

Ontological Distinctions

First, look at a person; then, think about a fictional person. The two differ from each other ontologically. Their status in reality differs. The relationship between such things as actual persons and fictional persons is part of the academic discipline of ontology (from the Greek word *ontos*, or being). Whenever we assume or judge that a thing is a particular kind of reality—for example, that what we see floating on a pond is a decoy duck rather than a real duck, but nonetheless a decoy duck and not a hallucination—we are making ontological distinctions. Real ducks and decoy ducks are different kinds of reality, but even decoy ducks are more real than hallucinations. Or consider the ontological difference between colors and tables. Tables are the sort of thing that might be colored, but colors are not the sort of thing that can be "tabled." Colors are properties of such things as tables, but tables are not properties at all, and so they are not properties of colors. The distinction between tables and colors is also an ontological distinction. To make or to assume ontological distinctions does not mean that we are thereby engaged in the discipline of ontology. Rather it is the other way around. The discipline presupposes that we make ontological distinctions.

(Philosophy for Understanding Theology, Second Edition, by Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, Kindle, 2007 [1985], Location 89 of 4432)