



Human rationality in Vito Mancuso's liberal Catholic theology augmenting the notions of Van Huyssteen's 'postfoundational transversality' and McGrath's 'rational consilience'

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Dates:

Received: 23 Feb. 2021
Accepted: 20 Apr. 2021
Published: 09 June 2021

How to cite this article:

Buitendag, J. & Simut, C.C., 2021, 'Human rationality in Vito Mancuso's liberal Catholic theology augmenting the notions of Van Huyssteen's 'postfoundational transversality' and McGrath's 'rational consilience', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42(2), a2222. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i2.2222>

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The cue for this article is *human rationality* being the cornerstone in Wentzel van Huyssteen's thinking, and Alister McGrath's scepticism about the feasibility of a postfoundational transversality in particular. This article does not intend to juxtapose Van Huyssteen's postfoundational rationality to McGrath's enterprise of a 'rational consilience' but contends that a transversal approach to rationality engages social ramifications as well. Subsequently, a liberal Catholic theologian's take on rationality is presented here as such an offering from the social sciences contributes to a bricolage of unintegrated pieces of knowledge and discernments emerging from various disciplinary or social viewpoints on reality. Vito Mancuso continues to focus on human rationality which, in his view, provides humanity with the hope of eternal life or life from the perspective of eternity. Such a conviction is in line with his horizontal understanding of human rationality, in addition to the human being's first challenge to understanding reality.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The *raison d'être* of this article is to call for a discussion partner to the notion of *human rationality* from the *social sciences* (indicated as one of the neglected fields in the theology and science discourse). Vito Mancuso, for one, brings the pragmatic and transformative (even revolutionary) dimension to the table. A transversal approach to rationality must integrate such social practices as well.

Keywords: Vito Mancuso; Alister McGrath; theology and science dialogue; Wentzel van Huyssteen; human rationality; post-foundational transversality; rational consilience.

Introduction

Towards the end of his seminal recent book, *The Territories of Human Reason: Sciences and Theology in an Age of Multiple Rationalities* (McGrath 2019), Alister E. McGrath observed that we experience our quotidian reality as an ontological unity; yet this view is anchored in an epistemological pluralism, offering us a 'bricolage' of unintegrated pieces of knowledge and discernments emerging from various disciplinary or social viewpoints on our reality, or scientific engagement with its multiple levels (McGrath 2019:222).

McGrath wants to get the point across that the fields of knowledge guiding us in our search for understanding reality are fragmented. No prism exists that does justice to this diversity when it comes to the *theology and science*¹ discourse. Models such as *conflict*, *contrast*, *contact* and *confirmation* have all proven to be dated (cf. Buitendag 2003:1031). Someone like John Haught has delineated the different approaches perhaps more aptly in a subtitle of one of his earlier books, that is, 'from conflict to conversation' (Haught 1995:4) and pleads for 'convergence' in a later publication, which could be interpreted in this enterprise of his, as (a sort of) 'consonance' (Haught 2012:4). But this proposal does not suffice either. Disciplines such as History,

1. We prefer the term 'theology and science' to 'religion and science', or even worse, 'science and religion'. Van Huyssteen asserts in this regard: 'Special attention needs to be given, for instance, not only to differences and apparent contrasts between science and religion, but also to the important distinction between religion and theology... Theology, in this reflective mode, may turn out to share more with scientific reflection than with mystical experience' (Van Huyssteen 1996:108; cf. 1996:125). Volf (2011:loc. 60) formulates this take aptly when he says: 'The contrast is rather between religious political pluralism and religious totalitarianism. The position I designate here as "religious political pluralism" emerged within Christianity, but it is not the Christian position.'

Note: Special Collection: Festschrift for Wentzel van Huyssteen.

Psychology and other social sciences have eclipsed these variegated views. Therefore, a more diverse and tangential approach is needed, which acknowledges the complexity of relationships, at least virtually or even metaphorically. A concept that has more potential to deal with this multiversality² is perhaps *resonance*, as introduced by Brown (2004). This approach could lead to a broader vision of reality than the views produced by either science or theology alone.³ The outdated ‘narrative of conflict’ is thus replaced with a ‘narrative of enrichment’ (McGrath 2019:12).

J. Wentzel van Huyssteen believes that the problem of rationality holds the key to understanding the forces that have shaped the radically different domains of theology and of the sciences: ‘It took me a long time’, Van Huyssteen (1999) said:

[T]o grasp that in trying to *understand* what scientific reflection is about, and in trying to *understand* what theological reflection is about, the answer lay hidden in the understanding itself. (p. 1)

For this, Van Huyssteen has coined the concept of ‘postfoundational rationality’, which is aptly formulated in the title of his contribution in an edited book: *Postfoundationalism in Theology and Science: Beyond Conflict and Consonance* (Van Huyssteen 1998).

Van Huyssteen (1999:21) is very clear that ‘the idea of rationality’, as it manifests in modernity’s philosophical discourse, is primarily the challenge and problem of current postmodernist thought. It is widely known that Van Huyssteen argued for a sort of ‘transversality’ of rationality when referring to the multileveled interactions of disciplines (Van Huyssteen 1999:135–139, 247–250). This leads convergently towards an ‘imagined vanishing point’ by creating a ‘transversal space’ where different voices can engage ingeniously (Van Huyssteen 2006:19). This imaginary plane ultimately transcends universality, and he gives much credit to Calvin Schragg in this regard (Van Huyssteen 2006:18–23).

Max Weber is renowned for his view of ‘rationalism’ based on the ‘deliberate and systematic adjustment of economic means’ to obtain fiscal profit and not on custom or tradition (Weber 2012:loc. 151). McGrath (2019:43) concurs with Weber’s influential role in developing a western rationality, arguing that social relationships have been commodified employing refined calculation techniques to obtain ‘rational control over both natural and social processes’ and subsequently, much emphasis on specialised knowledge. Despite a wide range of rationalities, McGrath concludes, ‘many scholars now recognise the multiple variations of modernity, its ongoing and innovative pluralisation and its lack of a normative notion of rationality’ (McGrath 2019:43).

²Valid ideas that physical reality is vastly larger than human perception of it, and that the perceived part may not be representative of the whole, exist on many levels and have a long history’ (Wilczek 2013:1).

³See a relevant article of the author in *HTS Theological Studies*, 2021 (yet to be released).

McGrath (2019:203–266) sought a solution to what he calls ‘rational consilience’, based on the naturalist Edward O. Wilson’s concept of ‘consilience’. This should produce according to McGrath ‘a network of relationships connecting the knowledge of various rationalities into a panoramic view of reality as humans have experienced it’ (Sharp 2020:3).

As a cue for the argument of the article, the authors take *human rationality* as the cornerstone in Wentzel van Huyssteen’s thinking, but in concurrence with McGrath’s (2019:44) scepticism of the feasibility of Van Huyssteen’s postfoundational transversality:

This point should be borne in mind when evaluating the ‘postfoundationalist’ proposal for theological rationality developed by Wentzel van Huyssteen, who locates his approach between modernity and postmodernity, aiming to avoid the difficulties arising from both. Not only does such an approach overlook the importance of distinct disciplinary rationalities, which are not easily mapped on to the proposed territories of modernity and postmodernity; it does not give due weight to the complexity of modernity, and its capacity to develop in divergent (though arguably correlated) manners, adapted to local cultural norms and situations. We need to speak of *modernities*, rather than a single *modernity*. (p. 44)

The notion of transversality, McGrath continues, is after all a heuristic concept that ‘creates imaginative space for affirming such multiple approaches, rather than a conceptual algorithm for calibrating their competing claims to authority, or the outcomes of their application’ (McGrath 2019:73).

The aim of the article is neither to contrast McGrath’s and Van Huyssteen’s understanding of human rationality nor to assess the validity of McGrath’s reading of Van Huyssteen, but to invite a discussion partner from the *social sciences* – indicated as one of the neglected areas in this discourse (McGrath 2019:76, 180, 215) – which brings the pragmatic and transformative (even revolutionary) dimension to the table of human rationality. A transversal approach to rationality must listen to social practices, which makes Vito Mancuso’s voice,⁴ Marxist or not, quite relevant. Human cognition is, therefore, both *embodied* and *embedded*.

Human rationality as horizontal-scientific understanding

Vito Mancuso defines rationality in connection with the fact that human beings are the most complex life forms known to human beings themselves. However, rationality is not only the human brain and its complexity; it is not even the reality of the human being’s superiority over other too complex forms of life.

⁴Vito Mancuso (born 09 December 1962 in Carate Brianza of Sicilian parents) is a doctor in systematic theology. Of the three academic degrees of the theological course, he obtained a Baccalaureate from the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy in Milan, a licentiate from the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy San Tommaso d’ Aquino in Naples and a doctorate in Rome from the Pontifical University Lateran. From 2013 to 2014 he was professor of History of Theological Doctrines at the University of Padua. Prior to this he was a professor of theology at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Vita-Salute San Raffaele University in Milan from 2004 to 2011. From 2009 to 2017 he collaborated with the newspaper *La Repubblica*.

What ultimately matters for Mancuso regarding the human being's rationality is its capacity to understand the world in which it is born – this is the horizontal aspect of human rationality. Human beings 'manage to understand the world'. This mental ability defines the very essence of rationality: human beings know what happens in the world, but they also know why things happen the way they do (Mancuso 2007:61).

Mancuso's methodology is contrary to that of traditional theology because it goes against Scripture and the Church. For instance, Corrado Marucci insists that human intellect should be enlightened by Scripture and the Church, not by its discoveries as claimed by Mancuso (Marucci 2008:264). Mancuso, however, is not interested in working with the methods of traditional theology. Consequently, he not only moves as far as possible from both Scripture and the doctrines of the church but also focuses exclusively on the human mind. For instance, he explains that human intelligence is not only a collective reality but also an individual manifestation of one's mind: some people are more intelligent than others; others have a different angle from which they understand the world when compared with similar individuals. What is expected, however, of human beings is that they should use their capacity to 'read the world' one way or another (Mancuso 2007:61).

The human being is a 'being', and it is the 'being' that manifests itself through the individual features of each human person to the point that what we call talents to define individuals in certain areas, such as 'music, literature, science, philosophy, law, economy, and many other ways' (Mancuso 2007:61–62). For Mancuso, it is essential to see rationality as the human mind's capacity to read and understand the material world in which human beings are born and exist during their lives. Such an exclusive focus on the human mind and its abilities to understand what happens in the world is in opposition to the teaching of salvation in traditional Christian quarters. For instance, Bruno Forte notices that Mancuso's thought ends up in the 'dissolution of Christian soteriology', because Mancuso's salvation appears to be only a 'quiet exercise in morality' (Forte 2008) and – one could add – intelligence. Or, in Forte's words, 'a self-redemption', the sort of salvation 'which does not come' to completion because it is based on human reason and human knowledge (Forte 2008).

Undeterred by such criticism, Mancuso continues to focus on human rationality which, in his view, provides humanity with the hope of eternal life or life from the perspective of eternity (Mancuso 2012:77). Such a conviction is in line with his previous works. One can identify a second feature of the horizontal aspect of human rationality and the human being's first ability to understand the world. Mancuso makes it clear that human beings understand the world as a natural environment for their existence and they do not only live in the world because they know what happens in it and why things happen in a certain way.

Whilst they live in the world, they as human beings also *transform* the world.⁵ In Mancuso's words: 'we understand the world and as we understand it, we also transform it' (Mancuso 2007:62).

Human rationality as vertical-religious understanding

Mancuso's perspective on the process of changing our lives through technical and scientific means points to what can be seen happening in the world when human beings use their minds. Rationality, however, is not an abstract idea but what we do notice is what human beings can do when transforming the world and thus changing their lives. It is not enough for human rationality and its use of science to evaluate the world by what David Deutsch calls 'the criterion of good explanation' (Deutsch 2012).

According to Mancuso, for the changing of lives to occur through the world's transformation, it is compulsory for human beings to see the reality of their existence in the world not only from the horizontal level of what happens in the world. What is needed for human rationality to be fully functional is to see the reality of technique as an instrument to transform the world and change human lives from a perspective from the above based on a vertical type of understanding. Such an endeavour requires consciousness. As William A. Tiller notices, there are 'different levels of consciousness in nature and our physical world reality' (Tiller 1977:88), which is consonant with Mancuso's conviction that people perceive the world in different ways. Resuming his perspective, understanding the world horizontally leads to transformation and change and this is what Mancuso calls 'life as hospital' (Mancuso 2011:47). It is at this horizontal level of understanding that we transform the world and change our lives to improve and repair, fix whatever is damaged to set it in motion again; it is as if we were in a hospital for recovery with the expectation that upon the restoration of health, new possibilities lie ahead of us for the future. There is a constant expectation for more within the horizontal perspective on life because, in this respect, human rationality deals with finitude and limitations, which it attempts to transcend through transformation and change mediated by technique (Mancuso 2011:47).

Human rationality, however, can move beyond the horizontal level of 'life as hospital' to the vertical level of 'life as a cosmic cathedral' (Mancuso 2011:47). This beautiful religious metaphor is masterfully crafted by Mancuso into a vision of human life as dominated by human reason acting in a servant-like manner. Thus, human reason is compared with a 'priest' who celebrates the wonder of human life in a 'liturgy of astonishment and gratefulness' (Mancuso 2011:47). This is Mancuso's way of saying that human rationality naturally moves beyond the horizontal dimension of

⁵This reminds of the words inscribed upon the grave of Karl Marx: 'The philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.' (Theses on Feuerbach. See <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm>). (Accessed on 21 February 2021). For the ecological ramifications of this statement, see Saito (2017).

understanding, transformation and change through technique to the vertical dimension of seeing human life *from above* as part of everything that exists. It should be said here that Mancuso's thought resembles Seneca's stoicism and especially, as highlighted by Frédéric Gros, his attempt to see human existence *from above* through the eyes of eternity (Gros 2019:23). Suppose the horizontal dimension is understandable by human reason; in that case, the vertical dimension – also investigated by reason – is open to 'mystery' because there are things in life that appear to escape the capacity of human reason to understand them fully. Therefore, as Mancuso puts it, human rationality presents the human being not only as *homo-sapiens-sapiens* (who horizontally reads, comprehends, translates, transforms and changes the world and his or her life through technique) but also as *homo religiosus* (who vertically accepts the mystery of life and its meaningfulness in the world despite its inherent limitations).

It is worth mentioning here that Mancuso's characterisation of the human being as *homo sapiens* and *homo religiosus* is not original. Still, it does reflect the multifaceted complexity of human existence, which Thomas J. Csordas also uses in a chain of similar descriptions including *homo faber*, *homo hierarchicus*, *homo loquax* and *homo ludens* (Csordas 1997:xi). In Mancuso, therefore, human rationality is the human being's capacity to avoid being crushed by its natural limitations as part of 'life as hospital' and, in so doing, to 'grab the wild beauty' of 'life as cosmic cathedral' (Mancuso 2011:49). Human rationality includes a scientific-horizontal perspective on human life and a religious-vertical take on the complexity of human existence in the world.

Human rationality as internal-psychological understanding

On the one hand, understanding human life horizontally and scientifically, as well as vertically and religiously, are two fundamental dimensions of human rationality as defined by Mancuso. There is, however, a third dimension of human rationality, which Mancuso presents in terms of interiority and appears to be governed by psychology, very much like James A. Harold's theory that human interiority is the locus of 'self-presence' and 'personal, intentional conscious experiences' (Harold 2016:104). Van Huyssteen concurs when he says that this discussion 'can only be adequately appreciated in terms of an experiential epistemology' (Van Huyssteen 1996:124). This is a clear indication that the human mind must not move only outwardly towards technique (what he knows) and religion (what he hopes) but also inwardly (what he is). Mancuso builds the argument of the interiority of human rationality from the vantage point of the human being's inability to understand his natural limitations fully. In the absence of a comprehensive understanding of who he is internally and psychologically, the human being is a slave; hence, Mancuso's presentation of the 'human being as prisoner' (Mancuso 2005:69).

Concretely, what Mancuso attempts to do here is to present the human being in the absence of an internal-psychological

knowledge as a 'prisoner of the world'. This phrase matches Alan Lightman's conviction that only the awareness of personal interiority allows the human being to escape the status of being 'prisoner of the world' (Lightman 2005:190). Most human beings think only of food, sex and relationships, in which case these three fundamental aspects of human life act as genuine 'chains' that enslave those who do not move beyond their natural role in sustaining the body and its life (Mancuso 2005:69). Even the best human beings who are deeply concerned with 'solidarity and social justice' can fail when it comes to an understanding of the natural role of food, sex and social life beyond their material reality and biological function to sustain life (Mancuso 2005:69).

Therefore, according to Mancuso human rationality must investigate the biological role of food, sex and social life and their meaning as part of human existence in the world. In the absence of a proper understanding of these three aspects of human life, they become chains that enslave people to the point that human rationality fails to investigate human freedom's genuine character. Consequently, human beings must learn to know themselves and accept food, sex and social life as 'natural goods' (Mancuso 2005:70), which serve a purpose, not the meaning of life. In this respect, Mancuso seems to move in the direction of Nigel Biggar's 'morally justified rights', which 'are aptly formulated by practical reason' and 'are justified by natural law' (Biggar 2020:14).

A genuine psychological investigation of these biological realities will reveal the fact that human beings must 'eat, make love, get busy in life, work, reproduce and move on' (Mancuso 2005:70). All these things should and must be done, and they must be done correctly, 'as nature demands' (Mancuso 2005:70). However, Mancuso is convinced that there is more to life than food, sex and relationships but in the sense that there is something beyond them. On the contrary, food, sex and relationships are the very essence of life, but they should not be done for one's own satisfaction. Genuine freedom is when one follows all these three aspects of life for the sake of others. Human rationality, therefore, teaches us that nature is neither good nor bad in itself; in the words of Kobus Krüger, 'nature is neither good nor evil as an inevitable feature or fate' (Krüger 2018:228). It is an 'open process' in which the human will or the human psyche in general, plays a crucial role (Krüger 2018:228). Food, sex and relationships are not bad or evil; they are the essence of human life as necessary components of human existence in the world. When used and abused for one's pleasure, they do become worse and may even lead to death but when used for others, they are not only pleasing but also beneficial because they serve a higher purpose (Mancuso 2005:70).

Human rationality as external-existential understanding

According to Mancuso, human rationality is the human being's capacity to understand human life not only horizontal-scientifically and vertical-religiously in outer

terms but also internal-psychologically from an inner perspective. However, these three components of human rationality lead to the fourth one, which combines the outer and the inner aspects of human life into what can be called the external-existential understanding of life. This perspective is a mixture of religion and psychology or what James M. Nelson identifies as 'a religion-psychology dialogue' (Nelson 2009:143). Mancuso sees it as a juxtaposition of what we can hope to be and what we know we are, in order to find meaning in life. At this point, Mancuso refers to Jesus Christ not only as a historical human being but also as an image of how the New Testament portrays him in antithetical terms (Mancuso 2002:176). In other words, human rationality tries to make sense of what we cannot know or what we do not know and what we would like to be starting from what we know about ourselves (cf. Leventhall 2009:79).⁶ In Mancuso's rendering, it is a 'dialectic' of 'thesis' and 'antithesis' (Mancuso 2002:176), a combination between the mystery of religion and the given of psychology.

Mancuso believes that this is where the image of Christ is beneficial. Why is that? Because as Christ is said to be both God and human, he combines religious aspirations and human limitations. However, religiously, this is too vague a definition and a relatively common attempt to keep together two human realities. For instance, David Max Moerman shows that the dialectic between human aspirations and human limitations is equally claimed by other world religions, such as Buddhism and Shintoism (Moerman 2005:234). This is the most complicated aspect of human rationality, namely its capacity to keep together claims that are naturally and rationally antithetical and even antagonistic. The best example in this respect is what Christianity presents in the New Testament as the 'incarnation of God in a human being' (Mancuso 2002:176).

Mystery and paradox are two concepts that illustrate what human rationality is and what are its capabilities. Concretely, human rationality is the human being's capacity to use human reason not only to outwardly read, understand, transform and change human life by inwardly understanding who human beings are in relationship to themselves but also to mysteriously accept and work with the paradox of life presented as divine and human at the same time.

This last aspect points to our existential aspirations that force us to move beyond the naturalism of food, sex and relationships into something that allows us to live for others. 'The plenitude of divinity' and 'the plenitude of humanity', as Mancuso explains, cannot exist in a rational combination. Therefore, he notices that human 'reason explodes' when it tries to make sense of this argument's impossibility (Mancuso 2002:177). Mancuso is undoubtedly right in this respect because even more traditional

⁶There are three aspects here: (1) what we cannot know, (2) what we do not know (but we could know) and (3) what we would like to be starting or based on what we know about ourselves. All these three aspects are investigated by human rationality.

approaches to theology, such as mysticism, deal with Christ's divinity and humanity in terms that are closer to mysticism rather than to rationalism, as plainly demonstrated by Edith Stein in her discussion about the incarnation of Christ (Stein 2002:523).

According to Mancuso, human rationality is the capacity to 'find the logic of antinomy' (Mancuso 2002:177) in a way that keeps mystery and paradox in an existential balance that is not contrary to reason. Moreover, Mancuso claimed that the mystery and paradox of Christ's incarnation of divinity into humanity may defy logic, but it is not contrary to it. William Wood confirms Mancuso's reflection from a traditionally orthodox and theistic standpoint (Wood 2021:295), which is simultaneously opposed to and consonant with Mancuso's understanding of the mysterious and paradoxical nature of the principle of (Christ's) incarnation. Thus, according to Mancuso, the beauty of human rationality is its capacity to keep mystery and paradox in balance and use them for higher purposes.

By focusing on Christ's example and living for others, human life is existentially meaningful if anchored in what he did. In Mancuso, human rationality is best expressed in this antagonistic nature of Christianity, which reveals the human being's capacity to keep together 'eternity and history, identity and difference, God's thinking and human thinking' in a 'symphony' characterised by love for others (Mancuso 2002:178–180).

Human rationality as understanding of truth

Loving other people is a possible human enterprise only if one lives authentically based on truth. Although Mancuso claims that truth is established through the right use of reason, which means that human reason can see the world as it is, without ideologies and superimposed teachings (Mancuso 2009:41), which appear to be a reference to ecclesiastical dogmas. Thus, human rationality consists of using reason without ideologies for the sake of truth to love others. Therefore, Mancuso postulates a very close relationship between truth and justice, a connection that implies a human effort to the point of personal sacrifice (Mancuso 2009:117–118). When truth and justice are connected through the mediation of individual action, and even with disregard for one's safety, one realises that life is a perpetual movement between what we are and what we hope to be, between what we see and what we do not.

Mancuso's presentation of life as part of the universe's complexity bears a striking resemblance to Emanuel Swedenborg's theosophical esotericism that places truth and justice in the heavenly realm of angels – most likely a reference to the transcendent nature of human truth and human justice (Swedenborg 1796:140–141). According to Mancuso human rationality presupposes the realisation of the fundamental fact that life moves but with

life truth also moves. This continuous movement of truth and life reveals the quality of life as good and authentic. Mancuso states that human rationality aims to achieve authentic life, good life, a life anchored in truth for the sake of justice and the well-being of others. Why is this important? Because, according to Mancuso, truth is a holistic concept that includes 'all the dimensions of human life' (Mancuso 2009:118), an aspect used by Lee Wilkins to explain how contemporary journalism connects 'emotion with fact' for a more comprehensive perspective on events with positives and negatives (Wilkins 2013:73). In other words, as Mancuso himself points out, truth includes the negativity of error and falsehood because it is a notion with universal applicability. Human rationality must consequently deal with the proper understanding of truth as apprehension of the world's reality to implement justice.

But doing what is just cannot be achieved without seeing the whole picture of reality. In this sense, truth is supernatural as per Mancuso, which means that the human spirit, or human reason, must work in such a way that we see truth as integrative, as a reality that includes good and evil, for the sake of loving others by doing justice (Mancuso 2009:118). Human rationality teaches that the supernatural character of truth does not work miraculously against physics laws but realistically within the laws of physics for the sake of promoting justice in the world. However, the world's reality must be seen and explained based on objective facts and a spiritual interpretation of these objective facts. In other words, truth is not just exactness but also justice, good and beauty (Mancuso 2009:119). Truth is the objectivity of the natural matter and the subjectivity of the human spirit. The human perspective is the aspect that differentiates between objective truth and subjective truth, as Dominguez (2020:78) argued and the reality that places them together – which is Mancuso's position (Mancuso 2009:119). Truth is objective and subjective and human rationality can work with this conceptual dichotomy. Why? Because in the absence of this dual perspective on truth as objective and subjective, justice cannot be meted effectively; so loving others becomes an impossible endeavour. Truth must be seen with the 'mind' and the 'heart' so that the finality of loving others by doing justice becomes a reality. In this respect, Mancuso is seconded by Lex Bayer and John Figdor, who argue against the existence of objective moral truth and in favour of truth seen as reality through the mediation of 'definitional truths', such as 'intellect, language, logic, and thought' (Bayer & Figdor 2014:81, 89). According to Mancuso, human rationality must understand truth in all its complexity by using the exactness of reason and 'the great intelligence of emotion and the great humility' of the spirit (Mancuso 2009:119).

Human rationality as understanding of life

The objectivity and subjectivity of truth that bring together the human reason and the human spirit disclose that human rationality can understand reality in all its complexity. For Mancuso, this indicates that human rationality can

understand life and all its facets. Mancuso's attempt to understand life in all its complexity appears to be supported by Yousuf Tahir Ali, who underscores the fact that life cannot be understood in the absence of understanding death and discovering the human soul (Ali 2019:5). According to Mancuso, however, understanding life can only be done if two fundamental aspects of human endeavours are considered, namely 'radical intellectual honesty' and 'the primacy of life' (Mancuso 2012:168).

Achieving this dual prospect is not easy. Human reason has the challenging task of investigating reality as truth in all its complexity; the resulting human rationality must include a comprehensive perspective on life that is essentially theological. What does Mancuso mean by referring to theology in the context of human rationality and its attempt to understand life? Because theology is the content of Christianity, the vehicle whereby the pursuit of truth for the sake of others through love has the chance to change the world for the better. Such a path towards understanding life is not distinctively to Theology, Philosophy and the humanities but also by the world of economics and business. For instance, Raj Kumar is convinced that billionaires have the potential and the capacity to change the world for the better, provided that they act as philanthropists (Kumar 2019:38).

Mancuso considers himself a Christian thinker and, although fundamentally atheistic in his convictions he nevertheless promotes the idea of a secularised Christianity, which has the enormous potential to help humanity if separated from ecclesiastical hierarchies and ancient dogmas (Mancuso 2012:172). To quote Mancuso, 'theology must free faith' from its 'doctrinal structure', which allows ecclesiastical control over people's lives. Christian theology must produce a specific sort of human rationality based on a 'dynamic-evolutionary conception of truth' promoting truth as good, not a 'static-doctrinal perspective' defending truth as doctrine (Mancuso 2012:172).

This is the very element which Mancuso's radical intellectual honesty consists of: namely that human rationality should appropriate a perspective on life, which equates truth with good. In this respect, Christian theology can help if liberated from traditionalism, hierarchy and the connection between sin and death. For Mancuso, such liberation, especially giving up the liaison between sin and death is essential to human rationality: death must no longer be the result of sin, but rather the consequence of biology (Mancuso 2012:177). Mancuso seems to adopt this rather crude biological perspective on death because this helps us understand and perhaps come to terms with our mortality; or, to the very least, as Rosalie Hudson tells us, it can 'mean' something 'for our own mortality' (Hudson 2003:67).

Truth should no longer be regarded as a doctrine, Mancuso contends, but as *life*. So, truth as life is the ultimate concern of human rationality and its very essence: obedience must no longer be given to the church or to traditional doctrines

or to any such external authorities, but to truth, seen as both objective and subjective in immediate connection with the materiality of nature and the constitution of human life as biological (Mancuso 2012:177). This is, according to Mancuso, the 'true kerygma' or the genuine 'good news' of the Christian Gospel: not that human beings are saved from sin in the reality of history, but the discovery and application of justice, even social justice, through the pursuit of the good.

This take on the Christian Gospel as espoused by Mancuso appears to be a perfect match to Confucianist political philosophy. Here is what Joseph Chan has to say about the pursuit of the good and the care for others in Confucianist thought: 'social justice provides an equitable economic foundation for the pursuit of the good life; in caring for others, whether the others are from one's own family or other families/social networks, benevolence is expressed and virtuous relationships are developed and sustained' (Chan 2014:177). This is what Mancuso also has in mind: human rationality presupposes a specific understanding of life as a practical application of justice through the active pursuit of the good, which is existentially based on 'trust in life' (Mancuso 2012:183). In Mancuso's opinion, if God is love and wants us to live eternally, then human rationality realises that, within the materiality of nature, we must trust life, do good and implement justice for the sake of the entire world.

Conclusion

Alister McGrath has an illuminating remark regarding the transformation of the world through 'intellectual culture' and 'natural sciences' that fits Mancuso. 'One of the most important elements of this transformation of intellectual culture', McGrath asserts, is possible through 'the emergence of the virtue of objectivity' (McGrath 2019:110).

Wentzel van Huyssteen's understanding of transversality embraces our embeddedness in specific contexts, which is more than 'mere belief' and like 'biological evolution' implies 'cultural evolution', which goes beyond Darwinism (Van Huyssteen 2006:98). Rational agents offer knowledge that is contextually shaped but not contextually bound (Van Huyssteen 2014:217).

Therefore, as there is a time and space for conversation and discourse, so there also is a time and space of action, of mood, of desire, and our experiences as "events of interpretation" are again always situated temporally and spatially. (Van Huyssteen 2014:219)

According to Mancuso, transforming the world – or to be more precise, the process whereby human rationality moves from understanding to transformation – is based on what Mancuso calls 'translation'. Human beings 'manage to translate' the world into two distinct realities: firstly, 'consolidated knowledge', and secondly 'concrete actions', which both 'become technique' (Mancuso 2007:62). In other words, human rationality is the capacity to know what and

why things happen in the world the way they do and the ability to transform the world through technical means and sciences. By using technique, human beings not only transform the world but they also change it – in most cases – for the better. Mancuso's optimism regarding the human being's capacity to change the world through technical transformation is grounded in this conviction that changing the world is synonymous with changing our lives; of course, for the better (Mancuso 2007:62).

Vito Mancuso brings the pragmatic and transformative (even revolutionary) dimension to the discussion table about human rationality by making it clear that a transversal approach to rationality must integrate social practices.

Loubser (2015:8) offered us a cue to loosen the Gordian knot of human rationality:

Transdisciplinary theologians are transdisciplinary because they engage real-world issues regarding faith, religion and spirituality by acknowledging the importance and validity of knowledge generated in other disciplines (academic or non-academic) and drawing on this knowledge in their specific context. (p. 8)

It has become clear that a transdisciplinary approach such as Mancuso's dealings with Physics, Philosophy and Psychology, coupled with van Huyssteen and McGrath's unique notions, augments understanding of theological inquiries into human rationality.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

The two authors contributed equally to the article. J.B. conceptualised and designed the framework within Van Huyssteen's rationality and McGrath's rational consilience. C.C.S. is a specialist on Mancuso's works and provided the material from his theology.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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