For some time now, the concept of trust, or the phenomenon thereof, has become a center of growing interest not only in philosophy and, to some extent, theology, but also in the social sciences. The two books under review significantly augment this development—and, into the bargain, provide a useful introduction to the discussion of trust.

The first book originated in a conference under the same title, but consists, not in conference proceedings, but in a dozen essays, including a selection of some rewritten after the conference, as well as some by other authors invited to contribute to the book. Although several of the essays are understandably by philosophers working out of different but related traditions, others contribute the approaches and insights of developmental psychology and sociology, while still others come from theologians and ethicists. The second book, on the other hand, is a monograph in philosophy that began as a dissertation directed by the late D. Z. Phillips. So, not surprisingly, it is an extended exercise in the logical analysis of “trust” and certain related concepts motivated by particular interest in religious life and expression, and also such secular substitutes therefor as those of Albert Camus.

It is impossible in a brief review to analyze the structure and interpret the contents of these books, much less to appropriate their arguments critically. And this would be true even if a reviewer had, as I don’t, the several kinds of expertise that doing this would require. So it must suffice to say summarily that their contents appear to be as rich as they are varied and that anyone interested in the phenomenon or concept of trust can hardly fail to benefit from engaging them. There is, inevitably, an unevenness in the
contributions. But, in my judgment, they collectively set a high standard, and none of them can be simply dismissed as failing, in its way, to help clarify the meaning of trust.

This is not to say that the discussion offered by the two books doesn’t have certain limitations, some of which, in my view, at least, are serious. So, in what follows, I want to call attention to two points where, as it seems to me, their discussion very much needs to be expanded so as to take account of possibilities and options that it either ignores or fails to consider. This I shall do from my own critical standpoint as a theologian, although, I hasten to add, not only or primarily as a theologian in the generic-specific sense—in my own case, as a Christian theologian—but also and, first of all, as a philosophical theologian.

One limitation I would draw attention to is this: were one to judge simply from the discussion presented by these books, one could be pardoned for concluding that there are really only two options for understanding trust in God, or, more generally, religious trust. Either one must proceed by developing a general concept of trust and then treat religious trust as simply one more particular case of it, or else one must reason that, because the strictly ultimate reality that theistic religions call “God” is not merely a being among beings, trust in God, or in the ultimate, cannot be merely a trust among trusts, however the concept may have been developed. But, then, it becomes apparent that, on the first option, the object of religious trust can be real, if it is, only in the same merely factual sense in which the object of any other trust is real, while the second option raises the question whether “God,” or “the strictly ultimate,” can refer to anything really real at all, as distinct from merely indicating a certain way of seeing what is real and leading one’s life as a human being accordingly.

As it happens, the first option is clearly represented in these books, neither by the author of the one nor by any of the contributors to the other, but only by writers whose views they criticize negatively in arguing for their own. But as much as I, for one, am encouraged by this, I’m troubled that the second option is the only other possibility any of them shows signs of having clearly recognized or seriously considered. In the case of Pawar, whose analysis closely tracks Phillips’, religious trust is said flat out to be “trust in the religious frame of reference” (p. 139). She arrives at this startling, and, to me, disturbing, conclusion from a reflection of Wittgenstein’s that, on my reading, has to be forced in order to support it. “It strikes me,” Wittgenstein says, “that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference” (quoted, p. 134). But whereas this statement expresses an open, undisguised comparison, and an explicitly qualified one at that, Pawar construes it as if it asserted a simple identity, and so speaks, astonishingly, of “Wittgenstein’s picture of religious belief as a frame of reference” (p. 140). But be this as it may, for all she shows to the contrary, trust in God, far from being trust in some sense in what is ultimately and uniquely real, and so, in its way, cognitively significant, is only something rather like a “blick” in R. M. Hare’s use of the term.

Nor is there as much difference, finally, as one could hope for in the case of the other writer, Ingolf Dalfether, who—again, in an homage to Phillips—argues persuasively that “the grammar of trust” is one thing, “the grammar of trust in God,” something else. Stressing that God is not a fact either in the world or beyond it, nor yet the fact that the world is, Dalfether unpacks Kierkegaard’s dictum that “God is the actuality of the possible.” “There is no possibility without some actuality in which it is grounded,