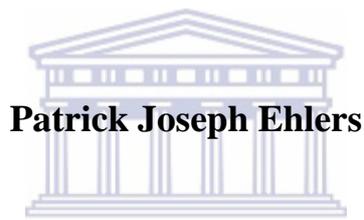


**A Comparison of the Views of Augustine Shutte and Thaddeus  
Metz on African Philosophy and Ubuntu Ethics**



A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in the Department of Religion and Theology, University of the Western Cape.

**Supervisor: Professor Christoffel Lombard**

**November 2017**

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## Declaration

I, Patrick Joseph Ehlers, hereby declare “A comparison of the views of Augustine Shutte and Thaddeus Metz on African philosophy and Ubuntu ethics” is my work, and that it has not been submitted before in any other institution for degree purposes, and that all the resources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Signed .....

November 2017



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## Abstract

### A COMPARISON OF THE VIEWS OF AUGUSTINE SHUTTE AND THADDEUS METZ ON AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND UBUNTU ETHICS

In the theoretical study of Ethics much emphasis has traditionally been placed on established ethical theories, via approaches typified e.g. as deontological, divine command, utilitarian, virtue ethics and natural ethics. At UWC all these approaches, very much entrenched in the Western academic canon, have been taught, together with ethical views carried by the world religions. Over the last few years, however, an interest in the study of African ideas (philosophy, theology, worldview studies, especially around the elusive but fascinating concept of Ubuntu) has grown. This study is an attempt to make a contribution towards a more serious exchange with African ethical ideas and their application in a global context.

In this mini-thesis I **compare** the views of two academics, Augustine Shutte and Thaddeus Metz, who have actively and deliberately worked in the field of African philosophy and ethics. Through this comparative study of two rather different readings of Ubuntu philosophy, I wish to contribute to the growing interest in ethical views and discourse emanating from African ways of looking at the world and at humanity. The well-known, recently deceased, Augustine Shutte, a Catholic scholar of repute, taught Philosophy at the University of Cape Town, and published books such as *Philosophy for Africa*, *The Mystery of Humanity*; *Ubuntu, An ethic for a New South Africa* and *The Quest for Humanity in Science and Religion, The South African Experience*. The other scholar, the American born philosopher Thaddeus Metz, started teaching Philosophy at the University of Johannesburg and shifted his intellectual attention to African ideas and ethics. Coming from a rational Kantian approach, mixed with utilitarian ethical concerns, Metz discovered the difficulty of adding another “African mix” to main stream academia, based on the comprehensive scope of the very inclusive look at what it means to be human in the quite unique African worldview. He has published widely and in depth on many aspects of this “clash of cultures” while also holding on to enlightenment ideals and an ongoing conversation with science, especially also social science. These two authors thus share many concerns and interests, but also represent two different angles and approaches into African philosophy and ethics.

The question for this limited study is formulated in the short introduction: How do Shutte and Metz *connect* the ethical implications of a widely shared “African worldview” with the core idea of Ubuntu, and which *ethical implications* do they draw from their reading of Ubuntu – for Africa and the world?

These questions are addressed via five chapters: In the first an introduction to the research focus and question and the second of these the field of African Philosophy and Ethics is briefly covered via appropriate literature, thus providing a framework for comparing Shutte and Metz. The third chapter deals with Shutte’s search for an Ubuntu approach to South Africa’s problems within the African and global context - via his emphasis on an inclusive anthropology of caring and justice in which the pitfalls of individualism, materialism and consumerism can be avoided while promoting a sustainable work ethos and attunement with “science”. The fourth chapter focuses on Metz’ critical deontological approach, and his attempt to take the comprehensive African worldview seriously in conversation with utility, reason and science. In the fifth chapter the comparison of these two overlapping, but still quite different with an approach that can lead to a concrete ethical conclusion and application for South Africa, Africa and the world.

## Key words

Philosophy

Ethics

African philosophy

Western Philosophy

Ubuntu

Religion

Science

Secular

Humanity

African

Western

South Africa

Individual

Community



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 The focus of the study

In general this thesis will explore the *ethical implications* of the central tenets of *African philosophy*<sup>1</sup>, via the concept of *Ubuntu*<sup>2</sup>, for a common and shared humanity. It will focus on the anti-individualist, anti-materialist, anti-reductionist and anti-dualist implications of a generally shared African worldview, popularly known as “Ubuntu”. The purpose of the investigation is to assess what kind of contribution an inclusive anthropology (as propagated by *Augustine Shutte*<sup>3</sup> in his metaphysical analysis of Ubuntu, and as critically assessed within the enlightenment mode of philosophy (Kant, Utilitarian thinking) as practised by *Thaddeus Metz*<sup>4</sup> can make towards the quest for a more inclusive philosophy. This means a philosophy that can avoid one-sided accents (on the individual, matter, success and instant gratification) that have been identified as pitfalls within mainstream Western philosophy. This study will thus focus on the reading and assessment of Ubuntu philosophy by comparing two non-African philosophers (in the strict sense of the word), the late Catholic (Aristotelian-Thomist) theologian and philosopher, Augustine Shutte, and the analytical secular philosopher from Cornell University in the USA, Thaddeus Metz, who has been teaching Philosophy at Johannesburg University since 2004. We want to see how they agree or disagree on African principled thinking and Ubuntu, which actually reacts to one-sided perspectives in Western philosophy. We are also interested in the ethos which they see in African thinking, which leads to an alternative understanding of the human, and what is good for all humans.

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<sup>1</sup> African Philosophy, which also relates to the term “Ubuntu” and Shutte, explains that, “in English this is equivalent to humanity, understood as a moral notion referring to a general quality of character, of attitude or behaviour or way of life” (Shutte, 1995: vi).

<sup>2</sup> “Ubuntu as a ‘human quality’, and a phenomenon (for instance a philosophy, an ethic, African humanism, or, a worldview) according to which persons are interconnected” (Gade, 2012: 484).

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Augustine Shutte was a member of the Philosophy Department at UCT from 1972 to 2003, and has been an Honorary Research Associate since then. He was Chairman of the Philosophy Society from 1982 until 1986. (He taught philosophy at UCT since 1972, died in the early morning of Monday 23rd May 2016) [See more at:](#)

<http://www.philosophy.uct.ac.za/philosophy/society/history/anniversarybooklet/shutte#sthash.fCPkKfXE.dpuf>

<sup>4</sup> Prof Metz hails from the United States, where he received his PhD from Cornell University in 1997. He relocated to South Africa in 2004, when he joined the Philosophy Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 2009, he became Professor (Research Focus) at the University of Johannesburg. – See more at: <http://www.uj.ac.za/EN/Faculties/humanities/departments/philosophy/people/Pages/ThadMetz.aspx> Access on: 20015-10-01

In this study we cannot omit the enquiry into African human culture and custom, focussing on how the individual upholds himself/herself in African culture and the benefits of a *positive anthropology*<sup>5</sup>. This study of African indigenous ways of life can be justified in today's globalized world, because of the strong emphasis (vis-à-vis the extreme individualism in Western thinking) on a life in community with others, and an inclusive constructive engagement with all others. Through the academic material Shutte and Metz provided we are able to identify the special contribution Ubuntu is making, validated or critiqued by other philosophers interested in African philosophy and ethics. Their active engagement allows them to become more like insiders, speaking a philosophical language which can relate to an African philosophical language in spite of their own roots.

## 1.2 The Rationale of the Study

I was personally intrigued to discover that there have been several investigations launched by non-African scholars, into the deeper and intrinsic human values embedded in Ubuntu philosophy. Two of them, Shutte and Metz, have engaged in important debates on the merits and demerits of Ubuntu - a worldview which is defined as a special quality of being human in community, and also referred to as African humanism.

During 1993, when **Augustine Shutte's** '*Philosophy for Africa*' was published, South Africa still did not have its first free elections and it was world renowned for *Apartheid*. This book was part of Shutte's philosophical engagement with an African culture addressing the challenges of the past, and where South Africans found themselves as a divided nation. Shutte was dedicated to this philosophical course, in ascertaining that Ubuntu can definitely contribute to the struggle of a new South Africa. Shutte was working hard in expressing himself in both philosophy and faith, because during 1993 as well he published, *The Mystery of Humanity: A New Conceptual Framework for Christian Faith*, which gives much clarity on his philosophy in engaging with concepts of faith.

In 2001 Shutte released his third book, *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa*, in essence to assess his positive expectation about Ubuntu philosophy as a way into a common life for all in South Africa. In a world context, he argued that this notion does compliment Western ethical notions of individualism and illustrated in this book how these notions can be shared in order to bring about an appreciation for human dignity to develop a just and humane

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<sup>5</sup> Positive anthropology would create social contributions that promote best practices and well-being.

society. In my research I have noticed that a large number of writers referred constructively to Augustine Shutte's books, *Philosophy for Africa, Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa* and the book he edited in 2005, *The Quest for Humanity in Science and Religion: The South African Experience*, as well as essays in numerous books, and articles, which make his work ideal for further research in African thought. Shutte said, that, "No tradition of thought has everything, but I hope to show that the central ethical ideas of Europe and Africa are complimentary to each other" (Shutte, 2001:33)

Turning to **Thaddeus Metz**, his central work on African moral theory was released in 2007, where he addressed African traditional ethical and moral theories, published in the *South African Journal of Philosophy*. He started off with this paper in his analytical philosophical method, "The Motivation for 'Toward an African Moral Theory'" followed by the main paper, "Toward an African Moral Theory" where he applied some dominant Western theories of Hobbesian egoism and the Kantian respect for persons. In defence of his 'theory' Metz wrote, "Ubuntu as a Moral Theory: reply to Four Critics", during the same year, in which he responded to questions and criticisms. Major topics he addressed, included: "What bearing the objectivity of moral value should have on cross-cultural moral differences between Africans and Westerners; whether a harmonious relationship is a good candidate for having final moral value; etc." (Metz, 2007b:369). Metz also wrote extensively on various topics in areas such as Ubuntu ethics, human rights; cross-cultural moral philosophy; ethics and AIDS; dignity; moral education; political transformation; global social policy and global justice, etc.

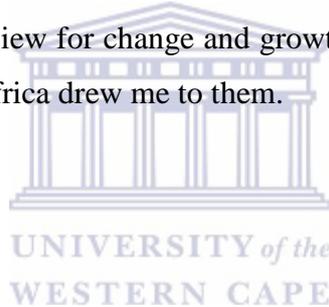
The research interest in African ethics and Ubuntu, is related to issues around moral values particular to South Africa, hence the choice of comparative views of these two scholars/philosophers connected to ethics regarding South Africa. In doing so, we do not only pay attention on how they are similar or may differ, but also to find a synthesis which may be of value, to an ethic for our current South African diverse culture. The question of "why Ubuntu" will be answered through the fact that it serves as a major ethical notion in African philosophy. For my 'Honours Research Essay' I wrote on the life and contribution of the Anglican Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu<sup>6</sup>, titled: "Tutu's Ubuntu Philosophy for

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<sup>6</sup> Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. In 1995, President Nelson Mandela named him as Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Retired as Archbishop of Cape Town, in South Africa, in 1996. Today he is Chair of The Elders. In 2009 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Barack Obama.

*Social Transformation*”. This work on Tutu’s Ubuntu theology serves well in honouring the value of a moral sage like Tutu, insofar as a social and religious study is concerned, but it lacks the theoretical embeddedness needed in a more serious research process.

Both Shutte and Metz are attempting to conjoin African and Western thought with their different traditions and ethical rationale, which in itself is new. New, to the degree that not much was done about philosophical and ethical ideas in South Africa, because Apartheid, isolation and exclusion very much kept African philosophy and Western philosophy apart. In this new South Africa we can also not just look at the ethic of the religious other, but also to the secular concept which makes my study convenient to use Shutte and Metz’s opposing, yet harmonizing views. Like Tutu, Shutte is supportive of an absolute dependence on God and others, and this ‘other’ also include the a-religious, like for example, Metz. In essence, just like Tutu’s Ubuntu theology and philosophy was instrumental in the Apartheid clashes with the African and the European culture and tradition, Shutte and Metz also use the means of Ubuntu as an African worldview for change and growth. Their notable contributions to philosophy in the New South Africa drew me to them.



## **Chapter 2: Background Orientation in African Philosophy and Ethics**

### **2.1 The Context of the study**

#### **2.1.1 The South African historical, political and ethical context**

South African citizens are currently dealing with a problematic past, which is calling for ethical commitments from them, in order to realise what is valuable and meaningful in life. A deeper understanding of human and social issues, and the current ethical situation in South Africa on how materialism and greed are destroying the moral fabric of South Africa, is needed. The communal culture has been changed by individualism, materialism and greed. An individual may make decisions on her own out of free will about herself and how his decision affects community, but a community who makes decisions, collectively validated decisions, acts on a collective wisdom and consensus. These ethical problems will be studied and researched from a native African understanding, and assessed on its contributions to humanity, in particular on a common humanity. This common humanity, or Ubuntu, is expressed in how the historical African society influenced the person positively. What is that within Ubuntu that avoids conflicts and can bring about justice and peace? Ubuntu teaches true humility and respect which will be of great value if professed and implemented properly. For a proper moral formation and development of character, we will have to address differences, but in a just manner without prejudice and stereotypes. We will need to focus on a form of socialization (in which we collectively can learn more about one another's values, attitudes and attributes) relevant to our situation.

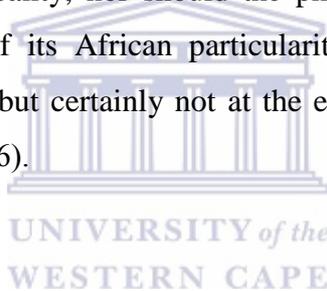
#### **2.1.2 The context of African ideas**

To compare the views of Shutte and Metz, we shall approach their assessment and use of Ubuntu via their views on African philosophy, anthropology and ethics.

##### **2.1.2.1 Philosophy**

Shutte and Metz illustrated a clear distinction between faith and reason, where Shutte is theocentric, leaning more towards faith and the supernatural side for obvious theological reasons, and Metz, anthropocentric and an analytical philosopher, steered more towards reason and the naturalistic view, for normative a-religious reasons. For more clarity on the

faith aspect, the explanation African philosopher and Catholic theologian Maurice M. Makumba<sup>7</sup>, in his book ‘Introduction to Philosophy’, is helpful in that he argues that philosophy is the only free science defining a philosophical thesis based on truth of *faith*, and truth of *reason*. Due to the flexibility provided by an approach that also emphasises the relative independence of both faith and reason, we can now anticipate proper integration objectively with other philosophies in general. To confirm this, Makumba stated: “A philosophy cannot afford to pretend to be impervious to any influence under whatever circumstance. Western philosophy needs to encounter other philosophies with an openness of mind” (Makumba, 2005:9). Both Shutte and Metz share the same sentiment in their literature, hence their effort to explore African and Western philosophy in union without decreasing the significance of either. Makumba is doing justice to this view of “different philosophies” when saying in his *Introduction to African Philosophy, Past and Present*: “In the definition of African philosophy, one should not insist on the Africanity of thought to the detriment of its philosophicality, nor should the philosophicality of the thought be stressed to the utter neglect of its African particularity. The particularity of African philosophy needs to be sought but certainly not at the expense of the universal spirit of philosophy” (Makumba, 2007:36).



### 2.1.2.2 African Virtue

On “virtue and morality” Professor Benezet Bujo<sup>8</sup> said: “African Ethics does this on its own fashion, in that the community plays an active role in shaping a meaningful moral life”. He elaborates: “A consideration of virtue is an essential element in our reflection on *African anthropology* (culture). It can readily be imagined that a moral theology of virtue in this context will not look the same as in the Aristotelian-Thomistic context” (Bujo, 2003:44-45). Focussing on this discourse and the stances Aristotelian-Thomistic of Shutte, we do see shared similarities within African ethics and, in so doing, also with communitarianism. Bujo explains Black African anthropology, as the supernatural in relation to the natural or world ethos. “Despite this relationship between the natural and the supernatural, the two realities are seen as two distinct entities, and precisely this is an important difference between the Western view and Black African anthropology” (Bujo, 2003:123).

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<sup>7</sup> Maurice Muhatia Makumba was born 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1968. He obtained his doctorate in Philosophy from the Pontifical Holy Cross University in Rome. On 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2010, he was ordained Bishop of Nakuru Diocese in Kenya.

<sup>8</sup> Benezet Bujo is a Professor of Moral Theology and Ethics at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland.

### 2.1.2.3 Ethics

The application of ethics in government, religion, education and in society at large, which will directly influence family and individuals, is of great value and conducive to positive growth, harmony and peace. “The practical task of ethics in a South African context is to critically evaluate the different institutional milieus in which human life is lived, namely those of family, language, gender, education, work, recreation, healthcare, government and religion, considering the actual institutions themselves, the practices associated with them and the way in which they are understood and justified. In each case, one will be asking how far personal growth and community are fostered or hindered by them, that is, whether they are genuinely liberating or not” (Shutte, 2008:34). This statement of Shutte is actually a rebuttal to Metz’s assumption that African ethics and Ubuntu is too other-orientated.

The ethical concepts of “goodness” and love are both profound in the world of the religious and the secular, therefore the debate on how these concepts relate to Shutte and Metz’s schools of thought may be illuminating. Our attention is thus focusing on how two African philosophers like **Shutte** (a theist) using the interplay of faith and reality, and **Metz** (a non-theist) with an African normative principle, are making sense of Ubuntu in a modern African context. Regarding reason in Ethics, Shutte said: “The definition of human beings as rational animals was the foundation of the most highly developed ethical system Greek philosophy produced, namely that of Aristotle, Plato’s student. Ethics, for Aristotle, was the study of how to develop our human nature to the full so as to be able to live the most truly fulfilling and satisfying life” (Shutte, 2001:38-39). Metz again focuses on what he referred to as “the most fundamental intrinsic moral good” as “a certain kind of harmonious relationship”. “This sort of relationship is what English speakers by and large mean by ‘friendship’ or a broad sense of ‘love’, which is an intuitively attractive and underdeveloped foundation for morality” (Metz, 2007a:334). Obviously Metz is not referring to the same kind of love as what Shutte would refer to, the kind of ‘love’ (Agape<sup>9</sup>) of which the Catholic nun Mother Teresa<sup>10</sup> says, love is what defines a Christian. We will however see similarities in African

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<sup>9</sup> Agape, Greek agapē, in the New Testament, the fatherly love of God for humans, as well as the human reciprocal love for God. The term necessarily extends to the love of one’s fellow man. Accessed: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/agape> 2017-10-29

<sup>10</sup> Mother Teresa, in full St. Teresa of Calcutta, also called St. Mother Teresa, original name Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu (baptized August 27, 1910, Skopje, Macedonia, Ottoman Empire [now in Republic of Macedonia]—died September 5, 1997, Calcutta [now Kolkata], India; canonized September 4, 2016; feast day September 5), founder of the Order of the Missionaries of Charity, a Roman Catholic congregation of women dedicated to the poor, particularly to the destitute of India. She was the recipient of numerous honours, including the

and Western (Christian) concept of love for God and one another. Hence, my disagreement with Metz's understanding of love which he claims is rather sympathetic. Ubuntu also contains empathy and numerous virtues which needs to be elaborated within a bigger research in order to do the concept of Ubuntu justice. So his following statement rather needs consideration. "Consider, now, that friendliness (or love) has not grounded any influential contemporary ethical theory, conceived as a principle that purports to capture what all wrong (or, conversely, right) actions have in common. The dominant players have been utilitarianism, Kantianism, contractualism, egoism, divine command theory and virtue theory" (Metz, 2014:71).

Like Shutte, Metz also theorises on Aristotle's concept of *Eudaimonia*<sup>11</sup> in terms of virtues and values in saying: "My aim, however, is to highlight the more glaring respects in which Aristotle's views differ from some characteristic African ones. I clarify the respects in which the latter are exclusively "communitarian" and how such a perspective is inconsistent with some core "individualist" elements of Aristotle's ethics. I also argue that Afro-communitarianism is, relative to Aristotle's view, implausible as an account of ethics, in the sense of a complete reckoning of what makes for a good human life, although it remains extraordinarily promising as an account of morality, in a more limited, modern sense qua rightness" (Metz, 2012:100). The research will seek to indicate and query points between these two South African philosophers in revealing the value of African philosophy and ethics in South Africa; also how their theorizing inter-act with, and challenge other prominent African philosophers. One such philosopher is Mogobe B. Ramose who with others explores and critiques the work of Shutte and Metz, in various sources which will be referred to in the thesis. With these theories we can see how philosophy proves to be an independent science and a discipline for searching ultimate causes and expressing its relevance for research in the present day.

## 2.2 The Relevance of the study

The debate on Ubuntu philosophy has been challenging and full of obstacles. The intention of this study is to address the question about what Ubuntu thinking can contribute to *World Philosophy*. What does it see as being missing in the secular and Western way of living and

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1979 Nobel Prize for Peace. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mother-Teresa> Accessed: 2017-10-29, 9:30.

<sup>11</sup> Eudaimonia is a Greek word commonly translated as happiness or welfare; however, "human flourishing" has been proposed as a more accurate translation.

what ethical values can be derived from it in order to boost a World Philosophy for the future. “Ubuntu is the root of African philosophy. The be-ing of an African in the Universe is inseparably anchored upon ubuntu. Similarly, the African tree of knowledge stems from ubuntu with which it is connected indivisibly. Ubuntu then is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology. If the latter are the bases of philosophy, then African philosophy has long been established through ubuntu. Our point of departure is that ubuntu may be seen as the basis of African philosophy” (Ramosé, 1999:49). Furthermore, we can add that taken from the origins and roots of mankind, its values and principles can be traced like the human gene pool, and the culture from the cradle of mankind out of Africa. These conceptions give an African philosophy or Ubuntu, its core and strength as an original and genuine phenomenon.

## 2.3 Literature review

### 2.3.1 Augustine Shutte

Shutte is outlining a philosophical conception of humanity in expressing, that “two crucial points of similarity between contemporary Thomist philosophy<sup>12</sup> and traditional African thought can be found in the conviction that human persons transcend the realm of the merely material, and also that in order to develop as persons we need to be empowered by others” (Shutte, 1993a:9). Thomas Aquinas used the translated writings acquired from Muslim philosophers in North Africa, of Aristotle, a non-theist Greek philosopher, to the disgust of his fellow theologians and the authorities in Rome. Their question regarding this scandal was: “How was it possible to express and explain the sacred doctrines of the faith by means of the concepts of a pagan and atheist philosopher?” (Shutte, 1993b:13) Shutte had similar objections in using an African concept of philosophy in context with Western and Christian philosophy.

Through examining Aristotle and Aquinas he could proof value of wisdom and tradition beneficial for today’s philosophy, politics and engaging with science. Shutte explained that, due to the fact that we were so divided racially, culturally and demographically through history it will now be a major task to bring together all those things that apartheid forced

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<sup>12</sup> Thomistic Philosophy is inspired by the philosophical methods and principles used by Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274), a Dominican Friar and Theologian, in his explanation of the Catholic faith. Aquinas, who is most renowned for his Five Ways of Proving the Existence of God, believed that both **faith** and **reason** discover truth, a conflict between them being impossible, since they both originate in God. In <http://www.aquinasonline.com/> downloaded 2016-03-10, 11:00.

apart. In introducing the book he edited, *The Quest for Humanity in Science and Religion: The South African experience*, he says this about our current situation and experience in South Africa: “The scientific secular culture of Europe and the traditional religious culture of Africa, the dominant culture and the culture of the majority, did not interpenetrate and mingle as they did elsewhere. What we now have, therefore, is a situation where we are engaged, in every sphere of life, in inter-cultural contact, conversation and conflict” (Shutte, 2006: xiii).

Shutte also defines the relationship between the European philosophy and our African Ubuntu as such: “European culture has taught us to see the self as something private, hidden within our bodies. The African image is very different: the self is *outside* the body, present and open to all” (Shutte, 2009:90). This means a person cannot be a person by himself, but only in relation to others. In regard of such a culture, Shutte illustrates convincingly why Africans who are living under such a consciousness becomes frustrated<sup>13</sup> and angry as a whole against injustices and inequalities. This we could see clearly, first during our Apartheid past, secondly via the current political turmoil over property (land claims), industry (inequity), corruption (bad governance) and lately in education, for example the “Fees must fall” drive which had damaging effects. The Defiance Campaign and successful ‘Nonviolent Resistance’ showed numerous positives, but unfortunately after this came some negatives, such as rioting, looting and vandalism, which are rather self-seeking, and which are not conducive to values of Ubuntu.

This type of political morality is a result of poor design in leadership structure and procedure. We are having a strong and hardworking Civil Society which unfortunately are misled by an unethical leadership in government. The Reverend Smangaliso Mkhathshwa commented on *Ubuntu, An Ethic for a New South Africa*, that: “It is a contribution for overcoming what our President (then Thabo Mbeki) has called the ‘moral vacuum’ that presently threatens South Africa” (Shutte, 2001). Shutte, also in his 1993 book, *Philosophy for Africa*, cover deep-seeded issues affected by this moral dilemma, in addressing education, work, religion and gender.

In education Shutte was a real teacher and communicator who always leave his students or audience with some insightful and valued teaching. Shutte’s type of project is now an attempt to bring together what Apartheid kept apart, in conjoining two philosophies to

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<sup>13</sup> Shutte explains: “The need, and the deep, often-hidden desire, to develop as a person is nevertheless part of our human nature ... So it persist , in each of us, in a greater or lesser frustration” (Shutte, 1993b:56)

develop a new way of ethical thinking for a broken nation in the process of healing. The true African philosophy has ethical values deeply embedded in it, which need not be lost, but need to be revisited and reawakened through virtuous persons and an unselfish community.

We are living in a dominantly Western (European) culture, especially in South Africa with little to no access to historically documented literature which covers African thought and culture. My first encounter with such literature was with that of Augustine Shutte, he did much justice to the field of African studies and writing. Although a white South African, he expressed himself professionally and with *simplicity*, to make it possible for academic and lay persons to grasp, which did not leave much room for unhelpful critique.

Unlike the Western way of life, of individualism, the African way of life in community, brings about more balance and moderation. One of the meanings of the word Ubuntu is 'humanity', and as Shutte said: "The concept of Ubuntu embodies an understanding of what it is to be human and what is necessary for human beings to grow and find fulfilment. It is an ethical concept and expresses a vision of what is valuable and worthwhile in life" (Shutte, 2001:2). Shutte states that traditional African thought and action is based on ideas, expressed in Zulu and Sotho, as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*: persons depend on persons to be persons, and *seriti* (life-force). Although the English meaning of the latter expression, *seriti*, (we are living in the shadow of one another), is dignity and integrity, it goes beyond that. It is how people are true to themselves and others in caring and sharing, not living in isolation and in being self-centred. "The first expression, which can be translated to mean that a person is a person through other people, presents us with the distinctive idea of community that underlies so much of African culture, traditional practices and institutions" (Nicolson, 2008:27).

Shutte wrote and published widely, and on his book, '*Philosophy for Africa*', Archbishop Emeritus of Durban, Denis E Hurley said: Shutte's book "is a valuable contribution to the African intellectual and moral scene at a time when we desperately need such contributions, particularly in South Africa". Shutte illustrates that the paradox of freedom-in-dependence does indeed express an important truth about human nature: "And the fact that individual freedom is known to depend on personal relationships with others for its exercise, growth and fulfilment provides us with an alternative to both an individualistic and a collectivist approach to society and politics" (Shutte, 1993:9-10).

To Shutte human development and fulfilment is of cardinal importance for all and not just the significant others, but also, as he states: in understanding personal community. In, ‘*An Ethic for a New South Africa*’ he says: “It is in belonging to the community that we become ourselves. The community is not opposed to the individual, nor does it simply swallow the individual up; it enables each individual to become a unique centre of shared life” (Shutte, 2001:9). As human beings we have a sense and a need for belonging, this is what makes us human, to love, share and give support to one another. Shutte sees this as each individual’s fundamental duty to live in good community with others.

Regarding ‘Ubuntu’, a term and word which is many times misused and used out of context he said: “The morality of Ubuntu is intrinsically related to human happiness and fulfilment. It is something derived from our nature as human persons, not something merely conventional or simple obedience to the arbitrary norms of society. Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So although the goal is personal, selfishness is excluded” (Shutte, 2001:30). When we become more fully human, we see humanity in others no matter how bad or neglected this person may be. We will find the desire to get closer to the unfortunate and troubled people of society. Feeling their pain and need, with compassion and love. This will make us more pragmatic in our approach to others and open ourselves up in finding joy in helping and supporting each other. In the literature on Shutte we can see the importance of him quoting the proverb “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, when saying: “The traditional African idea of the extended family as something that includes far more than parents and children, is perhaps the most common and most powerful protection of the value of *ubuntu*” (Shutte 1993a: 157). In a deeper and intimate way he said: “Breathing together they have one breath, one spirit, one heart. A community is a unity of a uniquely personal kind” (Shutte, 2001:27).

My literature review for Shutte is less analytical than that of Metz, because of Shutte’s simplicity and Metz’s more complex and analytical approach to African moral theory. Also note that for literary reasons I will also refer to Shutte whilst engaging with Metz’s literature.

### **2.3.2 Thaddeus Metz**

Metz, like Shutte also sees ‘Ubuntu’ as an asset and that an ‘African Moral Theory’ is grounded in ‘Ubuntu’. In a final comment, defining his motivation for a symposium devoted to “*Toward an African Moral Theory*”, he is saying: “... it also would not sufficiently assist

me to be given a list of the particular values often associated with Ubuntu, e.g., generosity, compassion, forgiveness, empathy, respect, dignity, equality, brotherhood, humanism, equal consideration, a spirit of oneness, unity”. He explains that: “These values, as they stand, are vague and, furthermore, can appear contradictory” (Metz, 2007a:332). How do we measure compassion and forgiveness? Perpetrators and offenders have different worldviews, which make matters complicated, as to act in whose favour or towards whose detriment. Here is where the true sense of Ubuntu makes a difference in community, where people can restore one another’s humaneness without measure, as Shutte is trying to bring complex realities under a less complicated heading.

Professor Mogobe Ramose,<sup>14</sup> who is a world renowned scholar on African thought and who partook in a colloquium with Metz and fellow academics, referred to Shutte’s ‘Philosophy for Africa’, critically, as contributions towards African moral values that are becoming more important in our globalized society. Ramose’s observations on and examination of Ubuntu acted like a catalyst in the works of Shutte and Metz, and raised many eyebrows in the academic field of African thought.

In his reply to and critique of Metz’s *Toward an African Moral Theory*, Ramose explained profound differences in Metz’s own viewpoints on African and Western morality. He says: “The fundamental problem then is that Metz fails to discern the philosophic character of *ubuntu* as –ness as incomparable with the many Western –isms to which he has referred” (Ramose, 2007:352). When we deliver a critique on someone’s work, we have to see everything in context and give a calculated reply without being biased or overly pessimistic. Everybody needs to be heard with dignity and respect, that way we will receive and foster more support and harmony.

Metz is not at all impressed with the critique of Ramose, when he says, “I feel lucky to be able to reply since he is the most critical of the commentators”. Metz raises three issues: “First off, Ramose claims that in seeking a single moral principle, I am implicitly after ‘immutability, essentiality and eternity’ which, in turn, is a matter of ‘absolutism and dogmatism’”. On the second issue Metz said: “A moral theory counts as ‘African’ for me insofar as it is informed and defended by beliefs that are common among people in sub-

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<sup>14</sup> Mogobe B. Ramose is Professor Extraordinaire in Philosophy, University of South Africa, Department of Philosophy. His recent publication includes *The Death of Democracy and the Resurrection of Timocracy*. He is also the author of *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* and *A Century is a Short Time: New Perspectives on the Anglo-Boer War*.

Saharan African, and particularly beliefs that are more common there than among Western societies” (Metz, 2007b:375). Thirdly Ramose objects to Metz’s methodology. “As Ramose notes in his contribution, he grounds his interpretation of ubuntu as an ethic on the etymology of the term. Since I do not do this, or at least since I employ a strictly *analytic methodology*, Ramose claimed I am not entitled to the claim of an ‘African’ moral theory” (Metz, 2007b:376). Furthermore, “Ramosé also claims that I ‘dismiss’ some work by other African thinkers, but, again, I do no such thing. I do aim to differentiate the kind of project I am undertaking, namely, *analytical normative ethical theory*, with what I take to be different kinds of projects in African ethics, particularly the aim of recounting and critically reflecting on the moral beliefs of a particular sub-Saharan people” (Metz, 2007b:376). In my thesis I will explain my support to Metz regarding the dismissal of other African thinkers and why I believe that both Metz and Shutte also deserve to write and express themselves on African moral theory.

Allen Wood<sup>15</sup>, in his critique of Metz, explains that Metz’s attempt to contrast African with Western ethics is interesting, provocative and probably more useful to Western moral philosophers. Africans need to understand the Western worldview and way of making sense of morality in order to understand a global ethic, and Westerners need to make sense of how African morality stems from empathy. This is important, Wood elaborated, in order to understand ethical differences between cultures, calling Metz’s assessment of Ubuntu his “attempt to formulate a principle expressing African Ethics or *ubuntu*” (Wood, 2007:346). He also refers to Metz’s view of Ubuntu as “a moral theory” working with these (utilitarian) principles: “An action is right just insofar as it produces *harmony* and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community” (Metz, 2007a: 334). Metz’s attempt to address African moral theory is as much useful to Africans as it is to Westerners. Unfortunately not many Africans are familiar with his intellectual work, which allows for both a more universal understanding and an African understanding. Metz’s reply to Wood’s critique was this: “Now, one way of reading Wood’s ‘armchair moral *anthropology*’ is providing reason to think that the differences in moral beliefs between Westerners and Africans are by and large superficial. Wood suggests that the major reason why Africans have tended to focus on the value of what I call ‘harmony’, i.e., roughly, the combination of sharing a sense of identity and acting for one another’s sake, is that it has been ‘vital’ for

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<sup>15</sup> Allen William Wood is an American philosopher specializing in the work of Immanuel Kant and the German Idealists, with particular interests in ethics and social philosophy.

the survival of their societies” (Wood, 2007b:372). Sharing in every way of living is in fact vital for all societies globally and much progress is made where people communicate and share knowledge and resources.

*Douglas Farland*<sup>16</sup> also saw Metz’s interpretation of African ethics as promoting *harmony* in the community. Adding value to the community is what it is all about, in order for both the individual’s and the community’s growth. Farland says: “The problem regarding how African and universal intuitions relate to one another are, I think, superseded by a more pressing problem. The more pressing problem is introduced by another feature of Metz’s work on Ubuntu. This is the fact that his aim, as he tells us, is to articulate and justify ‘a comprehensive, basic norm that is intended to account for what all permissible acts have in common as distinct from impermissible ones” (Metz, 2007a:321). He wants, or so he claims, “to articulate a theory of right action that is grounded in the relevant intuitions and which, in turn, explains them” (Farland, 2007:359). Reflecting again on his favoured interpretation of Ubuntu as a moral theory, he states: “I claim that we should believe that the best principled understanding of Ubuntu as an ethic is, roughly, one saying that we’re obligated to promote harmony and reduce discord of a certain kind and in certain ways” (Metz, 2007b:379). Living a good life is in fact living a balanced life; disagreeing with one another is inevitable, but it is about how we handle the differences, with wisdom or with despair. According to Metz, African philosophy is a philosophy of hope, as well and will serve justice if applied properly.

*Jason van Niekerk*<sup>17</sup> in his critique explained one significant point on which he seems to differ with Metz. Noting that Metz, “probably the dominant interpretation of African ethics in the literature, sees the primary normative goal as something like self-development or self-realization through engaging in the proper relationships with others”, he goes to dismiss such an approach as unattractive (van Niekerk, 2007:364). Van Niekerk in particular refers to Metz’s intuition that “an action is right insofar as it positively relates to others *and thereby realizes oneself*; an act is wrong to the extent that it *does not perfect one’s valuable nature as a social being*” (Metz, 2007a:331). To Jason van Niekerk, relationships between people are important for good moral status. “The view that an act is right insofar as it promotes relationships of particular kinds and in particular ways entails two logically distinct

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas Farland is affiliated with the School of Philosophy and Ethics, University of Kwazulu-Natal

<sup>17</sup> Jason van Niekerk, Rhodes University, Philosophy, Alumnus University of the Witwatersrand, Philosophy, Alumnus University of Pretoria, Philosophy, Temporary Lecturer University of Pretoria, Jurisprudence, Post-Doc.

conceptions of basic reasons for action” (see Metz, 2007b:383). The first is that our basic moral reasoning is *relational* rather than *intrinsic*, and secondly it is *other-regarding* and not merely *self-regarding*. This is a very complex theory, because we think our actions are more intrinsic and self-centred. This calls for serious soul searching and critical thinking as to what makes us human, and to be careful as to not use others as a means to our ends.

In gauging the extent of the work on Ubuntu, in particular Metz’s analytical approach, Jason van Niekerk, who had Metz as his supervisor, described him as ‘both an essential interlocutor, and a supportive promotor in his engagement with African philosophy’. In his doctoral thesis he summarised his critical appreciation for Metz’s approach: “Metz makes explicit the constellation of value claims generally glossed as Ubuntu, and proposes an attractive positive account, but does not account for the aretaic (or virtue-ethical) features integral to and attractive in most accounts of Ubuntu” (Van Niekerk, 2013:iii).

Van Niekerk uses Shutte’s work in explaining the relative terms to substantiate his argument, such as to the relevance of “seriti” (field of force), a term introduced and carried over by Setiloane and Tempels: Shutte argues that the intermingling fields of life-force between persons would make *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (how our humanity is bound up in one another) literally true, in that these invisible energy fields would map human interactions, literally reifying our various relationships”. This can also be explained literally, as Shutte stated about ‘Persons are Other-dependent’, referring to Rene Spitz experiments about ‘hospitalism’<sup>18</sup> in babies, when babies are separated from the mothers for prolonged periods they develop at a much slower rate than babies in normal situations. The lack of contact, in person, inhibits the baby psychologically and physically. So the dependence on persons for human development are crucial and much can be learned from the concept of child and personal development in an African context. “This perspective leads to the evocative distinction European culture has taught us to see the self as something private, hidden within our bodies opposing to the African image that the self is outside the body, present and open to all” (Van Niekerk, 2013:52-53).

Serious research into African Philosophy started more than four decades ago when most of the major literature started emerging for African philosophy and ethics. My focus will

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<sup>18</sup> Hospitalism: René Spitz introduced the term hospitalism in his work defining disorders in infants who were institutionalized for long periods and deprived of substitute maternal care. The notion was later expanded to refer more generally to severe and lasting maternal deprivation. Accessed: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/psychology/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/hospitalism> 2017-10-30, 14:50.

however not be on this whole emerging field of study, but the new questions of theory and methodology in African philosophy, in particular the thought-provoking contributions that the philosophers Shutte and Metz made in this discourse through their metaphysical and normative accents. We will review the collective criticisms of their approaches, and also assess their relatively convincing arguments. Besides Van Niekerk, various other philosophers pointed out the difficulty and problems of methodology in the African Philosophical discourse.

## **2.4 Demarcation**

In order to have an environment conducive to growth and happiness we need to create an “ethos” supporting good values for a new society and world. My study will, on a primary level, critically engage with the prominent works of these two renowned South African philosophers. I start with Shutte, who wrote extensively in various papers and some books which expressed much needed clarity on African thought and ethics. As a contrast to Shutte, I then follow up with Metz who pursued to construct a theory of *right action*, engaging with various academics in a colloquium. For further clarification, and as secondary sources of literature, I also engage critically with other African philosophers such as Maurice M. Makumba, Paulin J. Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Benezet Bujo, John Mbiti, Mogobe Ramose and the legendary Desmond Tutu.

### **2.4.1 Shutte’s contribution**

Shutte’s contribution to African Philosophy is important in the sense that he is, “a South African brought up and educated in a European philosophical tradition, using concepts and methods of this tradition”. Central to his work is the conception of humanity embodied in the traditional African proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through persons)” (Shutte, 1993: v). Bringing us an understanding of the *moral sphere* of Ubuntu (which Shutte also related to the English equivalent of humanity), his interest is with philosophies of character, attitude, behaviour, or way of life. What Shutte made clear in his work is that South Africans will only enjoy real integration, when different traditions of thought and feeling are integrated in every sphere, for example education, business, work, politics, religion, culture, etc. Unlike Metz, who illustrates many characteristics of African thought and life in moral values, Shutte focuses largely on the *metaphysical* background of *Ubuntu* and virtues, a notion which Makumba would approve of since he said: “philosophy

possesses a metaphysical character”. “Even when philosophy takes on the question of God it remains within its scope” (Makumba, 2005:28). Value alone is not enough; we need *virtue (a way of living)* - virtue which can be manifested in Ubuntu as a moral concept through which we can restore moral order. Virtue gives birth to forgiveness, reconciliation and reparation, it prepares a habitat and climate conducive to a good ethos. These spheres will be addressed in my thesis in which two related quests are joined: the *ethical* search for *how* this moral concept (Ubuntu) have meaning in praxis, and the *philosophical* search for *why* it is a genuine, fundamental human concept.

#### **2.4.2 Metz’s contribution**

Metz is an analytical philosopher, whose work teases out the critique of various African philosophers and academics. The symposium which he led, for example, generated significant constructive debate and criticism. He produced a wealth of recent research which addresses various issues in African ethics. He is in particular focusing largely on African *moral judgement* and *Ubuntu*. He argues that an African moral theory can account for the judgements he listed and explained in ‘*Toward an African Moral Theory*’, where he speaks about an African theory of right action in Ubuntu, the African normative principle. He is looking at it in an all-inclusive way of which a Western philosophy may say, ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’<sup>19</sup>...

Metz recognized Augustine Shutte as one of the first academic philosophers in the English-speaking world to seriously engage with African Ethics, capturing the morality of Ubuntu in the phrase: “The moral life is seen as a process of personal growth”. ”Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded” (Shutte, 2001:30). He also referred in much detail to Desmond Tutu’s concept of Ubuntu in how people are interrelated, forming wholeness in community (a shared identity), and also how we are made to be moral (good), citing Tutu’s book, ‘*No Future Without Forgiveness*’. Metz is keeping Tutu in a high regard in saying convincingly: “That the most promising way to construct a competitive African moral theory is to develop Tutu’s

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<sup>19</sup> Aristotle - <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/20103-the-whole-is-greater-than-the-sum-of-its-parts>  
Accessed 2017-10-31, 16:55.

understanding of *Ubuntu* in terms of a basic obligation to promote harmonious relationships and to prevent discordant ones” (Metz, 2007a:341).

## **2.5 Research problem**

The intellectual situation facing African thinkers is that African philosophy is an imperative and fundamental key in understanding Africa, its culture and its persons. We are currently having numerous philosophers, of African and European descent, doing research on African philosophy, with no proper central theories as to how we can apply such a notion. Within this situation we have the dilemma of which and/or whose standards we are going to use, to derive at such convincing theories. We will have to work on a heterogeneous approach to address such a dilemma.

My research project will entail a critical analysis and comparison of the views of these two South African philosophers, Augustine Shutte, whose earlier work on African philosophy and Ubuntu is of great value, and Thaddeus Metz, whose more recent work again caused a major stir in such a way that it motivated others to engage more critically. The two differ in the sense that they have different theoretical frameworks and approaches. Metz’s focus is more on the material, and is deontological in character whereas Shutte’s focus is more on the spiritual, metaphysical. Here we already have critical disparity, because African philosophy cannot exclude faith or God. Our benefit with Shutte’s approach is that he saw the parallels with Aristotle’s ethics via Thomas Aquinas. Correspondingly, Shutte was engaging more with ethno and sage philosophy, whereas Metz engaged more with nationalist, ideological and professional philosophy. Both of them wrote and published quite extensively in academic means of all categories. Africa, and in particular South Africa, has become Westernised to a high degree, so we do need to develop a philosophy which allow us to make sense of our situation, and how we need to relate and understand culture and philosophy globally.

We cannot study African philosophy in isolation, because it is a philosophy which is all inclusive. So the question can be raised: Can non-Africans understand African philosophy? (Both Shutte and Metz can be placed in this category). This “exclusion” cannot be entertained by Africans, because of the inclusive pretensions, and the nature of African philosophy. In addressing this problem, I do not claim that African philosophy can or cannot stand on its own, but in fact it will do it no harm to be influenced by other universal philosophies and to influence them again in return. I conclude that African philosophy,

inherently, by its nature and culture, is not meant to be lived and practiced in isolation, but now need to be tested and tried for the benefit of all.

## 2.6 Theoretical Framework

African thinking does not necessarily have to be composed or made authentic by a Western philosophical normative framework. Although currently influenced by Western philosophy, especially through the real fact that Western trained philosophers also research and debate on African thought, a discipline of uniqueness can still be maintained. An analytical framework, as represented by the methods of Metz, proved very incisive and thought-provoking, and also Shutte's more metaphysical approach successfully illustrates the depth of life and thought in Africa. Both have shown that we need to find a connection between African traditional world views and philosophical thinking. In educating and further research, especially the anti-materialistic and anti-individualistic approaches unique to African thought may be influential. So, using a strict rational and analytical method, Metz himself admits that his approach does not include virtue ethical theory intentionally (see his article, "Toward an African Moral Theory"): "The field lacks a well-defended general principle grounding particular duties that is informed by such values and that could be compared to dominant Western theories such as Hobbesian egoism or Kantian respect for persons. In this article, I aim to help develop such a principle. I focus exclusively on *right action* and set aside issues of *good character* (e.g., motives, virtues), saving them for another occasion" (Metz, 2007a:321).

Shutte, on the other hand, again makes the most of character, virtue, shared values and the metaphysical. Metz quotes him on this appropriately: "The moral life is seen as a process of personal growth. . . . Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded" (Shutte, 2001:30). This is very much an Aristotelian-Thomistic approach of the 'common good'. The comparison of the views and explications of Shutte and Metz, as two very diverse interpreters of Ubuntu, thus presupposes these two hermeneutical traditions: the line of Aristotle through Thomas to an ethic of virtue, and the line from Kant to "duties and responsibilities". To reflect on the latter, I want to add that laws and obligations are decided for persons, many times without their knowledge, rationale and believe. A proper *ethic* is when this approach should also be

reversed in time for balance, where character and virtue is considered in order to have meaningfulness and accord.

## 2.7 Research hypothesis

I start my hypothesis by stating my affinity with *Shutte's* approach, because his Aristotelian-Thomistic embrace of Ubuntu seems to be closer to an African *ethic* than Metz's more distanced, analytical approach. This is illustrated by Shutte's metaphysical *correlation* of self and others, which is further clarified through his juxtaposition of the European and the African image of self: "The European culture has taught us to see the self as something private, hidden within our bodies. Of course we don't think that the self is literally within us, as our brain and our heart are. We are thinking of ourselves as *things*, that is the image we have, and it determines how we see ourselves and relate to others" (Shutte, 2003:22). He is contrasting this "distanced" view with an African view: "The African image is very different: the self is *outside* the body, present and open to all. This is because the self is the result and expression of all the forces acting upon us. It is not a thing, but the sum total of all the interacting forces" (Shutte, 2003:22-23). In Shutte's view, this is what is keeping us together, and the world can learn much from what African morality has to offer.

This, then is the *first* point of my hypothesis: I wish to affirm with Shutte that Ubuntu is indeed a viable, comprehensive ethical approach to the world's problems of alienation, individualism, materialism, consumerism, crime violence. Although Shutte brings us closer to an African moral theory and its utility as an ethical worldview, Metz's new found experience and theorizing with African philosophy is also important to the African philosophical community. His analytical approach can offer a critical contribution to the field of Ethics in Africa, because we are after all very much westernized and need to also express and share our deepest convictions openly and clinically within the market of ideas. Secular people in the post-enlightenment era, also in Africa, seem to need such a more analytical approach as a way of expressing their ethos. Metz brings to the table how African moral theory differs from western moral theories, but in so doing he is using western moral theories (inter alia Kantian) to formulate a normative basis for ethical action which can then be informed by African values. He goes further to illustrate how such approaches can be beneficial when applied, for example in the fields of law/justice, science/medicine and business in general.

The *second* point of my hypothesis is thus that Metz's analytical approach to Ubuntu may provide a useful, supplementary tool for a more universal appropriation of Ubuntu in the world, and should be affirmed as a legitimate experiment in African philosophy and ethics.

Both Shutte and Metz make a positive difference, or add relevance and value, to African philosophy and ethics. Put bluntly, they show that having "non-Africans" and "Africans with Western philosophical backgrounds" doing research analysis, making statements and suggesting possible solutions, is plausible. By working through these critical questions emanating from these quite different approaches towards Ubuntu, I developed a sense of what is required, philosophically and ethically, to make people work and live together, to keep our moral fibre together, and to live in peace and harmony. So, in essence although Shutte and Metz are different, their appropriations of Ubuntu seem to be complementary. What has been interesting to note was how Metz showed affinity and support to Shutte's attempt to deal with probably the deepest challenge of any ethical "system": to find a way of connecting self-interest and respect/concern for the other (Kant, command theories), as formulated in the "Golden Rule": "Do unto others as you wish them to do to you".

My hypothesis, then, put in general terms, is that we seem to need both these approaches towards the utilisation of Ubuntu in order to fully develop it as an ethos fit to change the world: deep concern for the other is fundamental, basic, for community, peace, harmony (Shutte), but it is simultaneously the best route to self-fulfilment, survival, co-existence in a world where utility cannot be denied or ignored (Metz). Accepting and serving the other, is the route to accepting and fulfilling the self.

## **2.8 Research Methodology and Procedure**

The comparison I do is based on an extensive literature study in African Philosophy and Ethics, seen through the philosophical lenses of Shutte and Metz, and focused on the usefulness of Ubuntu as a moral vision. For the purposes of this mini-thesis the methodology is one of unpacking the views of two non-African philosophers, sympathetic to African philosophy and ethics, in a systematic way via a literature study in this field. The comparison focuses on how they assess the usefulness of the concept of *Ubuntu as a core component of African ethics*. The African moral outlooks as seen by the two philosophers have been widely questioned and debated – discussions which stimulated an ongoing debate in the discipline of African thought and whether or how this moral outlook is shared by Africa and the West.

The literature used in this study has been selected from the study field of African Philosophy and Ethics, involving Ubuntu. The main focus will be on the work on Ubuntu of late *Professor Augustine Shutte*, a South African Catholic Aristotelian-Thomistic theologian, who taught at the University of Cape Town, and *Professor Thaddeus Metz*, an analytical philosopher from the United States of America, now teaching in South Africa at the University of Johannesburg - both research focused scholars. The method throughout the thesis will be a *comparative analysis* of the writings of Shutte and Metz, against the background of a more universal assessment of African philosophy and Ubuntu. This will also include the interaction of other historical and current African philosophers with Shutte and Metz in this thesis. We will critically and explicitly, use the concepts and theories of these two philosophers here, as well as in all chapters to illustrate our hypothesis. Examining these concepts and theories for unrepresentativeness or other inadequacies is important, in its positioning in present-day African philosophy and ethics. One such way of doing comparative philosophy is to assess how their literature creates required conditions for appropriate application of Ubuntu ideas globally, as a more integrated ethical system. The two philosophers also comment on one another's work, which makes it interesting to see how their dialogue can be taken further, especially since African philosophy is by nature very *conversational*. In essence the reason for the research is to better understand the differences in ethical and moral standards as professed by Shutte and Metz on African morality, and how they think Ubuntu can engage with Western moral ideology and practice, and the methodology is geared towards a final chapter 5 where conclusions on their affinities and differences can be made.

## Chapter 3: Shutte's metaphysical contribution towards an appreciation of Ubuntu philosophy and ethics

### 3.1 Shutte's work and orientation on Ubuntu

Shutte is mostly known through his two major literary works *Philosophy for Africa* (1993) and *Ubuntu, An Ethic for a New South Africa* (2001). By reading and studying his work, I came to realise my own journey, much like he is narrating his own journey of faith and intellectual growth. He also has a keen interest in understanding humanity's relation and engagement, with faith and science. It is during this search where I found even more value in *The Mystery of Humanity* (1993) and *The Quest for Humanity in Science and Religion, The South African Experience* (2006), which he edited. From these works and numerous articles of his, we can lift out significant concepts shared by himself and also how he engaged in African thought and practice in contrast with Metz.

Shutte is without any doubt a person who believes in participation and the maintenance of good character for integrity, which will make it possible for people to share and develop together during this scientific and secular age. Very important is what he mentioned as the aim of his first book: "The kernel of this book, then, is my attempt to outline a philosophical conception of humanity that incorporates and systematises the African insights I think that is important. I use the particular European philosophical tradition in which I have been trained for this purpose. It is the tradition in which Aristotle and Aquinas are the classical figures, but in recent times it has incorporated into itself elements of existentialism and phenomenology..." (Shutte, 1993:9).

Shutte realised the need for philosophical influence in both religion and politics for South Africa, hence the need for these philosophers, whose are systematic and dynamic. It is in doing so that Shutte can illustrate similarities between European philosophy and African thought. For example how people empower one another through constructive relationships and freedom to trust, and to depend on one another. To realise who they are, and what they are is how they relate to one another. Richard H. Bell discussed Shutte's method in his own book, *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues* as follows: "...an example of critical philosophy in the analytic, conceptual analysis tradition turned to specific existential conditions and priorities in Africa is found in Augustine Shutte's book *Philosophy for Africa*" (1993). Shutte is a white South

African, who, as a philosopher, had struggled with the relevance of his discipline for the lived situation of apartheid South Africa. He is very much aware, as is the focus of “postcolonial” African philosophy, that “the present struggle in South Africa is partly a struggle between Africa and Europe” and the degree to which her mind has been colonized. In the context of the “new” South Africa, Shutte’s questions probe how philosophy should be applied” (Bell, 2002:27). This application can be seen in his 1993 and 2001 books, where he is very analytical in applying the ubuntu ethic on issues of education, work, religion, politics, gender, etc.

Shutte is looking at a more *traditional orientation* of African philosophy, so we have to look at situations of ethnicity (culture), national ideologies, the sages, and the hermeneutic narrative of an African philosophy. This is important in understanding the value European philosophy is offering Africa without the two condemning one another. Shutte makes us aware of the rich values African Philosophy can and will give European Philosophy. Where others objected to a notion of Afrocentrism, he ran with it in exploring the thoughts of persons doing Philosophy historically in Africa, from the Belgium missionary Placide Tempels who did major foundational work in African Philosophy, to Peter. O. Bodunrin’s historical overview on for example Nyrere and Kaunda, and furthermore also Kwasi Wiredu’s first and second order philosophy, and Paulin J. Hountondji’ perspectives. Last, but not least, Henry Odera Oruka’s five trends in African Philosophy, which Shutte applied in context with other philosophical trends in core values, for example how character is shaped and grown by community. Many of these philosophers have been trained in European philosophy, but are critically engaging with African Philosophy (Shutte, 1993:15).

Shutte observes and compares all these African approaches, conceptions and perspectives critically, because in order to set ourselves up for self-development as a people we have to tap into the wisdom of God, our sages (passed on and alive), our natural surroundings, and also the sciences. Shutte’s work, much like other significant African Philosophers, will make it possible to execute many of the projected concepts within the African community and abroad. Philosophy definitely does have that ability, as Shutte indicated: “There is a job for philosophy here, a job for which its tools of conceptual analysis and rational criticism are necessary” (Shutte, 1993:5). Shutte said the following as a white African about persons in community in Africa: “Persons are defined not by this or that natural property or set of properties but by the relationships between them and others”. So, for instance, Ifeanyi

Menkiti also said: “In the African view it is the community which defines the person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory.” In European philosophy of whatever kind, the self is always envisaged as something “inside” a person, or at least as a kind of container of mental properties and powers. In African thought it is seen as “outside,” subsisting in relationship to what is other, the natural and social environment” (Shutte 1993:47).

### 3.2 Shutte and Apartheid

An interesting perspective is that of African Philosopher Mabogo P. More, in his contribution in *‘Philosophy in South Africa Under an Apartheid Government’*, where he alludes to Shutte’s understanding and clarity of an African Philosophy, in a South African context, specifically Shutte’s questions regarding whether African Philosophy is possible after Apartheid. With this type of question we may also ask whether African Philosophy and Ubuntu are possible after Apartheid? Besides looking at where we were, Shutte knew that Ubuntu, harmony and dignity existed before Apartheid and that it is possible to allow it to become an ethic for a new South Africa. This is why Shutte could freely state that Ubuntu is the exact opposite of Apartheid, in saying: “At the centre of UBUNTU is the idea that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, persons depend on persons to be persons. This is our hidden secret” (Shutte, 2001:3). Recognition is also given to Shutte in appreciating his attempt to keep his course “Philosophy in the African Context,” and although he could not continue the course, he continued to get his first significant book, *Philosophy for Africa*, out in 1993. Through his non-Eurocentric way he could assist in laying foundations for the development of an instinctive African Philosophy with some of its unwritten values and virtues. Bringing African Philosophy and Ethics back into a curriculum is not going to happen overnight, so it will need critical involvement of many scholars, organizations and lay persons. This kind of future involvement in the Shutte foresight can be noticed also in a book, *‘African Renaissance’*, edited by Malegapuru William Makgoba, with a prologue by Thabo Mbeki. Post-Apartheid and Post-Colonialism got something in common, which is the perpetuation of the past. An example of post-colonialism is privatization and foreign shareholders exploiting our industrial/monetary prospective in moving large profit and dividends abroad, reducing our wealth and keeping us enslaved to ‘debt’<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Debt’, being the new form of slavery. Politically free and reconciled, but not economically.

Although a Christian, Shutte has written openly on the deeper meaning of life and humanity in its most basic forms, in how he illustrated it in his writing, saying: “The need, and the deep, often-hidden desire, to develop as a person is nevertheless part of our human nature – according to the Christian view at any rate – and can’t be destroyed. So it persists, in each of us, in a greater or lesser state of frustration.” (Shutte, 1993b:56). Now unlike Metz, it is with this deeper, metaphysical, understanding that Shutte realises the fact that an African (Ubuntu) philosophy already validates an African moral theory. This statement is the basis of my claim that an African philosophy already contains an inherent moral theory which can be explored and applied in context with a Western (European) moral theory.

What makes the African scenario even more valued, is the fact that there is not a parting between the individual and community as we can see in the African setup. “A community is a unity of a uniquely *personal* kind” (Shutte, 2001:27). This scenario also allows the whole human community to be seen as one extended unit, which is the human race. To be anthropocentric in only considering the human race, also seems to be unacceptable in this scenario, because it leaves no room for selfishness and self-centeredness. Shutte’s claim “A person who is generous and hospitable, who welcomes strangers to her house and table and cares for the needy... builds an identity that is enduring, that will not disintegrate – even in death – but continue to be a centre of life for all” (Shutte, 2001:25). This behaviour of compassion and understanding in disregarding discrimination on whatever ground is what will bind people and create harmony and prosperity for all in community. Life is precious and far too many lives were damaged and destroyed, where separation on race were made law, now in order not to live that way we need to stop creating ‘moral norms’, or legislations which becomes tools of discrimination and hurt.

### **3.3 Shutte and (South) African Ethics**

Although Shutte focused on African Ethics and its inspired ability to be more universal, he actually used it more as a tool, with much accuracy to address current moral concerns, especially in South Africa. This became very clear in his second book, *Ubuntu, An Ethic for a New South Africa* (2001). Shutte saw an ‘*African Vision*’ in his philosophical search, which is a vision that can be brought into action by a people who would work together on a metaphysical level. That will be people of African and European decent that will tap into their central ethical ideas on a higher level than just pure objectively.

As a theologian, Shutte saw religion as a significant contributor to a good ethic in community, and here is what he is saying about religion “with Ubuntu” when he discussed ‘The God of Ubuntu’: “Thus in a religion with Ubuntu the unlimited transcendent power that is the ground of my being is present in all I am or do, in my life as a whole and in each particular part of it” (Shutte, 2001:204). Religion, whether Western or African bring people together, in a way where God want them as one, one body, one voice and one spirit in harmony. Interestingly this notion of Ubuntu in God, Religion and Faith is in contradiction to what a theorist like Metz is insinuating, that Ubuntu is focused too much on others. Focusing on others is crucial for a harmonious society, especially in order to have a good ethic for South Africa. A clear example is the difference, between the old ANC<sup>21</sup>, where leaders were focussing on others rather than themselves and material gain. The ANC of late is more focussed on self (individual) gain rather than the collective. In summary, ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’, and Shutte is concluding it beautifully in saying: “If Ubuntu means seeking and finding oneself in others, no matter how different and alien they may appear, then surely no-one, no group or culture, has anything to fear from the practice of this ethic” (Shutte, 2001:226).

When people work together in body and spirit – with *seriti* (life-force)<sup>22</sup> - integrating the different selves and environment, we have less chance of conflict which could reduce our humanity. Shutte saw his life project an attempt to unify the interacting forces to realise ‘self’ and that discipline of “Ethics” is the best to express and apply. “As we shall see, living in the spirit of UBUNTU is not just a conventional obligation. It is my very growth as a person that is at stake. It is a matter of life and death.” (Shutte, 2001: 23-24). Such an attitude can explain that it is not just a duty, or obligation or a rule, but a privilege and a sanction, which allows us to make good decisions for the greater good. In this sense, Ethics and Ubuntu stands separate from mere ‘morality’, which is about obligation and laws. In Chapter 4, and also 5, where I will cover Metz’s normative, analytical approach, I will re-examine Shutte’s metaphysical approach and perspectives for more clarity.

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<sup>21</sup> African National Congress – the ruling political party of South Africa

<sup>22</sup> ‘Seriti’, “Gabriel Setiloane, the African Theologian, expresses this idea well when he writes. The force that is thus exuded (or radiated) is called seriti” (Shutte, 2001:21).

### 3.4 Shutte and the Sciences

Besides Theology and Philosophy, Shutte had a keen interest in the Sciences, and with the recent start of a science and religion dialogue in Europe and America, he saw it fit to make a South African contribution with a paper in 2005 entitled *The Possibility of Religion in a Scientific and Secular Culture*, published in the South African Journal of Philosophy. Prior to this article, almost two decades earlier, he also wrote *A New Argument for the Existence of God*<sup>23</sup>, in which he strengthened his argument that God exist, because we fail to be independent for personal growth and do need one another with God as a necessary cause. Following these earlier attempts, he and fellow academics completed three years of *collaborative research*<sup>24</sup>, which was published in the book, ‘*The Quest for Humanity in Science and Religion*’ which Shutte edited and published in 2006. This project was the first of its kind in South Africa and with Shutte in the lead it turned out a successful and promising venture.

The first very important statement Shutte made in the introduction is the following: “In exploring the relationship between science and religion it is important not to lose touch with oneself as the originating source of both. Both science and religion are the product, of humanity” (Shutte: xiii). This is critical, because each one of us have exposure to science and religion on a daily basis, in all spheres of life. Some of these spheres mentioned by Shutte are education, work, politics and the sciences where much ethical consideration are needed, hence the development of for example, bioethics and ‘code of ethics statements’ in research projects. It is part of our lifestyle and many of us have careers in it and makes a living of it, which can bring various moral questions and dilemmas to the fore.

Secondly, it is of importance, because we have to relate and communicate these sciences and technologies in community with others. In his quest, Shutte described the modern period as developed in two dominant traditions, namely the empiricist and the rationalist. “For empiricist thought human beings are an inextricable part of a material universe studied by science”. This clearly describes a more Western approach, which is dualistic. “Rationalist on the other hand provide what seem strong arguments for a human freedom of self-determination that is equally radical and complete” (Shutte, 2006:48). For explanation he uses Kant’s concept of dualism as an example. He addresses the contradiction of dualism as

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<sup>23</sup> Shutte, A. (1987), A new argument for the existence of GOD. *Modern Theology*, 3: 157–177.

<sup>24</sup> In 2001 the University of Cape Town secured the sponsorship of the Templeton Foundation to research the relationship between science and religion in the South African context.

not being a contradiction, but a paradox, “a paradox that expresses a most important truth about humanity, and which also reveals the most comprehensive and intimate way in which we are able to experience the presence and activity of a transcendent God in a truly secular world” (Shutte, 2006:48). To conclude, he says that “the non-dualistic approach of African thought is an advantage here, and there are signs that these religions can adapt more easily to a secular world than those that have grown up in contact with and in opposition to it” (Shutte, 2006:61). We do have a large religious community in South Africa and the largest minority group is the followers of African Traditional Religions. Fr many, thinking along the lines of Shutte, there is the hope that the influence of this kind of integrated religiosity or spirituality will spill over to the other religions and the secular, although the ANC is more supportive of a purely secular state.



## Chapter 4: Metz's normative analytical contribution to African philosophy and ethics

### 4.1 Metz's concepts on Ubuntu and African Moral Theory

The focus in this chapter is on Thaddeus Metz's concept of an African moral theory and its basic tenets, how it is affecting individuals and persons in community. Metz leans more towards a Western notion of rights, duties and rules, whereas Shutte leans more towards an African notion of *personhood*<sup>25</sup> and character, or metaphysical and communitarian thinking, with a spiritual and godly nature which is inherent to African Philosophy. Interesting is that Metz latches on to the concept of Ubuntu, which does include God, but he does so without deifying God or Spirit.

He did however receive much critique on the methodology of his influential article "*Toward an African Moral Theory*", especially about his formulation of an African moral theory and Ubuntu as an African moral theory of right action. "An action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community" (Metz, 2007a: 334).

As stated in Chapter two, Metz had numerous scholars analysing and critiquing his work, and one such person is Prof M.B. Ramose. In reply to critique on Metz's theory, he stated that the literature on African ethics contains "relatively little that consist of normative theory" and also dealt with Metz's attempt to stress that there is "less significant difference between African and Western morality" than normally realised (Ramose, 2007:54). Ramose's concern was around Metz's focus on tenability, terminology and method. These are areas of focus that are different to Shutte's claims and methods, for example Metz's claim in the sphere of religion. Metz stipulates that: "I seek to develop a moral theory that is non-religious at its base" (Ramose, 2007:350). In hindsight a person may also compliment Metz on his work, as Ramose remarked: "There is thus a polarity between Metz and African ethics. Between the two poles, there is a gap; a chasm that can be bridged. Metz has created

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<sup>25</sup> Personhood, selfhood, and humanness in characteristic sub-Saharan worldviews are value-laden concepts. That is, an individual can be more or less of a person, self, or human being, where the more one is, the better. The ultimate goal of a person, self, or human in the biological sense should be to become a full person, a real self, or a genuine human being, i.e., to exhibit virtue in a way that not everyone ends up doing (Metz, 2010: 83).

this chasm by effectively comparing Western with African philosophy” (Ramose, 2007:351-352).

Applying Kantian viewpoints and sentiments (a modern approach) in comparison with a more metaphysical and dynamic view, which is a more African view, seems to be important, but exactly this is currently lacking proper academic attention. This could then be Metz’s contribution in conversation with Ubuntu and other Africans taking the concept of Ubuntu seriously. For Metz, Africans can still do justice to one another without focussing on the pertinent issues at hand, like in a rules-based approach, but by enjoying and sharing a relaxed approach in interconnecting which brings harmony and discourse. “An action is right just insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on goodwill; an action is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites of division and ill-will” (Metz, 2007a, 338). So although the situation may seem relaxed in discourse, one still has a moral obligation to your fellow human beings for their well-being and yours. This responsibility and obligation can be seen via families, communities and how young people are taught. This is in a way the “utilitarian side” of Metz’s Ubuntu philosophy. Ubuntu has and brings its own utility to the African party.

#### **4.2 Metz’s normative and modernist approach**

Metz has been seeking and developing a more modernist orientation for African philosophy, so we have to approach Ubuntu also via modern views of professional philosophy and the hermeneutic narrative of an African philosophy in global contexts. In modern day society people converse less and compete more, which gives less time to find peaceful solutions through dialogue and cooperation.

The most advanced analytical work in this field over recent years has indeed been done by Thaddeus Metz, who, in a seminal essay “*Toward an African moral theory*” (Metz, 2007a), outlines at least six senses (intuitions) in which Ubuntu is used. He comes to the conclusion that there is indeed an indigenous African ethic that expresses the communitarian approach of Africans in distinction to the individualism of Europe. As Metz noted, “The requirements of an individual to help others are typically deemed heavier in African morality than in Western. A greater percentage of Africans think that one is morally obligated to help others.” (Metz 2007a:236). This is not a notion which is readily available in a deontological approach. A good example of typical Western ideology is that of *transactional giving and sharing*. There is always an exchange of money for goods and services rendered. To have

money means power, rights and access to services and goods. The African way is rather that you as individual becomes part of the sharing, even if one does not have much to contribute, access is not denied; the power and rights rests within a communal space for all. That is why Metz could quote Tutu's Ubuntu expression of, "I participate, I share"<sup>26</sup> (Tutu, 1999:35).

In his modernist approach he also reviews recent work in African Philosophy and Ethics to stay abreast with the rest of academia. Two such works that I personally obtained were *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, edited by M. F. Murove and *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture*, edited by R. Nicolson. In the latter he reviewed the essays of Benezet Bujo's ecology and ethics from an African perspective, through Ukama<sup>27</sup> and Ubuntu. The environment, the ancestors and God are highly revered and respected in the African culture and philosophy, so both Metz and Bujo are doing it justice, because this earth is our God given "home". Metz said: "The main, common thread is that the basic obligation of Ubuntu, to live a genuinely human way of life by living communally with other persons, entails a duty to respect the natural world." (Metz, 2010:383). Regarding politics and democracy in this collection of essays, Metz shared the same frame of mind with Bujo, Ramose and Shutte, all rejecting the competitive, multi-party style practiced in the West. For more consensus and less conflict, they agreed that we have to look at some indigenous practices and forms of politics, conducive to an African culture of politics for true democracy. These texts, which cover from basic African ethics, to politics and medical issues or bioethics, give us a sense of how to research into Ethics in a comparative fashion. In his review Metz found this useful, providing much potential for teaching and research. The title of the book includes the words comparative and applied ethics, which imparts the insight that we need to allow assertiveness to African Ethics, on the one hand, accompanied by less bias to Western Ethics, on the other hand, for them to grow together.

### **4.3 Metz on Right Action, Shared Identity and Good-Will**

Metz applies Ubuntu as a moral theory with 'six competing interpretations of Ubuntu', while working toward developing an African moral theory. I lift out only two dominant and promising ones to stress my point.

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<sup>26</sup> [Essays](#). Accessed 2017-10-05

<sup>27</sup> The Shona Ethic of *Ukama* with Reference to the Immortality of Values. By Murove, Munyaradzi Felix

The first interpretation is, “**U4:** *An action is right just insofar as it positively relates to others and thereby realizes oneself; an act is wrong to the extent that it does not perfect one’s valuable nature as a social being.*” This is probably the dominant interpretation of African ethics in the literature.<sup>28</sup> Many thinkers take the maxim “a person is a person through other persons” to be a call for an agent to develop her personhood. Shutte, whose book I mentioned above, captures Ubuntu this way: “The moral life is seen as a process of personal growth. . . . Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded” (Shutte, 2001:30). Personal fulfilment actually becomes rewarding to the altruistic person, which is now not just a feeling, but a lifestyle. “A different understanding of the morality of Ubuntu includes the idea that moral value fundamentally lies not in the individual, but rather in a relationship between individuals” (Metz 2007, 333). Metz’s intention in ‘Towards an African moral theory’, is “the articulation and justification of a comprehensive basic norm that is intended to account for what all permissible acts have in common as distinct from impermissible ones” (Metz 2007:321). In doing so he explains how such a theory differs from a Kantian notion of right action. What makes Metz’s analysis useful and interesting is that he is exploring quite a wide range of literature to bring his point across. One such area of analysis was harmony, which is well defined under the next interpretation.

“**U6:** *An action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community.*” This, he submits, is the most promising theoretical formulation of an African ethic to be found in the literature. Tutu expresses it in the following characterization of Ubuntu (Metz, 2007a:334): “Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* -the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good” (Tutu, 1999:35). Very important is Metz’s expansion on his theory of how Ubuntu can be given more clarity, in particular, on the concept of harmony and “the combination of *shared identity* and *good-will*” (Metz, 2007a:337). I will now further expand on this combination and how it ethically synthesizes

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<sup>28</sup> In addition to quotations in the text from Shutte and Ramose, see Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, pp. 156–57; Mokgoro, “Ubuntu and the law in South Africa,” p. 3; Drucilla Cornell and Karin van Marle, “Exploring ubuntu: tentative reflections,” *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 5 (2005), 195–220 at p. 206; and Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, pp. 87–94.

harmonious living in community. Starting with 'shared identity', Metz stated "An action is right just insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on good-will; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites of division and ill-will"(Metz, 2007a:338; see also Metz 2012). Metz defines harmony in a descriptive way as: "One has a relationship of good-will insofar as one: wishes another person well (conation); believes that another person is worthy of help (cognition); aims to help another person (intention); acts so as to help another person (volition); acts for the other's sake (motivation); and, finally, feels good upon the knowledge that another person has benefited and feels bad upon learning she has been harmed (affection)." Metz (2007:336). So, in essence and in all instances, a good moral theory always include right action according to the Metzian theories. Ubuntu is a word with many meanings (concepts) and values, for example "humaneness"<sup>29</sup>, which makes it difficult to explain it in one theory.

The "word" Ubuntu relates to many other communitarian concepts and values like: autonomy; rights; harmony; justice; honesty; kindness and equality. Considering equality, we can even mention 'contradictions', because many of these values may be contradicting one another, because what is acceptable to me, may be taboo to another person. For example, I may prefer to withhold information from someone and not being honest, in order not to hurt the person's feelings. Another example in the new South Africa is 'Affirmative Action' which we have been practicing for more than two decades but are still having equity issues which cause conflict nationally. This is not arguing that AA is wrong, but saying it should not be permanent in order to allow space for all to flourish naturally, otherwise we are creating another Apartheid-like dilemma which is unethical, inhumane and definitely not in the spirit of Ubuntu. These notions of right action, shared-identity and good-will, bring us closer to concepts of Human Rights, Animal Rights, etc.

For such "right action" we need good moral status and values. Metz proposes the view that "the more a being is capable of being part of a certain communal relationship, the greater its *moral status*" (Metz, 2011:2). He defines moral status as something internal to the individual, but also to the group. His actual aim is to develop and contextualize a new relational theory of moral status, even including animals and mentally challenged persons. "In typical African reflection, talk of '*personhood*' (as in the second instance of "person"

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<sup>29</sup> Humane: Characterized by tenderness, compassion, and sympathy for people and animals, especially for the suffering or distressed: humane treatment of prisoners; invalids; animals; etc. Accessed: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/humaneness> 2017-10-19, 17:35.

in the quote above) is inherently moralized, such that to be a person is to be virtuous or to exhibit good character” (Metz, 2011: 3). This in African morality is brought out through Ubuntu, by the person becoming a full person, in attaining humaneness. As derived from U4: “to be a call for an agent to develop her personhood.” (Metz, 2007a:331)

#### **4.4 Metz’s African Concept of Human Rights**

Metz gives good reasons (some illustrated in the previous section), as to why he relates the concept of Human Rights to Ubuntu, even though Ubuntu is not even mentioned once in the South African constitution. Our constitution does not directly provide attributes of Ubuntu, which, if ignored, leaves one with very little African moral foundation to address current ethical leadership issues. Two contemporary examples of the blatant abuse of Human Rights in South Africa are the deaths of elderly and psychiatric patients through sheer neglect, at Esidimeni,<sup>30</sup> and the SASSA debacle<sup>31</sup>, where welfare dependants are suffering and dying because of an inefficient system. Abusing public (community) resources and funds, is not in the spirit of Ubuntu, and could have been addressed via the constitution and the courts to ensure justiciability of our deepest values.

Some may reason that these apparent shortcomings of our constitution and the lack of application of Ubuntu, do not necessarily signal a crisis in public morality. However, given the escalating socio-political and economical predicaments that thousands of marginalised people are suffering daily, we need to “act right” as Metz argues. A possible problem can be that Ubuntu may not have enough regard for individual freedom and may thus not always be favouring human dignity, because Ubuntu may seem more communitarian in nature. The philosopher’s view of human rights, much like that of the social scientist and the theologian, may be perceived to cover the broad spectrum of community and culture, and not so much focus on individual rights. We thus need to look at the conception of human dignity and how it is grounded in Human Rights via “the African way”; also how the human relates to the rest of the earthly and spiritual spheres. “The traditional thought is that every human being has a spiritual self or invisible 'life force' that has been bestowed by God, that can outlive the death of her body, and that makes her more special than anything else in the

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<sup>30</sup> *Life Esidimeni death toll now sits at 141*: Johannesburg – The number of patients who have died following the Gauteng health department’s decision to move Life Esidimeni patients to a number of unlicensed NGOs has risen to 141... Jan Bornman. Accessed: <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/life-esidimeni-death-toll-now-sits-at-141-20171013> 2017-10-19, 15:24.

<sup>31</sup> *The SASSA grant payments debacle*: Social Development Minister, Bathabile Dlamini and SASSA’s CEO have admitted to breaking promises made to the Constitutional Court affecting the payment of social grants. Accessed: <https://www.enca.com/coverage/the-sassa-grant-payments-debacle> 2017-10-19, 15:55.

mineral, vegetable or animal kingdoms. Such a view would obviously underwrite an equal right to life, and also probably rights to integrity of the human organism that carries the 'soul'" (Metz, 2011b:543-544).

Metz is winding up an Ubuntu-based moral theory with a deep conception of human dignity in illustrating the main objectives to grounding a public morality on Ubuntu. He links up with Neville Alexander's<sup>32</sup> profound statement, "How was Ubuntu understood in the past?" and 'How should we understand Ubuntu now<sup>33</sup>?' (Metz, 2011b:535). Taken from their shared perspective, it is clear that for national unity and harmony we should not make the mistake now again, in allowing so-called race differences making us ostracizing individuals and groups. Metz does add value in constructing and evaluating a moral theory in line with Ubuntu, in allowing for a *quality of life* for all, in engaging *utilitarian considerations*, and in critically engaging Kant on the issue of *autonomy*, without degrading the individual in robbing him or her of a basic human right of dignity.



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<sup>32</sup> Dr. Neville Alexander quoted by Roland Czada: "He was much more concerned with human rights and dignity than with national identity based on national pride". Accessed: 2017-10-25, 18:12 <http://www.politik.uni-osnabrueck.de/download/alexander.and.nation.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Neville Alexander in: "We'll pay the price for race cowardice", Accessed": 2017-10-25, 18:50 [http://www.ee-dev.uct.ac.za/downloads/uct.ac.za/news/media/oped/NevilleAlexander06\\_2010.pdf](http://www.ee-dev.uct.ac.za/downloads/uct.ac.za/news/media/oped/NevilleAlexander06_2010.pdf) .

## Chapter 5: A comparative assessment of the views of Shutte and Metz

In this final chapter we shall compare and contrast the views of Augustine Shutte and Thaddeus Metz on a number of selected aspects that relate to their definition, appropriation and use of the African concept of Ubuntu in their own contributions towards an African Philosophy and Ethic.

### 5.1 Contrasting Worldviews

An important distinction between Shutte and Metz can be made in terms of how they approach the “dichotomous” understanding of Ethics and Morality. Shutte finds the base for his moral views in God, Ubuntu, charity and virtue (or character), whereas Metz works more along the lines of a phenomenology of “being”. Morality and Ubuntu in his approach are inundated in obligations, rules and responsibilities, within the ambit of the human condition as appropriated by “reason”, following the clues of Kantian enlightenment thinking. Reason alone, however, according to the critics of rationalist approaches to morality (including Shutte), and cannot per se bring about “good” action; it is rather open to cause undesired volition. Metz’s attempt at aligning Ubuntu thinking with “Kantian reason” seems to deprive African Ethics of its worldview base, and to overanalyse morality, while Shutte’s metaphysical approach seems to be closer to the world out of which African Ethics has grown.

In essence Metz thinks Western ethics have a great influence on African ethics in a meta-ethical way, and in contrast Shutte would rather emphasise that African ethics, with its metaphysical attributes, has the potential to influence and enrich Western ethics. Shutte honours African Ethics in his book, *Philosophy for Africa*, in referring prominently to a pioneer in African Philosophy, Leopold Senghor<sup>34</sup>, especially regarding his critique of Europe and emphasis on traditional African thinking. In Senghor he sees reflected the defining characteristics of African thought: “Like all African philosophers he recognises certain ideas as fundamental to traditional African wisdom: that reality is force and the world process an interplay between forces; that humanity is part of this universal field of

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<sup>34</sup> Léopold Senghor, in full Léopold Sédar Senghor (born Oct. 9, 1906, Joal, Senegal, French West Africa [now in Senegal] - died Dec. 20, 2001, Verson, France), poet, teacher, and statesman, first president of Senegal, and a major proponent of the concept of Negritude.

Accessed: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leopold-Senghor> 2017-10-27, 20:45.

force; that at bottom all force is alive, spiritual rather than material; that the individual's life and fulfilment are only to be found in community with others (a community that does not end at death); that morality is the development of natural tendencies to fuller being and more abundant life; and finally that all human life and world process is directed and empowered by a transcendent origin of life and force" (Shutte, 2001:26).

This difference in appropriating African ideas, by Shutte and Metz, makes for an interesting debate, comparison and application, because the audience they are reaching out to include both theistic and naturalistic elements, and sentiments. Shutte's view allows more for the person to be ethical and act morally on his or her own account or "agency", whereas Metz interprets within his moral theory the use of Ubuntu more as a true, objective moral "concept", guiding our actions, almost like Kantian reason.

As far as African morality is concerned, they both investigate how we can restore the moral concept of Ubuntu, through understanding Ubuntu as a genuine moral influence. The trouble that both also have is that the word Ubuntu is not straightforward and is somewhat abused or misunderstood, whether from an individualist or communitarian point of view. Shutte's notion of the African individual and African community, thus of Ubuntu, opts for a careful balance: "Each individual of the community sees the community as themselves, as one with them in character and identity.<sup>35</sup> Each individual sees every other individual member as another self. Thus there is no room for a separation between the individual and the community" (Shutte, 2001, 27).

Metz's notion of African individual and community is captured in the idea that in community those who are deprived are supported by those who are affluent. No measure is made and no return of favour expected. Although Metz is leaning mostly towards Kantian rational theory, with some utilitarian touches, he also reflects on some virtue theories, in particular that of Aristotle. This aspect of his philosophy brings him closer to Shutte, whose Catholic philosophical background is based on Aristotelian-Thomistic studies. Metz himself admits the dichotomy of means and ends in his own appropriation of Ubuntu: "Ubuntu promises to capture our moral ends, understood narrowly in terms of *right action* and the dispositions toward it; Aristotle's account is more plausible as an overall ethic, a general guide for what to pursue for its own sake in life" (Metz, 2012:111).

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<sup>35</sup> Character and identity is important, but within the concept of community.

These similarities and differences between Shutte and Metz are interesting and important, especially because of Metz's claims that sub-Saharan philosophers are far too other-regarding and communitarian in their emphasis. It is exactly on this point where a philosopher like Shutte, who also studied both sub-Saharan and Western philosophies, can perhaps suggest a balanced "compromise". Shutte does not claim that African philosophy is a complete account of how to live, but he argues that neither African nor Western philosophies are complete, and that instead of competing, they need to rather complement one another. Metz seems to claim or assume that a normal adult can be virtuous in isolation, without regarding or communicating with the other, but he neglects to explain how a normal adult can obtain virtuous thinking and behaviour in isolation. If we should consistently follow an approach of individualist isolation, and thus not positively allow relations to form us morally, we may lose the benefits of belonging, prosperity and harmony based on communality. For example, staying on the parameters of a situation or environment, in isolation, will rob us from an opportunity to experience goodness in dimensions which are sometimes not known to the individual. There are great benefits in having communal experience, because it is a simple truth that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts' so, every part, and every person, contributes to the harmony and unity of the whole. When we choose not to relate, we actually turn people into objects without dignity, instead of welcoming and embracing them and their culture. Understanding people in the world involves, and requires, an experience with them and their culture, in order to become more knowledgeable of them and to make righteous judgement about them.

The different ways of appropriating Ubuntu into a "way of life", as presented by Shutte and Metz, clearly reflect different worldviews and make us aware of the dialectical relation between "worldview" (resting on deep intuitions about reality) and "philosophy" (our attempts to find and apply a reasonable approach to life, which includes ethics).

## **5.2 Appealing divergences on the use of Ubuntu**

This comparative view will not just cover the different stances of Shutte and Metz on human relations and rights, but also how their notions spill over to one another's, and overlap, in a beneficial way. On this point we can start with Shutte's take on the Aristotelian-Thomistic view of 'happiness'. In this view happiness functions as a means towards the end of moral existence, an understanding that can help explain that our morality is not based merely on obligations, duties and responsibilities, as emphasised by Metz and the Kantian convictions.

Metz appropriated Ubuntu to show the differences with his analytical, Kantian presentation, and the shortcomings of Ubuntu vis-à-vis such a more rational approach to ethics, while Shutte uses it for his metaphysical contextualization of Ubuntu, believing that Ubuntu in fact has much to offer as a normative base, when properly understood and contextualised in new, e.g. “modern”, situations. Although Shutte is more theological in his thinking, he also includes empirical ideas of theorists like David Hume<sup>36</sup> and rationalist ideas of Emmanuel Kant,<sup>37</sup> especially since Shutte was also a keen researcher in the field of faith and science, a field where “data” and “reason” function strongly. He was however adamant that the consistent emphasis on total freedom and autonomy was based on an unrealistic anthropology, overestimating human capacity: “For Kant, freedom means autonomy, self-determination. Hence the conception of our God cannot include anything that could suggest a power external to our own. This appears problematic, and indeed it is a problem that I do not think Kant himself ever solved” (Shutte, 2005:297). The reason for this assessment of Shutte is that genuine freedom for the individual, even humanly spoken, is only accomplished in relationship with others, i.e. in situations where “autonomy” cannot be the final word.

Patrick Giddy, who did several studies on Shutte’s work, refers to an early article by Shutte, on the intricate relationship between authority and freedom, and between spirituality and materiality, viz “Religious Laws: The Christian Problem” (Shutte 1976): “The problem I was thinking of was the way many (if not most) religious people think of religion in terms of obedience to some religious authority whose commands or laws have some divine sanction. And I was able to use the work I had done in my Master’s thesis on Kant and Hegel to criticize this in view of the value of the freedom which those authors stress” (Giddy, 2016:238). Giddy also refers to a suggestion of Shutte, on the nature of spirituality, published in the *St Augustine Papers*: “Shutte suggests, finally, that this (comment: my spirituality) can be reconciled with my materiality in a non-dualist way. My spirituality is my relatedness to myself, while my materiality is my relatedness to other-than-self. If one

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<sup>36</sup> David Hume, (born May 7 [April 26, Old Style], 1711, Edinburgh, Scotland—died August 25, 1776, Edinburgh), Scottish philosopher, historian, economist, and essayist known especially for his philosophical empiricism and skepticism. Accessed: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Hume> 2017-10-17, 19:45.

<sup>37</sup> Immanuel Kant, (born April 22, 1724, Königsberg, Prussia [now Kaliningrad, Russia]—died February 12, 1804, Königsberg), German philosopher whose comprehensive and systematic work in epistemology (the theory of knowledge), ethics, and aesthetics greatly influenced all subsequent philosophy, especially the various schools of Kantianism and idealism. Accessed: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Immanuel-Kant> 2017-10-17, 20:15.

thinks of my dependence on the world around me, and in particular on other persons, then it can be seen that the first develops only through the second. My spirituality is, paradoxically, enacted in direct proportion (and not indirect) to my dependence on other-than-me” (Giddy, 2014:63).

In spite of “appealing divergences” in their respective appropriations of Ubuntu, the differences between Shutte and Metz also stand out clearly:

Firstly unlike Metz, Shutte based his theory on Deity and, like in the African philosophy definition of the Ubuntu concept, not allowing his theory to be reduced to the “natural” side of ethics, such as “desires and pleasures”. Metz made his stance clear in saying, “... I seek to develop a moral theory that is non-religious at its base. I do so partly since I favour ethical naturalism on meta-ethical grounds, and partly since it is a sufficiently large and coherent project to critically analyse those accounts of ubuntu that make no reference at bottom to, say, ancestors or God” (Metz, 2007a:328). Shutte is clearly on a different trajectory in his approach: without God and traditional wisdom Ubuntu will lose much of its power.

Secondly, unlike Metz, Shutte has been disappointed with Kant’s negative attitude towards God and religion; religion which has been supporting the survival of leading moral ideas and concepts through history. Also, Shutte has noted that, sadly, many leading Western philosophers, like Hegel, picked up where Kant left with the notion of unrestricted human autonomy, and developed this even more radically in order to promote so-called ‘human freedom’. According to Shutte: “Kant had in fact a divided attitude towards Christianity. He saw it as the expression of an important truth about human life; in fact the most important truth. But this truth was expressed in symbolic mythical language and attached to particular historical events. The mistake was to take it literally. Instead one had to dig beneath the narrative surface to find the jewel hidden underneath. Using the conceptual tools of his own philosophical conception of humanity, Kant began the modern work of the demythologization of religion” (Shutte, 2005:292).

### **5.3 Views on Political, Social and Economic Transformation**

Shutte developed an ethical vision for South Africa, which we can see especially in his own narratives and those of the people who touched him during his life. He saw the good in others’ way of life and how that good can contribute to building a good society, politically, socially and economically. Shutte was interested in a central set of ideas which he learnt via African culture, its stories, poetry, songs and art, and which he saw as important for its

truthfulness and sincerity. This is something which an approach like Metz's, which is dominated by analysis and scientific culture cannot fully comprehend or appreciate. Also, the general idea of Ubuntu is central to most African cultures which Shutte came across in his research, so that contrasting it as an African tradition vis-à-vis Western tradition (or traditions) is justified: "The concept of Ubuntu was originally illustrated in songs and stories as well as being embodied in traditional customs and institutions, and in whole ethos or lifestyle" (Shutte, 2009a:85). Shutte's social concept of Africans is very different from Metz's, because Metz's concept is very much rules and laws based, given the influence of Kantian and Utilitarian approaches he takes as "normative"

European thought is materialistic and works, according to Shutte, on the 'mechanistic theory'<sup>38</sup>, society being the "machine" and individuals "the parts". He emphasised that leading African philosophers are not comfortable with this Western notions, for example: "The famous African philosopher, poet and statesman, Leopold Senghor, has coined the term 'communalism' and speaks of a 'community society' to distinguish the African conception from the European collectivist theories such as socialism and communism" (Shutte, 2009:93).

The reality is that African societies historically, are not collectivist and when they do become collectivist without a proper ethos, society suffers in corrupt and unethical governance. In exploring the history of socialism and communism we sadly have to observe how it came to a fall in many counties. On the other hand, when we look at our current situation in South Africa we see how capitalism simply carries on widening the gap between the elite and the poor. This division brings with it social problems of unemployment, poverty, crime, violence, famine, illness and unnecessary deaths, so there is a dire need to reduce or reform capitalism towards increased equality, as is indeed attempted in the National Development Plan 2030. This plan, linked to the ideals of the Bill of Rights as contained in the Constitution of South Africa, however, seems currently, to be put on the back burner!

In order to transform our political philosophy, supporting civil society and our economy for improvement in society's livelihood, we cannot stare ourselves blind at only Kantianism and utilitarianism. On this point it seems as though Metz's theories lack a dimension of virtue. For a study regarding this we can look at his concepts of Impartialists and

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<sup>38</sup> "There are two main versions of this 'mechanistic theory', the individualist version that underlies liberalism and capitalism, and the collectivist version that underlies socialism and communism" (Shutte, 2009a:93):

Partialists.<sup>39</sup> Impartialists' claim that "those working for a newly liberated African state should act only for the sake of the public as a whole. By contrast, Partialists claim that civil servants may occasionally act for the sake of certain individuals, at some foreseeable cost to the general public. By just strictly looking at this type of more individualist European moral theory, and disregarding African virtues of Ubuntu, we will create more frustration in philosophically interpreting African values in an African context.

Shutte is providing us a good explanation of how we should deal with politics and an ethic of Ubuntu: "What is important, from the perspective of Ubuntu ethics, is to see that political community and government is a natural and essential expression of human nature" (Shutte, 2009b:378). Shutte thus explains that the government is not a machine, with individuals the parts, as Metz stated previously. After citing the twentieth-century French philosopher, Jacques Maritain, Shutte says, "... that government is not a machine, nor governing a machinelike process. It must not, therefore, be treated as if it were" (Shutte, 2009b:378). In doing so government will treat people with respect in acknowledging their freedom, dignity and peace.

Civil society in South Africa does value Ubuntu, as can be seen through the growth and development still fostered by many small faith-based and community based organisations, in spite of a ruling party, and thus central government, who is not governing ethically and fairly. So, one senses that for the people to promote Ubuntu from grassroots level "upwards" is more important than merely lamenting a dysfunctional government. In line with Shutte's understanding of Ubuntu as a dynamic philosophy of the people, South Africans need a paradigm shift in governance, which can turn the mind-set away from individual favour and gain - to a communal one of compassion and contentment: "The fundamental reason for government, and its ultimate goal, is to promote the people's common good" (Shutte, 2009c:380). This emphasis of Shutte seems to provide a coherent, integrated point of departure against the current state of corruption and 'State Capture' in government, as being exposed by critical voices such as the weekly *Mail and Guardian*, and books by courageous investigative journalists such as Max du Preez, Jacques Pauw, Tinyiko Maluleke, and Moeletsi Mbeki - hopefully brought to book in the very near future.

With an Ubuntu type 'struggle' we can unite across our different barriers, as was the case against the apartheid regime, through the Mass Democratic Movement, and tackle the new

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<sup>39</sup> See Metz, 2009:335.

corrupt regime. What is similar to apartheid's white minority rule, is that, just like under the minority rule behind apartheid, our country with its rich resources is now again manipulated and abused by an elitist black minority - without Ubuntu - while the majority of the country is suffering. A tragic example of the structural violence behind such rule is the senseless killings of our people at Marikana<sup>40</sup>, which cannot be justified in any sense of what Ubuntu entails.

Our leadership is neglecting the very important course that their predecessors suffered and died for, they are dehumanizing a nation, and failing to bring together what Desmond Tutu referred to as our rainbow nation. "To dehumanize another inexorably means that one is dehumanized as well" (Tutu, 1999:35). By the look of our current situation, we will have to go through another reconciliatory process with the new regime as well, in finding renewed resilience through forgiveness. As Tutu said: "Thus to forgive is indeed the best form of self-interest since anger, resentment, and revenge are corrosive of that *summum bonum*, that greatest good communal harmony that enhances the humanity and personhood of all in the community" (Tutu, 1999:35).

Metz wrote an article related to the Marikana incident in applying Ubuntu as a moral theory, "... a sub-Saharan moral principle can really be put to work once one is clear and specific about what it means to enter into community or to live harmoniously" (Metz, 2016:4). In this mentioned article, Metz states two aspects that can be linked to Ubuntu: the first one: 'someone who have achieved moral excellence', and the second: 'seeking to live harmoniously'. In spite of these qualifications posed even by Metz, the government responded to the massacre in a way that a secular government would respond, and (as Metz's would lean towards): the exclusion of the metaphysical. This can sadly be noted in Metz's other remarks, such as: "How, if at all, do ancestors, God and the other invisible beings and forces figure in" (Metz, 2016:6)? For 'the rainbow people of God'<sup>41</sup> to be free genuinely, we will need more than such grey, secular prescriptions.

Ubuntu is not only a structural power, but simultaneously a deeply personal one, as Shutte observed: "A change of institutions is necessary but it can never be sufficient. Genuine

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<sup>40</sup> On 16 August 2012, the South African Police Service (SAPS) opened fire on a crowd of striking mineworkers at Marikana, in the North West Province. The police killed 34 mineworkers, and left 78 seriously injured. Following the open fire assault - 250 of the miners were arrested. Accessed: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/marikana-massacre-16-august-2012> 2017-11-04, 22:37.

<sup>41</sup> Shutte's 2006 book: *The Rainbow People of God: A Spiritual Journey from Apartheid to Freedom*, with a Foreword by Nelson Mandela.

human liberation entails personal growth” (Shutte, 2001:163). To grow as a person in order to contribute to a spirit of Ubuntu is inherently spiritual and requires love, faith and hope, a kind of compassion for one another, that is to be found in the metaphysical powers of Ubuntu. Liberating ourselves can in turn liberate others and the world, but for that God need to use us as persons. Tutu makes it beautifully clear when he said: “If God is transfiguring the world, you may ask, why He needs our help? The answer is quite simple: we are the agents of transformation that God uses to transfigure His world” (Tutu, 2004:15).

#### 5.4 Views on Communication and Moral Development

It must be said that Metz kept Shutte in high regard, as his predecessor, hence his statement that Shutte was one of the first professional philosophers in South Africa to publish books on African Philosophy and Ubuntu. In his own assessment of the merits of Ubuntu, Metz quotes Steve Biko<sup>42</sup>: “The claim that one can obtain Ubuntu ‘through other persons’ means, to be more explicit, by way of communal relationships with others” (Metz, 2011b:537). He thus emphasises the aspect of communication and relationship in speaking of Ubuntu. On this point he then remarked as follows: “A nice illustration of this point is a study recounted by Augustine Shutte in his book devoted to ubuntu<sup>43</sup>” (Metz, 2007a:327). He refers here to the story about the African and German nuns’ ignorance about one another’s cultures of conversation keeping as a good example. The African nuns found it acceptable to talk whilst working and the German sisters of course decidedly not. In African cultures it is easy to see people in good relationships, because there was never a lack of *communication*. When there was a problem which could not be solved, or agreed upon, the elders had to be consulted and do mediation. Both Shutte and Metz were aware of these demands of good relations, and how lack of communication and *council*, leave doors open for abuse and corruption, which is then experienced at political, social, economic and religious levels.

In fact, communication and conversation lead to learning and “moral formation”, and it is interesting what Shutte pointed out as to how it starts in the family: “As the mother teaches conversation to her child she will learn as much about herself as the child – if she is truly teaching” (Shutte, 2001:111). It is in the family nucleus where the seed of conversation is

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<sup>42</sup> For representative statements from those in Southern Africa, see S Biko ‘Some African cultural concepts’ in S Biko I write what I like. Selected writings by Steve Biko (1971/2004) 46; Tutu (n 15 above) 35; N Mkhize ‘Ubuntu and harmony’ in R Nicolson (Ed) Persons in community (2008) 38-41.

<sup>43</sup> Read Augustine Shutte, Ubuntu: An Ethic for the New South Africa (Cape Town: Cluster Publications, 2001), pp. 27–8.

planted, preparing the child for community and schooling for good moral development. To maintain relationships with others are important for development as persons through every stage of one's life. "From birth and childhood, through adolescence into adulthood, through marriage and parenthood and old age, our need of something that only others can give is recognized and celebrated in all sorts of initiation and ceremonies" (Shutte, 2009:93). Relationship, conversation, and communication form the basis of all natural processes of moral formation.

Metz referred us to a more Western way of moral development in saying: "The question, here, is how to characterise the process of moral maturation and, in particular, whether there is any kind of moral growth that occurs universally, viz., in all human societies. Famously, according to Kohlberg<sup>44</sup>, human beings, as they mature from children to adults under normal circumstances, tend to develop their thinking about interpersonal moral considerations in a series of invariant stages, with later stages being improvements over earlier ones" (Metz & Gaie, 2010:281). Shutte's keenness is more towards family and community learning and teaching the African way in order to develop the individual to better communicate and understand within community; whereas Metz focuses more on rational routes towards autonomy, and thus the Kohlberg approach of "stages of moral and character formation", with the "tasks" for each stage.

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## **5.5 Views on Education, Science and Technology**

In order to address the inequalities that South Africans have had under the old apartheid regime, and which they are still having in contemporary South Africa, due to affirmative action and unfair employment equity, we will have to make use of the opportunities that education, science and technology are providing us. Before this can be implemented on a level playing field, we must find ways of cope with the dilemma of past inequalities, because African philosophy grew as a natural and wholesome philosophy, but was also born from positions of oppression and exclusion, e.g. from good education and access to science. We will also have to be careful not to be too optimistic, because science and technology can easily become dominating forces, as can be confirmed by simply observing people's everyday dependence on computers and social media. These "modern powers" can give

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<sup>44</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, (born October 25, 1927, Bronxville, New York, U.S.—died January 17, 1987, Boston, Massachusetts), American psychologist and educator known for his theory of moral development. Accessed: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lawrence-Kohlberg> 2017-10-20, 22:56.

them total mobility, but of a kind in which they do not even see or meet other people personally anymore, or which provide automation and gadgets which are reducing human involvement. Before we can proceed in this cyber and techno era, we will have to come up with good philosophical solutions, because questions may arise as to whether science can solve these philosophical problems. The answer from cyber technocrats will probably be that we shall have to wait and see what *artificial intelligence* or *virtual reality technology* will eventually deliver.

We need to develop young people who can apply critical thinking philosophically, not just in a traditional orientation but also in a modern orientation in dealing with modern science disciplines in order to find lost meaning and dignity. For this task I find Shutte stronger, because he leans more to the philosophy of character, virtue and beliefs. Whereas Metz's thinking tends more towards the empirical, the scientific, which is very objective, and Kant's deontological "du sollst", which is more concerned with actions, reason and consequences. Metz's teachings work on the analytical, legal side of fault finding and blame, in contrast of Shutte's, which operate more from the character side of virtue and moral formation. For Shutte what is important is that a person's basic duty is to know herself by having community with others. This comes out strongly in how he applies it in education and work, which will manifest itself in science and technology. Education in South Africa lost its close link to our common humanity, because it started downplaying the sacred values of life and co-humanity, and it will be difficult to build a strong philosophy of education on a weak foundation of values. Shutte clearly identified this problem: "But there is no question but that the power of science and technology has created a one-sided over-valuation of the aspects of the world they can control and the products they can provide" (Shutte, 2001:220).

Metz on the other has a very systematic approach which can develop an inclusive and essential discipline of right action, which is good and appropriate, but not complete. The advantage of education is that it creates more autonomy (Kantian), while it is also cause the individual to contribute to societies' wealth of knowledge and resources (utilitarian). Unfortunately these emphases fall short in the area of 'moral education', because they are in danger of becoming closed-minded and enforcing principles through alarm and indoctrination. This form of education is not humane enough to develop virtue and character, and this is where Shutte's ethic of Ubuntu in education can provide valuable support and supplementation: "Education must remove the rift between the social claim and the individual claim within man himself. It must therefore develop both the sense of freedom

and the sense of responsibility, human rights and human obligations, the courage to take risks and exert authority for the general welfare and the respect for the humanity of each individual person” (Shutte, 2001:126).

Blending moral education into other disciplines of education like the sciences, can be of great benefit in the fight against moral degradation. The degradation is currently made worse through South Africa’s becoming a “secular state”, with no plan in sight to introduce, for example, philosophy and moral education into the curriculum. Our youth do have a desire for moral insight and human knowledge, and this can be made possible via the current discourse in and around the place of the humanities in the curriculum. African philosophy of education is well represented by Metz in looking at the central differences between African and Western philosophy, of which the main one is that the African one is very communitarian and the Western one very individualistic. The main problem for a South African philosophy of education is political, because the ruling government is apathetic towards robust moral discourse (as wanted by Metz), and for that one needs a humane philosophical framework for science and technology (as proposed by Shutte).

## 5.6 Beliefs and beyond

In African philosophy we cannot deal with reality without speaking about God (which is being avoided by Metz). Shutte however does include God in the conversation about the human condition and justice. My understanding is that, because our African and Western history very significantly include religion (e.g. African Traditional religion and Christianity), so we simply cannot avoid that relationship. The fact that Thaddeus Metz is writing on *Meaning in Life*, a book he published in 2013, says much about his faith and doubt. He respects most religious and moral principles in an optimistic way even though he claims not being a theist. To add value and meaning to human existence is an other-regarding notion, which I think Metz also does respect and approve of, for example, in saying: “A human person’s life is more meaningful, the more that she employs her reason and in ways that positively orient rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence” (Metz, 2013:222). The fundamental conditions of human existence is not always desirable and to act with good and virtuous reason (wisdom) to make a change can be demanding and painful. When we do act for goodness sake and suffer because of it, we bring relieve and happiness to others, which generates a joy within us that realises the meaning of love immeasurably.

Striving towards wholeness and goodness, Tutu says: “In a life of wholeness we may face brokenness, and endure woundedness, but our suffering will not be meaningless. Meaningless suffering is soul-destroying” (Tutu, 2010:49). We need to apply wisdom and look beyond ourselves in order to find true meaning and happiness, by living in harmony with others, which do not mean that we do not acknowledge ourselves, but it is in acknowledging oneself that we can acknowledge and know others more meaningful. Shutte offered a meaningful statement, as to how we can achieve such goals. He says, “The range of moral virtues that make up Ubuntu is very wide. It will be useful to divide them into two groups, those concerned with our relationships with others, and those that characterise our relationship to ourselves” (Shutte, 2009a:98). This is in contrast with Metz, who believe that Ubuntu is too other-regarding, as discussed under *Contrasting Worldviews* (5.1).

Via the conversation between Shutte and Metz, and also this brief comparison of their views on Ubuntu, I think it is advisable for us not to neglect our spiritual beliefs. This is possible, I would argue, since some of us, who are non-theist, also ascribe to such a notion even while experiencing deep doubt, and while realising that it is as impossible for them to prove that God does not exist as it is to rationally prove God’s non-existence. The fact that Metz could bring the work of Aristotle to some points of contrast to his own rational approach provides some hope for finding common grounds with normative analytical theorists. Although Aristotle also theorises along the lines of ‘reason’, it is interesting to see how Shutte’s ‘faith’ theory, with the help of Aristotelian-Thomistic arguments, could add virtue to reason in a complementary way.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The two scholars Shutte and Metz both do justice to the notion of Ubuntu, in defining African philosophy, ethics and Ubuntu formally, concretely, and in Shutte’s case, even metaphysically. The concepts individual and community do not outweigh one another, but rather complement one another. For example, our humanity depends on the respect the community have for its individuals and vice versa. Naturally community would seem more important as it encapsulates the individuals, but at the same time it however also elevates the individual through gratification, love and respect. We need powerful moral theories, which is grounded in Ethics and both Shutte and Metz add value in realizing such African morality, infused with different aspects of Western philosophy. Both of them also bring some practical philosophy to the table: Metz in particular works extensively on comparative

and applied ethics, while Shutte made conclusions such as: “So it seems that the European idea of freedom and the African idea of community do, after all, have something in common, albeit something mysterious, namely the idea that human beings are unlimited in a certain way. Of course this being unlimited is expressed in different ways in African and in European thought. In African thought it shows itself in openness and inclusiveness, in self-transcendence. In European thought it shows itself in self-determination. But it is such an unusual idea that the fact that it occurs in both of them could be a sign that at a deep level their different insights into human nature are compatible, even complimentary, and can provide a solid foundation for an ethic” (Shutte 2001:53-54).

Maurice M. Makumba explained *practical philosophy* in a way suitable to understand and include Shutte’s and Metz’s comparative and applied methods too. He said: “Generally, ethics and the philosophy of art constitute practical philosophy. However, strictly speaking ethics and politics should be grouped together constituting practical philosophy because both are concerned with directing the human person either as an individual or as a community towards the attainment of the common good or happiness” (Makumba, 2005:53-54).

For Shutte and Metz, an important consideration is to get the theoretical to engage with the practical, in order for human actions to be more regulated - without depriving the person. Both Shutte and Metz see the concept of *Ubuntu* as a tool for South Africa to be used as an integration between European and African Philosophy, to join people locally and globally for goodness. The ultimate aim to have people understanding ethics and morality is to get them to better understand their inherent values. We do not only need knowledge, but evaluative knowledge for discernment, i.e. to know why rules exist and how they contribute to our harmony and dignity which results in love for God, one another and the environment. This spirit of togetherness is the wonder of human relationships, and the realization that we are nothing without each other, creation and most importantly, our Creator.

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