pain and even transforms it into passion. It shows that, when they become grasped by their ultimate concern, people may be able to create a product or a service that is for the benefit of others, as she has done. This *fragmentarily revealed presence*, is a presence that is both linked to the history, the background and values of the business owner as well as embracing their present and the future that they anticipate for themselves, their work, and those their business will relate to.

Conclusion

Our initial question was how business owners might be able to know what gives meaning to the heart. As we have seen, some recent research has found that the heart might literally be the organ for

intuitive responses and thus vindicating the possible epistemological value of 'gut feelings'. Using Tillich's (Augustinian) understanding of *Eros* we found that knowledge of the heart was closely linked to a human quest for meaning, which might be revealed through culture and art. In accordance with a relational understanding of artwork as action and search for meaning we also found that through the way these business owners address their work even the everyday can become the locus of revelation. Knowledge of the heart is then intimately connected with this revelation. The reflections from business owners describe their experiences of gathering fragments into a whole against the background of a certain vision, the urge to give something beyond the ordinary, the experience of relating people in new ways, and the need to give healing to others. Through a certain kind of participation they thus become able to change things. Although we cannot develop this idea fully here, we also believe that these kind of experiences and outcomes also show the way to overcoming the division of fact and value in the sense of economic facts and personal values or between the 'value' that is reflected in a 'bottom-line' approach to business and an approach that looks more to personal fulfillment and social meaning.

The 'heart' thus reveals an intuitive knowledge that goes beyond self-interest and toward foresight and participation, revealing a presence that allows us to be creative in meaningful if fragmentary ways. It is a kind of intuition that may be seen as a lens through which to address and synthesise fact and value – and, via love, reveals how we might move beyond both in concrete action. This is one of the central contributions in this article which we hope have demonstrated one aspect of the relevance of a revelatory theology for our secularized times.

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Notes

- 1 20 of 22 respondents on this question answered in the high end of a 10 scale. These data has been collected as a part of Kristin F. Saghaug's Phd study and as a part of the European EU project KASK – WIB from 2009 to 2011
- 2 This does not mean that Tillich opposes science, it is vital for our knowledge and our society, (e.g., he was inspired by neuroscience) but his concern is that technical science should not go beyond its proper limits. (Tillich 1951)
- 3 This mirrors the dualism stemming from Descartes and Kant. In his own critical philosophy Kant tried to solve this conflict between nature, subjected to mechanical laws, and morality, determined by free will, by means of introducing the art experience as a possible locus of reconciliation in which intuitive knowledge by the artist (genius) would be able to link the person to a spiritual dimension. Beauty became a symbol for the moral good (Gadamer 2004;Mason 2003, Kant 1781 trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn <https://archive.org/stream/thecritiqueof-pur04280gut/cprn10.txt>).
- 4 For further on the Neo-Kantian movement look in (Staiti 2013).
- 5 This sense of Eros is, of course, distinct from contemporary sexualized connotations of eroticism.
- 6 Joseph Beuys (1921- 1986) was a German artist known also as a key figure in the student movement in the sixties. He approached life creatively in the sense that not just everyone was an artist but everything could, and even should be subjected to art. His perception of art was highly influenced by the idea of transforming the existing society e.g. at Documenta V 1972 with his work Office of Direct Democracy. Here he was present and discussing and explaining his ideas with the visitors for 100 days. Here he also stated that even "explanation is an art form" as well as he demands "creativity for every person" (Bodenmann-Ritter, 2007, p 189ff).