Pathways in African Philosophical Theology: Augustine Shutte (1938–2016) and Gerrit Brand (1970–2013)

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Abstract

The article seeks to describe one trend within the theological scene in South Africa, a trajectory that could be called "African Philosophical Theology". In the first part of the article, some methodological problems surrounding such a descriptive category are discussed. Thereafter, I attempt to give a summary of the contributions of two thinkers who could be grouped within this category, namely Augustine Shutte (1938–2016) and Gerrit Brand (1970–2013). In this regard, Shutte's approach can be viewed as a philosophical synthesis of Thomistic and African accounts of personhood, while Brand's constitutes a meta-theology, a postfoundationalist attempt to articulate those criteria that are fundamental to adjudicating doctrinal and religious change. While their respective projects are distinctive, I argue that both of them can be classified as practicing a variety of metaphysics and theology that takes seriously the deliverances of African thought, performing thereby a "decolonial" gesture within philosophical theology.

For Gerrit Brand and Vincent Brümmer[1]

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1   Gerrit made an enormous impression on me for the short time I knew him during the initial phase of my postgraduate research at Stellenbosch. The TSSA conference, together with its theme, was scheduled for 2020, but was delayed until 2021 due to the outbreak of Covid-19. 2020 would have been Gerrit's fiftieth year, had he not died in 2013. Gerrit also introduced me to the work of Vincent Brümmer in those early stages of my work, which was in some ways foundational for my approach – particularly as regards theological method. Brümmer passed away on 30 March 2021, the year the original version of this article was delivered.

I

Occasionally, a local stock-taking of theology is needed, to look back retrospectively to see where we have come from, and what options are presently on the table. In many ways this is a fraught exercise because we are still living within these developments. Moreover, the "we" assumed in this discussion is not uniform, but plural and unfolding. To invoke Rowan Williams and Gillian Rose, "we" are always, and inescapably, in the middle of things.[2] Many of these tendencies might be latent and inchoate, not consciously recollected. Martin Heidegger argued that the thrownness of Dasein is always accompanied by *Stimmung*, a "mood" or "attunement" that is more basic than conscious thought, "moods" that shift seismically and often imperceptibly.[3] These "moods" exist in a zone of latency, and often, like the Owl of Minerva, are only brought into focus after they have passed. As a result, they provide us with an implicit horizon of understanding. As such, we are placed mid-flight, and so any historical judgements of the "mood" of philosophical theology, as it has been distinctly practised in South Africa, needs to acknowledge its tentative and processual situation.

Clearly stated, my argument concerns the task of philosophical theology and, more specifically, the various "traditions" of philosophical theology in South Africa. As such these reflections form part of a more expansive project about the status of philosophical theology in the country, particularly in the post-1994 period. My intentions here are primarily descriptive and interpretative, but it would be hard to exclude normative criteria regarding the task of philosophical theology, and how it might be practiced in the future. The argument I have set for myself is a rather delimited one: in this article, I'm not attempting a broad typology of these "traditions" within South Africa. Such comprehensiveness would be beyond the allotted scope. Rather, I will be attempting to describe what I see as one distinctive stream amongst these traditions within South Africa; in particular, two philosophical theologians whose work to my mind should be placed under an Africanised philosophical theology.

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2   Rowan Williams, "Prologue," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), xii; Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

3   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh and Dennis J. Schmidt (New York: SUNY, 2010), 134–140.

For the sake of this essay, I will be speaking about "African Philosophical Theology" (APT), a loaded term which I'll need to qualify shortly. In addition to this, my aim here is further curtailed by limiting myself to this context. Of course, historical genealogy cannot be abstracted from its expanded lineage, namely the larger continent of Africa and Europe specifically; to use a Hegelian phrase, any sufficiently "concrete" recounting of the emergence of philosophical theology in South Africa would need to appreciate this. National borders do not and (in fact) should not apply to the free circulation of ideas. And yet, even though our locus is Africa, there does seem at least some purchase in singling out South Africa – both for substantial and pragmatic reasons. Pragmatically, because this is the context I have been asked to focus on,[4] and is the one which I know best; and, substantially, because there does appear to be something unique as regards the institutionalisation of philosophy and theology in our country (here echoing the sentiments of Pieter Duvenage).[5]

For example, Andrew Nash has argued that the dialectical tradition, drawing from Socratic tendencies in Dutch philosophy, had a distinctive iteration at institutions like Stellenbosch University.[6] In his master's dissertation on the British Idealist philosopher R. F. Alfred Hoernlé, Nash makes some methodological remarks worth noting: "just as the material and human resources of post-colonial societies in Africa and elsewhere are

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4   This essay is an expanded version of a presentation delivered at the Theological Society of South Africa, with the conference title "The Decolonial Turn and Reconstructing the History of Systematic Theology in South Africa" (30 June–2 July 2021).

5   Pieter Duvenage, "Is there a South African Philosophical Tradition?' in Daniel Smith et al (eds.), *Thought and Practice in African Philosophy* (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2002), 107–119. This, however, takes notes of consideration of Coetzee and Roux that there is "no developed regional philosophy in South Africa," insofar as the South African philosophical tradition "has its roots in largely European traditions"; see P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, "Preface," in P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (eds.), *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings* (Oxford University Press, 1998), xi. This reading might need to be qualified somewhat considering the extensive literature that has developed around concepts such as *ubuntu*, which while exhibiting patterns analogous with aspects of traditional African thought more generally, do exhibit something of a "South African" flavour. Moreover, André Du Toit's and Andrew Nash's reflections on method suggest that even though "postcolonial" societies, like South Africa, exhibit a strong intellectual and historical linkage to their former colonial metropoles, the way these traditions are taken up and "bricolaged" in such contexts needs to be theorised and historically recounted in their specificity.

6   Andrew Nash, *The Dialectical Tradition in South Africa* (Routledge, 2009).

obscured and distorted by the kinds of production required by the world-market, so our intellectual and moral resources might equally be obscured and distorted by the attempt to produce whatever can be exchanged against the established coinages of the world. It is hardly possible even to raise this question unless those coinages are refused, however reluctantly".[7] Nash argues that intellectual development happens differently in post-colonial contexts when compared to metropolitan ones: "literary, artistic, technological or other processes which serve to bring into relief those aspects of reality which then become specialised fields of argument in the modern sense do not ordinarily take place in the post-colonial context in which such specialised fields of argument are continued. Consequently, "western rationality" comes to be seen not as an ongoing historical process but rather as an abstract norm".[8]

In other words, the construction of so-called "Western" philosophy constitutes an abstraction of the historical process. Instead of inserting "Western" models of philosophical development onto African soil prematurely, he argues that we should attend to the way philosophical reason has developed here specifically. Nash's methodology is decidedly Hegelian here: Hegel had argued that the "refusal both to insert one's own views into the immanent rhythm of the concept and to interfere arbitrarily with that rhythm by means of wisdom acquired elsewhere … are all themselves an essential moment of attentiveness to the concept".[9] André Du Toit, in a seminal essay on intellectual history in post-colonial societies, writes that

> The imperial power and metropolitan centre continued to be of
> primary significance to colonial developments and to provide
> much of the intellectual context for emergent colonial thinking as
> well. Accordingly, colonial intellectual history is characterised by
> a particular kind of combined and uneven development. Emergent
> local traditions had to define their own ideas, values and aims

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7   Andrew Nash, *Colonialism and Philosophy: R.F.A Hoernlé in South Africa* (M.A. diss., University of Stellenbosch, 1985), 21.

8   *Colonialism and Philosophy*, 15.

9   G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), §58/41–42.

very much within the ambit of hegemonious imperialist and other 'foreign' discourses even (and perhaps especially) where they deliberately set themselves off against these.[10]

This creates complications for typologizing traditions, stemming from the European metropolis, which have been translated into a postcolonial context. Postcolonial societies are characterized by a *mélange* of fragmented traditions and identities that are reconfigured and recomposed within the settler society, often being reified into "invented" traditions passed off as having historical pedigree.[11]

Now this influences how one approaches the question of philosophical theology in South Africa. For one thing, "philosophical theology" is a dispersed phenomenon with multiple traditions and trajectories, not all of which are compatible or congenial. "Philosophical theology" includes within its sweep Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics, early Christian philosophy, natural theology, medieval philosophy, rationalist theology, analytical and continental philosophies of religion, and so on.[12] Today, philosophical theology reflects a preference for analytic approaches, in which the conceptual issues and meaning provoked by Christian doctrines are subjected to analytic rigour and clarification. For instance, noted Reformed epistemologist Alvin Plantinga has described philosophical theology as "a matter of thinking about the central doctrines of the Christian faith from a philosophical perspective; it is a matter of employing the resources of philosophy to deepen our grasp and understanding of them".[13] Taliaferro and Meister define philosophical theology as a "critical,

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10   André Du Toit, "The Problem of Intellectual History in (Post) Colonial Societies: The Case of South Africa." *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 18, no. 2 (1991): 8.

11   For example, "ethic tribalism", Du Toit argues, "should in fact be recognised as a colonial creation, a rigidified grid imposed on the multiple and local identities in the interest of orderly administration and colonial rule" ("The Problem of Intellectual History in (Post) Colonial Societies," 12).

12   See Ingolf Dalferth, "Philosophical Theology," in David Ford and Rachel Muers (eds.), *Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918* (3rd ed., Blackwell, 2005), 305–321.

13   Alvin Plantinga, quoted in Brian Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine* (Blackwell, 2005), 14.

disciplined reflection on the concept of God or the divine."[14] Vincent Brümmer spoke about philosophical theology as "an analysis of internal conceptual problems in systematic theology",[15] which tried "to determine which conceptual forms can be accepted without contradiction".[16] That is, philosophical theology aims to analyse the coherency of confessions and faith commitments so that their respective meanings might be made clearer. This method of bringing into clarity the conceptual structures of faith and religious traditions implies the development of inter-subjective criteria for an intelligible and adequate account of faith in the contemporary world.[17]

As far as a normative account of philosophical theology goes, this is compelling enough. However, as regards historical description, this only constitutes one tradition, and in many ways is a hybrid one too. For example, Brümmer's style, along with the "Utrecht School", is a mediation of both conceptual analysis and continental hermeneutical philosophy, stemming from the influence of J. F. Kirsten, Johan Degenaar, and the Stellenbosch tradition of hermeneutics.[18] Moreover, even as his scholarship remains respected in his birth country, it remains doubtful whether his method of philosophical theology has gained significant traction in South Africa, as of yet.[19] We will discuss one exception to this tendency, but it

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14   Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, *Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (Routledge, 2016), 2.

15   Vincent Brümmer, "Meanders in My Thinking: A Brief Intellectual Autobiography," in *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), 10.

16   Brümmer, "Philosophical Theology as Conceptual Recollection," in *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith,* 448.

17   Brümmer, "The Inter-Subjectivity of Criteria in Theology," in *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith,* 453–470.

18   Brümmer, "Meanders in My Thinking," 3–5. On hermeneutics at the University of Stellenbosch, see Bernard Lategan, "History, Historiography, and Reformed Hermeneutics at Stellenbosch: Dealing with a Hermeneutical Deficit and its Consequences," in Wallace M. Alston Jr. and Michael Welker (eds.), *Reformed Theology II: Identity and Ecumenicity – Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 157–171. Of particular importance in the mediation of this hermeneutical tradition at Stellenbosch is the figure of Hennie Rossouw.

19   D. C. S. Oosthuizen, who had a deep impact on a generation on ministers and theologians at Stellenbosch and Rhodes University – as well as student movements – during the 1950s and 60s, could be classified as a practitioner of a more analytical style. However, the deep impact of Kierkegaardian existentialism and phenomenology on him complicates this picture somewhat. Moreover, as with Brümmer, it remains an open question as to whether his approach has found a significant following within

seems that while hermeneutics, phenomenology, and critical theory remain dominant traditions within theological circles in the country, analytical philosophy of religion has not been disseminated to the same degree.[20] This means that what mostly counts as "philosophical theology" has not gained traction within the intellectual discourse of South Africa. But does this mean that philosophical theology, largely, is not being practiced in our context? I think the answer to this must be a negative one. Yet if this is so, then how has philosophical theology been practiced? At the very minimum, a constructive engagement between philosophy and theology seems required. But beyond this, how might the traditions of philosophical theology in South Africa be characterised?

There are several directions one could go. However, I want to focus here on one distinctive trajectory. I classify this as African Philosophical Theology (APT). The name already suggests a mix between philosophical theology and African traditions of thought. However, we encounter complexity again here: what counts as "African philosophy"? "African" as opposed to *what* exactly? Traditionally, as is often assumed, it is "African" as opposed to something like "Western" or "the Occidental". But such configurations are problematic. What counts as uniquely and distinctively "Western"? The history of so-called Western thought is not a purely European and Christian invention. As Lucy Allais has argued, "so-called Western philosophy is not monolithic or homogenous" for "one cannot easily pick out either a subject matter or a methodology and declare it to be specifically 'Western.'"[21] In fact for her, intellectual decolonisation should imply "rejecting so-called Western philosophy." What this involves is a refusal to grant "the

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theological circles within South Africa. For more on Oosthuizen, see Nash, "Dialogue Alone: D. C. S. Oosthuizen's Engagement with Three Philosophical Generations." *African Sociological Review* 9, no. 1 (2005): 62–72; Nash, *Dialectical Tradition in South Africa*, 93–102.

20   One should mention, in addition to Brümmer and Oosthuizen the figure of James Moulder, a professor at University of Rhodes and Natal, who had a deep interest in the philosophical clarification of Christological doctrines, and who also was more analytic in his approach (in line with the tradition at Rhodes). But he also appears as a rather isolated figure, who did not gather significant traction in South African theological circles; for example, see James Moulder, "A Model for Christology." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 35 (1981): 10–17.

21   Lucy Allais, "Problematising Western Philosophy as one part of Africanising the Curriculum." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (2016): 537.

West a false narrative about its origins, influences, and interactions … perpetuating exclusions and failed acknowledgements within the history of so-called Western philosophy," and thus denying "the West proprietary rights over any ideas it has happened to investigate, rather than seeing these as belonging to all of humanity".[22]

Moreover, what counts as "African philosophy"?[23] That African philosophy is constituted by diverse and conflicting traditions of thought regarding what exactly counts as "philosophy" is now commonly assumed. Is it simply philosophy done by those on the African continent? In that case, anyone doing philosophy on the continent would be doing "African philosophy". This seems to dissipate its heuristic capacity, since the distinctive history and contribution of the continent needs to be included in the equation. Somehow, questions of contextuality and relevancy must be raised. Moreover, would philosophical works written in African languages be included, no matter their explicit content? Is so-called "ethno-philosophy" included in the mix, or is Paulin Hountondji right to exclude it from the proper domain of philosophy? Should African philosophy be considered from the priority of method and its professionalization,[24] or should "African" content be prioritized, namely traditional systems of thought? And then there is this assumed distinction between philosophy and theology: African philosophy throughout the continent has a distinctly religious component to it, so that hard distinctions between theology and philosophy are often rather tenuous. What actualisable distinctions can be drawn here then? In the end, maybe Gerrit Brand's comments that "African philosophy owes its distinctive identity not to an immutable essence of core

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22   "Problematising Western philosophy," 544.

23   The debate is significant and disparate, but for a sample see P. O. Bodunrin, "The Question of African Philosophy." *Philosophy* 56 (1981): 161–179; Paulin Hountondji, "On 'African Philosophy.'" *Radical Philosophy* 34 (Autumn 1983): 20–25; Godfrey Tangwa, "African Philosophy: Appraisal of a Recurrent Problematic," in Adeshina Afolayan and Toyin Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 19–33.

24   On "professionalisation" in African philosophy (with a special reference to Hountondji), see Omedi Ochieng, *The Intellectual Imagination: Knowledge and Aesthetics in North Atlantic and African Philosophy* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 105–124. For a critique of Bodunrin on this score, see H. Odera Oruka, "Sagacity in African Philosophy." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23, no.4 (1983): 383–393.

convictions, but to an on-going process of discussion and debate" is the most capacious designation we have.[25]

In my argument, I will not be answering all these questions. Sufficient for my purposes is that philosophical theology must imply, at the very minimum, a procedure whereby philosophy and theology are correlated explicitly. This would imply a distinction but not an opposition between the disciplines.[26] Additionally, APT would imply making the distinctive contribution of Africa somehow thematic within its method and content. Furthermore, I should add that I am explicitly focused on philosophical theology within the Christian tradition. This delimits my scope quite a bit. And as I've said before, my focus is on South Africa, which narrows the window even further, and excludes a discussion of someone like the Kenyan theologian and philosopher John Mbiti.

With these qualifications in mind, I will now move onto a discussion of Augustine Shutte and Gerrit Brand, and in particular their contributions in *Philosophy for Africa* (1993) and *Speaking of a Fabulous Ghost* (2002).

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25   Gerrit Brand, "African Philosophy and the Politics of Language in Africa," in Willem De Vries and Robert Vosloo (eds.), *Godverlanger: 'n Huldingsbundel vir Gerrit Brand* (Stellenbosch, SUN Press, 2014), 195.

26   Personally, I think a Thomistic model of the relation between philosophy and theology is rather a simple and compelling one, insofar as it is grounded on the creature-creator distinction, and an overall analogical metaphysic that acknowledges their connection without abolishing the distinction between them. As Aquinas writes in *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.4, "the philosopher takes his argument from the proper causes of things; the believer, from the first cause". Furthermore, "the teaching of philosophy, which considers creatures in themselves and leads us from them to the knowledge of God, the first consideration is about creatures; the last, of God. But in the teaching of faith, which considers creatures only in their relation to God, the consideration of God comes first, that of creatures afterwards. And thus the doctrine of faith is more perfect, as being more like the knowledge possessed by God, who, in knowing Himself, immediately knows other things." Translation taken from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Two: Creation*, trans. James F. Anderson (New York: Doubleday, 1955). Also see Michael Hanby's "Discourse on method", in his *No God, no Science? Theology, Cosmology, Biology* (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 9–48. This however is a theological judgement which might not be shared by all traditions, and so I will not be using it as a historical and descriptive rubric.

II

Augustine Shutte (1938-2016) was a Catholic philosopher trained at the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University. Under the influence of Johan Degenaar, Martin Versfeld, and Thomism, Shutte put forward a Christian account of personhood that was communicable to an African and as well as an expanding "secular" context.[27] His strong preoccupation with this theme can be seen in several early publications, in addition to his doctoral dissertation (completed under Degenaar).[28] Later, as a lecturer at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Cape Town, Shutte penned several monographs on related themes, namely theological humanism,[29] African philosophy,[30] and the concept of *ubuntu*.[31] It is particularly his book on African philosophy which will concern me here.[32]

Mabogo More once credited Augustine Shutte's *Philosophy for Africa* as being "a contribution to the general consciousness of Africa", despite its obvious shortcomings and limitations.[33] Singling out this publication then appears to have methodological purchase, and so is not arbitrary. The purpose of the monograph was to juxtapose a broadly Thomistic conceptuality of personhood with an African account of sociality. These distinct traditions converged for him insofar as both suggested 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". That means that "our capacity for free self-realisation…requires *a certain*

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27   For the sake of descriptive purposes here, I will not challenge or enter into polemic regarding whether this "secularisation" thesis can be globally sustained.

28   M. F. N. Shutte, *Spirituality and Intersubjectivity: A Philosophical Understanding of the Relation between the Spiritual Nature of Persons and Basic Structures of Subjectivity* (PhD diss., Stellenbosch University, 1982).

29   Augustine Shutte, *The Mystery of Humanity* (Cape Town: Snail Press, 1993).

30   Augustine Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993).

31   Augustine Shutte, *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Press, 2001).

32   For more biographical details, see Patrick Giddy, "Augustine Shutte's Autobiographical Account of His Christian Theology." *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 2, no. 2 (2016): 227–256.

33   Mabogo P. More, "Philosophy in South Africa Under and After Apartheid," in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.), A *Companion to African Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 158.

kind of influence of other persons if it is to develop towards fulfilment."[34] Shutte explicitly places his argument within a religious context since only a religious orientation can address the whole person and lead them towards the transformation of desire – a typically Augustinian gesture one might add.[35] Overall, Shutte juxtaposes both Catholic and African metaphysics of personhood to overcome, on the one side, a scientific materialism and determinism which negates spirituality and human freedom, while also mitigating a dualism between matter and mind.[36]

Shutte distinguishes between two approaches within African philosophy, namely that which privileges philosophical method and that which focuses on systematizing and analysing African traditional thought. As examples of the former trend, one might mention Paulin Hountondji and Kwasi Wiredu, while the latter might be exemplified by Kwame Nkrumah and Alexis Kagamé. But in fact, these tendencies reflect two distinct movements within philosophy itself, namely the gesture towards "the universality of philosophical truth", on the one side, and "the fact that actual philosophy is always produced in a particular culture and language and develops particular sets of concepts to deal with particular intellectual problems that are felt to be important."[37] Shutte thinks that there are benefits to each of these tendencies: universal truth holds in check destructive ideas that are sheltered from scrutiny because they are classified as traditional, while the focus on particularity can alert us to the contextual nature of all philosophical production. However, each should be balanced insofar as the former can tend towards scientism and reductionism, while the latter can bend to cultural relativism.[38]

In one of his chapters, Shutte turns to Léopold S. Senghor, whose thought was characterised by a blending of European philosophical traditions with African socialism and *négritude*. Senghor argued for a philosophy in which

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34   *Philosophy for Africa*, 9–10.

35   Ibid., 12.

36   Ibid., 35–45

37   Ibid., 17.

38   On this question more generally, see Kwasi Wiredu, "Are there Cultural Universals?" *The Monist* 78, no. 1 (January 1995): 52–64.

human thought was "a practical activity, not merely a contemplative gaze."[39] Drawing upon dialectics, phenomenology, quantum theory, and Marxism, Senghor argued for the entanglement of the mental and the material, and a rejection of any fact-value distinction, or a determinism that denied spiritual transcendence and freedom.[40] Shutte correlates this dynamism with an African ontology of "force," which Senghor himself explicates via Teilhard de Chardin.[41] Hereby, the self and the other, the spiritual and the natural world, the living and the dead, are bound together through a spiritual and interpenetrating dynamism.[42] Shutte contextualises this for South Africa through the concepts of *ubuntu* (person-in-community) and *seriti* (force or energy).[43] African concepts of personhood tend to complexify the individuation process: they imply a movement from the social collective towards the construction of the individual, a movement from exteriority to interiority, and back again.[44] Within African metaphysics, this is animated by "the universal field of force"[45] that undermines any one-sided polarization on the self or the other, the one or the many.[46]

Shutte, here drawing upon his explicitly Dominican and Catholic background, then seeks to relate this vision to a Thomistic account of

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39   *Philosophy for Africa*, 24.

40   "The fact that one can't separate the knower from the known entails that one cannot make a distinction between two kinds of reality, one purely mental, the other merely material" (*Philosophy for Africa*, 25).

41   Ibid., 26–34.

42   Lajul, overstating the case somewhat, says "being in African metaphysics is a dynamic concept. It is different from the Western understanding that distinguishes "being" from "becoming", making being static and becoming dynamic. In African metaphysics, being is activity and becoming is a process. To be a human person is an activity that goes on all the time, so long as such a person is in existence; while becoming a person is a process that starts probably at conception and continues till death, or even after death according to some African cultures"; Wilfred Lajul, "African Metaphysics: Traditional and Modern Discussions," in Isaac E. Ukpokolo (ed.), *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 28,

43   Shutte seeks to relate seriti to Aristotelian ideas of *energeia*, with its concomitant ideas of the dialectic between act and potency.

44   *Philosophy for Africa*, 46–51.

45   Ibid., 53.

46   Ibid., 54–58. On this, see I. A. Menkiti, "Person and community in African traditional thought," in R. A. Wright (ed.), *African philosophy: An Introduction* (3rd ed., New York: University Press of America, 1984), 171–181; D. A. Masolo, "Western and African Communitarianism: A Comparison," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, 483–498.

personhood, here mediated and nuanced by the work of Karl Rahner. Again, Shutte attempts to reclaim the embodied aspects of the human person, without denying their openness to spiritual transcendence. For Aquinas and Rahner, this capacity for self-determination stems from the intellectual nature of the human person, which cannot be reduced to pure determinism or reactivity.[47] However, the will is always accompanied by an emotional and affective register, which means that sense and intellect are deeply connected within Thomistic philosophy. There is a play between activity and receptivity within this system. At the most profound level, this interplay between independence and dependence plays itself out in the divine-human connection.

As those familiar with Aquinas might know, Thomistic metaphysics proposes a paradoxical and non-oppositional account of the relation between divine and human action, so that the greater the dependence on the creator, the greater the freedom of the creature. Shutte proposes that something analogous is happening within the sphere of personal relations, insofar as there does seem to be relationships of dependence – like love – that rather than diminishing personhood and freedom, on the contrary expand it and enrich it further.[48] "The greater the strictly personal influence you have on me, the freer I become. The more you are involved *in a strictly personal way* in the production of my act, the more the act is my own".[49] Such a model moves against a liberal individualism in which freedom is seen as "being free of the power of others", whereby "non-interference is maximised".[50] However, it also transcends a communitarianism that reduces the individual to the social whole, thus diminishing self-realisation.[51] The philosophy he proposed, in an amalgamation of Thomist

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47   See his essay, "The Human Predicament and the Transcendent." *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 68, No. 801 (January 1987): 25–35 for more on this. The theme of personhood and the metaphysical implications of "personal causality" are a persistent theme in Shutte's work. In addition to the dissertation and the cited book, this subject formed the theme of several essays; Shutte, "What Makes Us Persons?" *Modern Theology* 1, no. 1 (1984): 67–79.

48   *Philosophy for Africa*, 69.

49   Ibid., 92.

50   Ibid., 103.

51   Ibid., 104. It should be said here that Shutte associated the former tendency as predominant among the white population of South Africa, while the latter was more

and African personalism, sought to deny this Hobbesian picture through promoting an ideal of social relations in which the goods of differing and distinct parties were not conceived as being irreconcilably opposed, but expanded when placed in structures that promote "self-realising" through "other-dependence".

In the work of Shutte then, there appears to be a certain philosophical hybridity, one in which the distinctiveness of philosophical traditions is acknowledged while also asserting their epistemological porosity. Within the play of particularity and universality, a movement that we have seen is internal to the discipline of African philosophy itself, there is an attempt by him to maintain the unique contributions of each tradition, while sustaining their gesture towards universal truth. One could say that Shutte synthesised a Thomistic account of personhood with African accounts of sociality. On the one hand, he retrieved an African ontology of constitutive co-belonging, following Senghor, while on the other maintaining a Catholic metaphysics of relationality drawn from Aquinas and Rahner. For Shutte, personhood is both self-realising and other-dependent, insofar as the actualization of human freedom is not curtailed but enhanced by the loving attention of other agents. In this way, he maintained the reality of "subjectivity" and "intersubjectivity," against scientism, while also rejecting a dualist spirituality. He also thought that this synthesis provided a transcendence of the sterile opposition between liberal individualism and homogenizing collectivism, suggesting fruitful avenues for reimagining politics more generally.

By way of transition, it should be said that one can probably critique Shutte for romanticized interpretations of *ubuntu*, and his reliance on older colonialist accounts of African philosophy (like Placide Tempels). Here Aimé Césaire's satirical vituperations in *Discourse on Colonialism* regarding the appropriation of "Bantu ontology" to maintain the colonial hierarchy of being are worth bearing in mind.[52] Shutte's preferred sources

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prevalent among blacks, or so he argued.

52   "Now then, know that Bantu thought is essentially ontological; that Bantu ontology is based on the truly fundamental notions of a life force and a hierarchy of life forces; and that for the Bantu the ontological order which defines the world comes from God and, as a divine decree, must be respected. Wonderful! Everybody gains: the big companies, the colonists, the government – everybody except the Bantu, naturally. Since Bantu

for African philosophies could be classified under what Hountondji has pejoratively described as "ethnophilosophy", and it could be submitted to a similar critique directed at *négritude* by Frantz Fanon (who is not cited by Shutte). Marlene Van Niekerk has placed these trends within a "dialectics of othering" in which retrievals of African philosophy have sometimes performed a "Eurocentricism in reverse", that is, "a serialisation of the ethnocentricism instituted by the Europeans". For her, this is a "dialectically unstable reversal" since hereby "the African intellectual "others" himself [sic], objectifies himself into the shape of a product that he has seen proven fit for the export market – the distinctive shape of the ethno-mind".[53] So indeed there are some issues worth reflecting on here, but whatever these limitations might be Shutte's *Philosophy for Africa* does appear, at the very least, to complicate any easy division between African and so-called Western philosophy, and so appears, *prima facie*, to approximate a "decolonising" process that Lucy Allais has argued for. It therefore appears to be a genuine attempt at practicing philosophical theology within an African mode.

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thought is ontological, the Bantu only ask for satisfaction of an ontological nature. Decent wages! Comfortable housing! Food! These Bantu are pure spirits, I tell you: "What they desire first of all and above all is not the improvement of their economic or material situation, but the white man's recognition of and respect for their dignity as men, their full human value." In short, you tip your hat to the Bantu life force, you give a wink to the immortal Bantu soul. And that's all it costs you! You have to admit you're getting off cheap! As for the government, why should it complain? Since, the Rev. Tempels notes with obvious satisfaction, "from their first contact with the white men, the Bantu considered us from the only point of view that was possible to them, the point of view of their Bantu philosophy" and "integrated us into their hierarchy of life forces at a very high level." In other words, arrange it so that the white man, and particularly the Belgian, and even more particularly Albert or Leopold, takes his place at the head of the hierarchy of Bantu life forces, and you have done the trick. You will have brought this miracle to pass: *the Bantu god will take responsibility for the Belgian colonialist order, and any Bantu who dares to raise his hand against it will be guilty of sacrilege.*" The quotation is taken from Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 58–59.

53   Marlene Van Niekerk, "Understanding Trends," in "African Thinking" – A Critical Discussion", in *Philosophy from Africa*, 74.

III

Gerrit Brand (1970-2013) was a Christian theologian and philosopher from the Reformed tradition who was deeply influenced by the so-called "Utrecht school". In his short career, tragically cut short, Brand managed to publish one monograph based on his doctoral dissertation. That dissertation formed part of a larger project at Utrecht which was concerned with the topic of change and continuity within religious traditions.[54] Brand explicitly places his proposal within this project: in *Speaking of a Fabulous Ghost*, he develops *criteria* for adjudicating legitimate or non-legitimate claims for religious continuity within historical change.[55] The study concerned how people in theological debates "*in fact* judge theological proposals", seeking to point towards those "kind of considerations that *should* guide the judgement of those involved in the task of systematic theology".[56] Within an environment of "diachronic *fluidity*" and "synchronic *plurality*", theologians are continually working with "some implicit or explicit set of *criteria* or 'success conditions'" whereby they decide whether theological developments are continuous or discontinuous with the tradition. Brand has in mind here systematic theology, and particularly African Christian Theology. He characterises this quest for criteria as *meta-theology*, a process that transitions through philosophy of religion, the philosophy of theology, and systematic theology.[57]

But why are criteria required? For him, this is because method or authoritative sources *alone* will not prove sufficient for making such judgements; there are in fact a plurality of methods, and moreover theologians rarely follow a strong "methodological blueprint". Criteriology assists more adequately at discerning "the *common rationale*" between methodological approaches and for judging whether change or continuity is integrous. Moreover, source or scriptural interpretation, according to him, does not provide a

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54   For one sample of the kind of work produced from this project, see Brümmer, "The Identity of the Christian Tradition," in *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith*, 375–390.

55   Gerrit Brand, *Speaking of a Fabulous Ghost: In Search of Theological Criteria, with Special Relevance to the debate on Salvation in African Christian Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002), 14–15.

56   *Speaking of Fabulous Ghost*, 19.

57   Ibid., 30–34.

sufficient vantage for making these judgements, since certain standards are required for interpretations to be considered as theologically viable or not.[58] In particular, Brand is concerned with criteria found within reflections on the doctrine of salvation in Africa. He wants to explore whether it is only the substance of African theology that differs from the Western tradition, or whether their criteria differ as well. To do this, Brand decides to embrace a three-fold movement: firstly, he seeks to summarise those traditional criteria that have characterised Christian theology for discerning legitimate or non-legitimate changes and continuities in the tradition. Secondly, he then engages in a literary review of the themes that arise within African soteriology, with the hope of discerning the criteria that arise there. Thirdly, he then seeks to juxtapose these criteria with the hope of discovering the similarities or differences which may or may not arise when these criteria are compared. By doing this, Brand is attempting to avoid the colonialist gesture whereby occidental categories are imposed upon African conceptualities before they have been allowed to articulate their own.[59] In other words, criteria should be discovered *a posteriori* and not asserted at the outset; they are discerned, as he says, through an immersion in the "rhythm" of the discussion.[60]

One philosophical assumption worth mentioning is Brand's preference for *postfoundationalism* as a mode of theological engagement. This style of dialogue presupposes, on the one hand, that there is no ahistorical, acontextual, extra-linguistic, or non-experiential account of truth or experience available to us (the criteria of *contextuality*); on the other hand, it denies that different language-games are necessarily incommensurable (the criteria of *transversality*).[61] Rather, it proposes that through a mutual exposure of distinct discourses, certain intersubjective and interdisciplinary criteria and areas of common concern might arise between them.[62] For

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58   Ibid., 20–23.

59   Ibid., 35–37.

60   Ibid., 29.

61   On transversality, see Calvin O. Schrag, "Transversal Rationality," in Timothy Stapleton (ed.), *The Question of Hermeneutics: Essays in Honor of Joseph J. Kockelmans* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1994), 61–78.

62   Ibid., 40–45. See also J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

Brand, as he makes clear towards the end of his argument, this is not a philosophical assumption imposed on African theological discourse; he in fact suggests that African theology has an affinity to postfoundational method due to its insistence that "plausibility structures" are "context-relative."[63] By this he means that what we count as plausible or not is deeply connected to the conceptual framework we work within.

Space does not permit a laborious detailing of all the criteria that Brand proposes, which are largely drawn heavily from Vincent Brümmer. Generally, they fall somewhat conveniently under the three-fold traditional sources of theology, namely *revelation, reason*, and *experience*. By revelation there is implied the canons of divine self-revelation in Jesus Christ and scripture, of recognisable Christian *identity* and a *continuity* with the tradition, of a moral and personal integrity, as well as accountability to the church. The reference to reason implies *consistency* and coherence, that is, a broad commitment to non-contradiction and the ideal of showing how statements and beliefs may support each other and increase their mutual likelihood. Beliefs and theological statements should be *intelligible* as well as communicable and understandable for its addressees. They should also be *credible*, believable insofar as they situated within the larger network of things that we hold to be true. Then we have the so-called experiential criteria, which includes principles such as being *relevant* to the demands and situations that the world presents to us; moreover, such beliefs should not just be relevant to the context but sufficiently *adequate* to those tasks.[64]

In the end, what criteria does Brand discover and recollect after surveying African contributions? Well, there is a strong emphasis on cultural and contextual criteria; namely, that Christian theology should be Africanised, here implying an integration of Christian and African worldviews; moreover, it must speak to the problems of Africa, and be rooted in the local church. There are also contextual criteria in which theology is pushed to be a liberatory praxis, attentive to its situational position, as well as being accountable to the church of the poor, and not just the historical and institutional church. It appears then that these criteria do add something to the pre-understanding of theological criteria articulated by

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63 *Speaking of Fabulous Ghost*, 213.

64 Ibid., 38–58.

Brand previously. African Christian Theology hereby makes a distinctive contribution. As regards revelational criteria, there appears to be a general cohesiveness with earlier proposals regarding revelation, scripture, etc., even as context and culture play a significant part in how these criteria are translated. A significant amount of continuity, within difference, is detectable here. When we come to the criteria related to rationality, Brand argues that reason and logic are in fact intrinsic to an African cosmology that aspires to hold together both Christian and African perspectives. Conceptual schemes need to be made intelligible within an African context, coexisting credibly within the web of African beliefs regarding God, the cosmos, the spiritual world, ancestors, and so on. The experiential criteria of relevance and adequacy also gain ascendency in African discussions of soteriology: the primacy of addressing material concerns is a strong tendency throughout.[65]

What conclusions does Brand draw from all of this? Brand says that "the criteria invoked by African and Western theologians respectively seem to be *roughly similar*". In fact, "*all* the criteria invoked by Western theologians … have their counterparts in the African discussion. It is only when one mistakes a European plausibility structure for universal reason that one fails to recognise references to the African context for what they are: appeals to reason. And its only when one mistakes the Western theological tradition for theology *simpliciter*, or a perennial theology, that one becomes suspicious of a contextualised understanding of the authority of scripture and tradition." Following what could be called the "postfoundationalist" tendencies of African theology, Brand stipulates that in "place of a generalised 'reason', African theologians posit a rationality that is culturally determined and context specific". However, despite these differences, both traditions of theological criteria express an "open-endedness" insofar as the various criteria proposed work together to qualify and balance the others.[66] Related to this trajectory, Brand speaks on the task of systematic theology today:

> systematic theology cannot arrive at definitive decisions regarding the shape of the faith. At most it can attempt to clarify the nature

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65 Ibid., 196–219.

66 Ibid., 219–220.

of religious difference, delimit legitimate options, and suggest
future directions. Any attempt to stretch the competence of the
discipline beyond this must end in an arbitrary and self-defeating
absolutizing of one criterion at the expense of all the others: either
fundamentalism or foundationalism … Theology, whether Western
or African, is by definition a critical reflection on faith … and, as
such, can never take the place of faith itself in arriving at a salvific
knowledge of God.[67]

Overall, we can see that Brand, in *Speaking of a Fabulous Ghost*, attempted
to articulate a meta-theology that juxtaposed Western and African
theological criteria, with the purpose of ascertaining whether analogous
criteria were operative in both traditions. This was done with the purpose
of addressing religious change, especially on the continent of Africa in
the postcolonial period. Brand discerned standards that were *internal* to
African discussions of salvation, though without imposing a predetermined
"common scale" on both, thereby obscuring their distinctiveness. In this
juxtaposition, Brand argued that the African discourses of soteriology were
by-no-means irrational or atavistic – or "pre-logical" in the words of Lévy-
Bruhl[68] – but exemplified patterns of coherency and defensibility, as far as
their structures of plausibility were concerned. What this showed is that
there are deep parallels between Western and African criteriology, even
as they emerge from distinct sites of cultural production. If his analysis is
correct, then this suggests that both occidental and African systems, from
within their particularity, push towards *universal* standards. But if those
comparable structures and criteria are mutually present, then a Eurocentric
model of universal reason is unsustainable and finally irrational. The
decolonial import of this conclusion should be clear.[69]

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67   Ibid., 220–221.

68   Emevwo Biakolo has performed a trenchant deconstruction of the various binaries
used to categorise African thought vis-à-vis Western civilization, whether this be
the explicitly racist notions of "savage/civilised" (e.g., David Hume), or even more
nuanced accounts such as Lévy-Bruhl's "prelogical/logical", "perceptual/conceptual"
(Lévi-Strauss), "oral/written" cultures (Havelock, Ong), and "religious/scientific"
(Horton); Emevwo Biakolo, "Categories of Cross–Cultural Cognition and the African
Condition," in *Philosophy from Africa*, 1–14.

69   Echoing Quijano: "… epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to
clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences
and meanings, as the basis of another rationality which may legitimately pretend to

It can be added that Shutte also evidenced an interplay between particularity and universality in his *Philosophy for Africa*. His philosophical theology can be read as an attempt to hybridize or (if I may) creolise a Thomistic and African metaphysic of personhood. While Shutte is by no means ignorant of the differences between these traditions, his philosophical theology is more synthetic, here imitating Senghor's own articulation of a "civilisation of the universal".[70] One might wager that Brand, for his part, is methodologically more cautious: his postfoundationalist approach does not presume synthesis, but rather seeks to discover the criteria of distinct traditions, and inductively compares them to see what analogous patterns may or may not be present. He is not proposing a more systematic metaphysic, like Shutte appears to be, but rather a formal, meta-theological procedure for articulating Christian identity within continuity and change. At the structural level then, one could say that Brand tries to maintain these differences a bit more clearly, even as he suggests substantive parallels – or "family resemblance" – between these language-games.

In conclusion, one could say that both Augustine Shutte and Gerrit Brand perform a decolonial gesture as people indebted to European traditions of philosophy and theology. They could be said to be practitioners of what Johannes Fabian called "coevalness", that juxtaposition of temporalities which does not presume a racial primitivisation of the other or a simple valorising of modernity, but rather a mutual co-dwelling within the contemporary.[71] Following these arguments, one could say that their comparable projects (as regards both method and substance) destabilise the isolationism and pseudo-universality of "white" discourse. It implies a "joining" of worlds, a "Love-in-Union",[72] that militates against the

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some universality. Nothing is less rational, finally, than the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnie [sic] should be taken as universal rationality, even if such an ethnie [sic] is called Western Europe because this is actually pretend to impose a provincialism as universalism"; Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (March/May 2007): 177.

70   Léopold S. Senghor, "Negritude and African Socialism," in *Philosophy from Africa*, 438–448; Shutte, "African and European Philosophising: Senghor's 'Civilization of the Universal,'" in ibid., 428–437.

71   See Van Niekerk, "Understanding Trends," 66–71.

72   Senghor, "Negritude and African Socialism," 446.

absolutization of the colonial and postcolonial fragment.[73] Invoking Chardin, Maritain and Senghor, one might say that they articulate a philosophical *union-in-distinction* that is grounded, as Shutte himself intimates,[74] in an ethic of Christian love that distinguishes in order to unite.

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73   Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2010), 250–288; Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Eerdmans, 2020).

74   *Philosophy for Africa*, 32–34; "African and European Philosophising," 436–437.

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