Philosophical theology (PT),¹ which replaced natural and rational theology after Kant, began its modern career as a distinct philosophical project, based not on faith and religion but on reason and reflection and/or nature, experience, and science. However, it has never been a monolithic endeavour, and its impact on Christian thinking has been constructive as well as critical or even destructive.

Its prehistory that is sometimes mistakenly taken to be part of it includes such diverse factors as Platonist dualism, the Aristotelian pattern of causality, Stoic immanentism, Philonean personalism, Neoplatonist negative theology and Sozinian antitrinitarianism. From its most ancient roots the theology of the philosophers in the Western tradition was intimately bound up with the rise of reason and science in ancient Greece. When the gods ceased to be part of the furniture of the world, God (the divine) became an explanatory principle based not on the traditional mythological tales but on cosmological science, astronomical speculation, and metaphysical reflection. Its idea of God involved the ideas of divine singularity (there is only one God), of divine transcendence (God is neither part nor the whole of the world) and of divine immanence (God's active presence can be discerned in the order, regularity, and beauty of the cosmos). And even though it took a long time to grasp those differences clearly, the monotheistic difference between gods and God, the cosmological difference between God and the world, and the metaphysical difference between the transcendence and immanence of God have remained central to the intellectual enterprise of theological reflection in philosophy.

But the ancient theology of the philosophers is not PT in the modern sense, though it shares its difference from Christian theology. From its apologetic beginnings in the early church Christian theology defined itself in contrast not only to the mythologies of the Graeco-Roman world, but also to the philosophical cosmotheologies of the Hellenistic period and the prophetic theology of the Jewish tradition. It sought to conceive God in personal terms, and as acting in history, without relapsing into myth; it sought to conceive God as creator and ruler of the universe without reducing God to a metaphysical principle of the world; and it sought to conceive God as the eschatological

¹ For an abbreviated and different version of the following, cf. Dalferth (2005).
saviour who had acted in Jesus Christ in a definitive way, universally valid and relevant not only for the Jews but for everyone. In combining these strands it developed a revelation-based theology worked out in Christological and Trinitarian terms, and it accepted the theology of the philosophers only as a preliminary and insufficient “natural” knowledge of God.

In the intellectual matrix of the 13th century Aquinas reformulated this in terms of a hierarchy of nature and grace. Philosophy can arrive at a natural knowledge of God the creator by way of causality, analogy, and negation, but this is to be perfected by the revealed knowledge of the Trinitarian mystery of God the saviour based on Christ and scripture. However, the integrating power of this view depends on two assumptions that are not shared by modern PT: the idea of creation as the common frame of reference for both philosophical and theological knowledge of God, and the validity of the use of causality, analogy and negation to move intelligibly from the order of nature to the order of grace without either mystifying reason or rationalising revelation.

The medieval synthesis of reason and faith collapsed, on the one hand, with the differentiation of Christian theology into different confessional traditions since the Reformation and, on the other, with rise of modern philosophy and empirical science. This fundamentally changed the situation for PT, and marked the decisive step from its prehistory to its history. It begins with Bacon’s scientific methodology, Galileo’s scientific discoveries, and Descartes’ search for epistemic certainty. It reaches a first peak with Newton’s scientific achievements and their theistic interpretations in the early 18th century, and then again, in a similar climate of debate with science (cosmology, biology), in the second half of the 20th century. It begins to decline with the philosophical critiques of Hume and Kant, the rise of philosophy of religion and the onto-theological alternatives of Hegel and Schelling. Notwithstanding its continuation and even revival in the analytic theism of the second half of the 20th century, it forfeits its scientific attractiveness by the shift from physics and astronomy to biology and the life sciences as the leading sciences of the day; its point through the demise of Cartesianism and transcendentalism, the discontent with mere epistemology, and the growing prominence of phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophies of life in contemporary philosophy; its philosophical persuasiveness by the insight that religious belief is warranted within a religious practice rather than in need of justification by a de-contextualised PT; its apologetic value due to its failure to communicate to an increasingly disinterested public a philosophically mediated understanding of Christian faith; and its public function by undermining the autonomy of morality, by being stripped of its claim to be an unavoidable truth for all reasonable persons, and by the plausible charge that its arguments further the very scepticism in religion which they seek to combat.

But this is not the whole story. When the de-contextualising approach to God in natural and rational theology collapsed under Hume’s and Kant’s criticisms, this