

What exactly are the differences between philosophy, philosophical theology, and philosophy of religion?

**Philosophy** is reflective self-understanding and life-praxis by way of critical reflection upon, i.e., both critical interpretation and critical validation of, life-praxis as mediated by culture in all of its forms, secular as well as religious.

**Philosophical theology** is reflective self-understanding and life-praxis by way of critical reflection upon, i.e., both critical interpretation and critical validation of, life-praxis as explicitly mediated by religion as well as implicitly mediated by all of the other secular forms of culture.

**Philosophy of religion** is reflective self-understanding and life-praxis by way of critical reflection upon, i.e., critical interpretation of, life-praxis as explicitly mediated by religion as well as implicitly mediated by all of the other secular forms of culture.

On this understanding, philosophy, philosophical theology, and philosophy of religion are all alike in being reflective self-understanding and life-praxis by way of critical reflection upon life-praxis as mediated by forms of culture, including religion. It is not surprising, therefore, that they are commonly confused and that it is not easy to distinguish them. Nevertheless, one can and should take account of the differences between them that this understanding allows for.

Philosophical theology and philosophy of religion are different from philosophy insofar as the data provided by religion, or by life-praxis as explicitly mediated by religion, are privileged data for their critical reflection. But philosophy of religion also differs from philosophical theology insofar as its critical reflection upon the privileged data of religion, or of life-praxis as explicitly mediated by religion, is limited to critical interpretation as distinct from critical validation. True, philosophy of religion is also different from history of religion in that its critical interpretation is concerned with the "deep" structure of life-praxis as explicitly mediated by religion, as distinct from the "surface" meaning of particular religious data. Even so, philosophy of religion is properly "analytic," whereas philosophical theology properly

includes, in addition to such analysis, the "existential" moment that is essential to the reflective self-understanding and life-praxis that are philosophy.

Alternatively, one could so understand philosophical theology and philosophy of religion as to assign to the first philosophy's "existential" moment of critical validation, while assigning to the second philosophy's "analytic" moment of critical interpretation. In that event, philosophical theology would necessarily presuppose philosophy of religion in something like the way in which systematic theology necessarily presupposes historical theology; and, conversely, philosophy of religion would necessarily anticipate philosophical theology in more or less the same way in which historical theology anticipates systematic theology. Were one to pursue this alternative, there might be good reason to distinguish yet a fourth form of study called "**philosophical study of religion**," which would include philosophy of religion and philosophical theology as its two essential moments, concerned respectively with critically *interpreting* self-understanding and life-praxis as explicitly mediated by religion and critically *validating* the claims to validity that such self-understanding and life-praxis either make or imply.