

# Understanding the Difference: Theology vs Philosophy

## A Guide for Year 11 Religious Studies Students

As you move into A Level Religious Studies, you'll often hear the words "**theology**" and "**philosophy**". It's important to know the difference between the two – they often overlap, but they ask **different kinds of questions** and use **different methods**.

### What is Theology?

**Theology** is the study of God and religious beliefs.

- Comes from the Greek *theos* (God) + *logos* (word/study).
- Usually studied **from within a faith tradition** (e.g. Christianity, Islam).
- Tries to understand the nature of God, the meaning of scripture, and how humans relate to God.

### Example Theological Questions:

- What is the nature of God?
- Why did Jesus die, and what does it mean for salvation?
- How should Christians live based on the teachings of the Bible?

### Famous Theologians:

- **St Augustine** – Wrote about sin and grace.
- **Karl Barth** – Believed we can only know God through Jesus.
- **Sallie McFague** – Used metaphors like “God as Mother” to rethink Christian beliefs.

## What is Philosophy?

**Philosophy** is the study of big questions about life, knowledge, morality, and reality — often using reason and logic.

- Comes from the Greek *philos* (love) + *sophia* (wisdom).
- Doesn't always assume God exists – instead, it **asks** whether He does and **why**.
- Uses argument, logic, and critical thinking.

### Example Philosophical Questions:

- Does God exist?
- Is there life after death?
- Is it ever right to break the law?

### Famous Philosophers:

- **Plato** – Asked what is truly real.
- **Immanuel Kant** – Wrote about morality and reason.
- **David Hume** – Challenged arguments for God's existence.

## Key Differences at a Glance

<b>Theology</b>	<b>Philosophy</b>
Based on faith or religious tradition	Based on reason and logic
Begins with belief in God	May question belief in God
Uses scripture and religious experience	Uses argument and evidence
Often written by religious believers	May be religious or non-religious

## **How They Work Together**

Even though they're different, theology and philosophy often **overlap**. In A Level RS, you'll look at:

- **Philosophical arguments for God's existence** (e.g. the Design Argument).
- **Theological views about Jesus**, salvation, and the Bible.
- **Ethical issues** from both philosophical and theological angles.