

Confucius for Christians: What an Ancient Chinese Worldview Can Teach Us about Life in Christ. By Gregg A. Ten Elshof. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. Pp. viii + 102. \$15.

Ten Elshof offers a book for two types of Christians. The first are those who were raised in a Confucian environment and who seek to integrate their cultural heritage with their religious convictions. The second are those who were raised in the Christian West and who could benefit from the Confucian tradition. T. E., a philosopher by training, treats Confucianism as a philosophy that a Christian can apply to Scripture. Christian Scripture is clearly authoritative for him, but he reads it differently after having encountered another faith tradition, albeit a very humanistic one. Because T. E.'s interest is helping Christians grow in their faith by reading a non-Christian tradition, he is practicing comparative theology, not comparative philosophy.

This volume is most fit for an undergraduate audience or for parish discussion groups. Exemplary Christian characters illustrate Confucian concepts and make them concrete. They imaginatively render the book accessible. They allow Christians who may be skeptical or afraid of reading a non-Christian tradition picture how Confucius might be a trusted advisor along with Jesus and not in competition with him.

T. E. only gets off track when he introduces a third tradition, Daoism, in the chapter on ethics. He contrasts Confucian training with a supposed Daoist anarchy. Such a contrast in early Chinese philosophy has been dismissed by scholars. In addition, along with an emphasis on the family institution, the book could mention the value Confucianism places on other social institutions, especially in the context of Christian churches. The book chooses, instead, to focus on another element critical to Confucianism: self-cultivation.

T. E. hopes that readers will take up the classic texts of Confucianism themselves. This book offers an attractive invitation to do so.

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The Problem with God: Why Atheists, True Believers and Even Agnostics Must All Be Wrong. By Peter J. Steinberger. New York: Columbia University, 2013. Pp. 210. \$29.50; \$22.

Despite the title, the author's problem is not with God but with "God," that is, with the word and its purported referent. In his own words, "I want to say that there is, in fact, no concept of God—no idea or thought of God" (33). For when it is analyzed properly, the idea of God is as impossible as a four-sided triangle or a gallon of justice. Thus sentences about God can be grammatically correct, but in fact they are "Balderdash. . . . Or, to be more precise, . . . Mumbo-jumbo" (60).

The book is easy to read, and it appears to be directed toward undergraduate students who are not philosophy majors. As can be gathered from the above quotations,

it is written in a lively and engaging style. But the instructor who would choose it for the classroom should be aware that Steinberger subscribes to the view that meaning is reference, that is, the meaning of a word is what it refers to. Thus, if it can be shown that “God” refers to a conceptual impossibility, then talking about God is meaningless, whether one is a theist, an atheist, or an agnostic.

Along the way, S. gives us clues that he is not very conversant with things outside the analytic tradition, as when he reduces the causal argument for God to an argument from efficient causality (6–14), when he asserts that existing necessarily implies having been caused (57), and when he claims that Christianity according to Paul is a matter of “pure, blind, irrational faith” (15). Thus he does not consider the possibility that in speaking about God, people might be referring to beliefs that are internally consistent, to images and symbols found in a religious tradition, or to a reality encountered in spiritual experience.

From an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective, one could say that S. succeeds in demonstrating that God is not to be found in the realm of contingent or proportionate being. In the end he admits that if the universe exists, “There *must* be an explanation” (163), but the explanation cannot be anything that can be conceptualized—which is what theistic philosophers have always contended, and what mystics take for granted.

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The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence. By Thomas Jay Oord. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015. Pp. 228. \$17.60.

This book proposes an open model of God’s providence that is centered around a theology of God’s love and denies God’s direct “control” over creation. O.’s primary contribution is to say that the love of God *essentially* “limits” God, thereby acquitting God of responsibility for evil in the world, since God is unable to coerce created beings in any way.

The author writes for a Christian audience, although he has atheists in mind. At the heart of the work is O.’s attempt to “solve” the problem of evil. He argues that both cosmic regularity and randomness are real. Science and self-observation indicate that God grants self-organization and agency to simpler entities, and genuine free will to humans.

O.’s writing style is lucid and accessible. His overview and critique of common models of God’s providence is helpful, yet he contentiously describes Aquinas’s primary/secondary causation schema as “an elaborate appeal to mystery” (104). O. opts for a model that embraces three ideas: God as relational being, the future as undetermined, and love as God’s chief attribute. O.’s proposed model, “essential kenosis,” maintains that the “self-giving” love of God revealed in Christ is “logically primary in God’s eternal essence” (159–60). God’s love makes it impossible for God to coerce human freedom or cosmic agency. Therefore, “God *cannot* unilaterally prevent genuine evil” (167).