

【논문】

## Fortune-telling as Prop Oriented Make-Believe\*

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【Abstract】 Many people do not really believe fortune-telling, but they do not dismiss it as a complete nonsense, either. Their attitude toward it is ambivalent, and this ambivalence requires explanation. In this paper, I propose a thesis which can explain their ambivalent attitude toward fortune-telling by appealing to the concept of prop-oriented make-believe. I argue that if we understand fortune-telling as practiced and enjoyed by these people as prop oriented-make-believe, we can best explain and understand the ambivalent attitude toward it.

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## I . Introduction

Many ordinary people nowadays have an ambivalent attitude toward fortune-telling. When asked whether they really believe it, they usually shrug their shoulders and say well, not really. However, lots of people still go to see a fortune-teller, and they even say that the practitioner is really good at, for example, describing their personalities. Many ordinary people seem to think that fortune-telling does a quite good job in describing their personalities, and so on. These people do not really believe fortune-telling, but they do not dismiss it as a complete nonsense, either. Their attitude toward it is ambivalent, and this ambivalence requires explanation.

In this paper, I will propose a thesis which can explain their ambivalent attitude toward fortune-telling. In doing so, I will appeal to the concept of prop oriented make-believe. I will argue that if we understand fortune-telling as practiced and enjoyed by these people as prop oriented-make-believe, we can best explain and understand the ambivalent attitude toward it.

## II. Prop Oriented Make-Believe

Kendall Walton introduced the concept of content oriented make-believe.<sup>1)</sup> On his view, ordinary fiction is a prop for a game of content oriented make-believe. For example, when we read a novel, we engage in a game of make-believe with the novel as a prop. Props generate what is true in a fiction, or what is fictional, and participants in the make-believe imagine what they recognize to be

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1) Walton [1990]. See also Walton [2000].

fictional. In the case of content oriented make-believe, we are interested in what is fictional, the content of the make-believe world.

On some other occasions, we play a game of make-believe where our interest is not in the content of the make-believe world, but in the props themselves. In this case, props are not just mere tools for establishing fictional worlds. It is the props themselves that matter. Walton calls the make-believe where our interest is in the props themselves prop oriented make-believe.<sup>2)</sup> This is make-believe which is a means for understanding props. Games of make-believe of this kind are created for illuminating or exposing features of props.

Here are some of Walton's examples of prop oriented make-believe.<sup>3)</sup> Some people create a game of make-believe in which a frisbee is a flying saucer. Some people say Crotona is on the arch of the Italian boot. These people are not interested in the fictional truths which these props generate in the game. They are not interested in the content of the make-believe world. Rather their focus is on the props themselves. Calling a frisbee a flying saucer is a convenient way to indicate what a frisbee is and how it works. Thinking of the map of Italy as depicting a boot helps us articulate and communicate the geography of Italy. What we learn from make-believe in these cases is not about a flying saucer or a boot, but about a frisbee or the geography of Italy. These are prop oriented make-believe, which is useful for articulating, illuminating, exposing, remembering, and communicating facts about the props.

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2) Walton [1993]. Reprinted in Kalderon [2005] (page references are to this version.). See also Walton [2000].

3) Walton [1993], pp.66-67.

### III. Sa-Ju as Prop Oriented Make-Believe

My initial proposal is that ordinary people who have an ambivalent attitude toward fortune-telling consider it as prop oriented make-believe with our personalities as its props. They take fortune-telling as inviting prop oriented make-believe, and they engage in a game of make-believe.<sup>4)</sup>

This proposal can easily explain their ambivalent attitude. Make-believe is only pretense. When people play a game of make-believe, they only pretend that what is going on in the game is true. In general, they do not literally believe the content of the game of make-believe.<sup>5)</sup> However, prop oriented make-believe is supposed to tell us something about its props, so people can grasp something about props by engaging in this game of prop oriented make-believe. The same is the case with fortune-telling. When ordinary people go to see a fortune-teller, they engage in a game of prop oriented make-believe. So it is natural that they do not literally believe what the fortune-tellers say. They only pretend that the fortunes are true. However, when people engage in a game of prop-oriented make-believe, they will expect that the game tells us or at least attempt to tell us something about its props. The props of the game in this case are our personalities. This explains why these people think that there is something to fortune-telling which can describe people's personalities accurately, although they do not really believe that they are literally true. Thus my proposal explains

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4) I will focus on one function of fortune-telling, describing people's personalities. I will extend my proposal to another function, predicting the future later, but the discussion of this extension will be brief.

5) I am not claiming that truth and fictionality are always incompatible. See Walton [1990], p.42.

their ambivalent attitude toward fortune-telling.

Below, I will apply this proposal to two of the most popular kinds of fortune-telling, Sa-Ju, a specific kind of Asian fortune-telling, and astrology. Then, with some modifications, I will extend the application to fortune-telling in general. In doing so, I hope to show that my proposal is very plausible.

First, Sa-Ju.<sup>6)</sup> According to the theoretical framework of Sa-Ju, the universe or the cosmos is made of 5 basic elements or forces or energy: Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Soil (or Earth).<sup>7)</sup> Each element is divided into two: Negative and Positive. Everything in the cosmos can be categorized as belonging to one of these 10 elements or forces. Every event and change is explained by interactions and relationships among these elements or forces. Among many relationships, the following two are most fundamental. One is the ‘generating’ relationship, and the other is the ‘destroying’ (or ‘controlling’) relationship.<sup>8)</sup> The generating relationship is a mother-child relationship or a teacher-student relationship, and the destroying relationship is a father-child relationship or a husband-wife relationship or an employer-employee relationship. Here is an example of how these relationships work. Winter belongs to Water,

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6) I thank Chul-Jae Seong for helpful discussions on Sa-Ju.

7) I have to stress that what I explain below is only rough and common-sensical knowledge of Sa-Ju, which is available to ordinary people. So I want to make clear the following things about my interpretation of Sa Ju: (1) It is at an introductory level, (2) It is of only one of the major schools of interpretation.

8) These can be summarized as follows:

Generating relationship

Wood generates Fire; Fire generates Soil; Soil generates Metal; Metal generates Water; Water generates Wood.

Destroying relationship

Wood destroys Soil; Soil destroys Water; Water destroys Fire; Fire destroys Metal; Metal destroys Wood.

and it gives rise to ('generates') what belongs to Wood, that is, spring. Spring in turn gives rise to what belongs to Fire, which is summer, and so on.

Each person's Sa-Ju, which literally means 4 pillars or 4 columns, is determined by that person's birth time, birth date, birth month, and birth year. Each pillar consists of two letters: the upper one and the lower one. The upper one is one of the 10 letters which refers to one of the 10 elements or forces, which are assigned to years, months, days, and times. The lower one is one of 12 letters which refers to one of 12 animals of the zodiac, which are assigned to years, months, days, and times.<sup>9)</sup> Thus, a person's birth time, birth date, birth month, and birth year determine his or her 4 pillars which consist of 8 letters. For example, the Sa-Ju of the person who's born at 12pm on March 25th in 2008 is as follows:

Positive Metal	Positive Wood	Negative Wood	Positive Soil
Horse	Rat	Rabbit	Rat

From the right, the first column or pillar is determined by the birth year, the second by the birth month, the third by the birth date, and the last one by the birth time. This is called that person's Sa-Ju.

Once a person's 4 pillars and 8 letters are known, we can determine his or her inherent personality. The upper letter of the third pillar from the right is that person's basic element which determines his or her basic personality. In the above case, it is (Positive) Wood. Depending on which element is a person's basic

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9) Each animal belongs to one of 10 elements. To some of these animals, more than one element is assigned.

element, the person's basic personality is described as follows:

Wood

The person is consistent, diligent, sympathetic, and kind.

Fire

The person is cheerful, optimistic, energetic, passionate, and talkative.

Soil

The person is generous, faithful, loyal, and secretive.

Metal

The person is stubborn, persistent, brave, and decisive.

Water

The person is clever, resourceful, adaptive, and calm.<sup>10)</sup>

Depending on the other elements or the forces in 8 letters, this basic personality can be strengthened or weakened, so the personality of people with the same basic personality can vary.

Many ordinary people take Sa-Ju to be or invite prop oriented make-believe with types of personalities as its props. They understand Sa-Ju as prop oriented make-believe for illuminating certain characteristics of types of personalities. According to this understanding, a certain person exhibits, say, a Wood personality, not because that person's basic element or force is Wood. It is the other way around. This person's personality has certain features which can be compared to characteristics of a tree, and this is why a game of prop oriented make-believe is created according to which this person's basic element is Wood. Just as a flying saucer is

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10) Depending on whether the basic element is Negative or Positive, the person's basic personality is slightly different.

introduced in order to illuminate certain features of a frisbee, the 5 elements are introduced in order to illuminate certain characteristics of each type of personality.

Consider a Wood personality again. Think of a tree. It constantly grows up, provides shadow to people, its trunk is usually straight, and so on. If a certain person is consistent, diligent, and kind, calling this person a Wood person is a convenient way to indicate what he is like. He's like a tree: as a tree grows up constantly, he's diligent; as a tree trunk is straight, he's consistent; as a tree provides us with shadow, he is sympathetic and kind to other people. Think of a tree, and we can grasp this person's characteristics more easily.

Consider a Fire personality. If a certain person is cheerful, optimistic, energetic, and talkative, calling this person a Fire person is a useful way to indicate what she is like. She's like fire: as its color is bright, she is cheerful and optimistic; as its flame moves quickly, she is energetic, passionate, and talkative. We can comprehend this person's characteristics more vividly by thinking of fire.

Let's consider one more personality: a Metal personality. A knife cuts things, and metal itself is hard, and so on. When someone is brave, decisive, stubborn, and persistent, we can say this person is like a knife or metal: as a knife is a weapon which cuts things, he or she is brave and decisive; as metal is hard and does not break easily, he or she is stubborn and persistent.

We can say similar things about other personalities too. When these people go to see a Sa-Ju practitioner, they engage in games of prop oriented make-believe which are created for illuminating and communicating certain characteristics of different types of personalities. Their focus is on their own personalities, the props, not on our

basic elements or forces, the content of the make-believe world.

#### IV. Astrology as Prop Oriented Make-Believe

In astrology, we are assigned a star sign based on our birthday.<sup>11)</sup> For example, the star sign of those who are born between January 20 and February 18 is Aquarius, and the star sign of those who are born between February 19 and March 20 is Pisces, and so on. There are 12 star signs, and people are described to have different personalities depending on which star sign one is assigned. Here are two examples:

Taurus

The person is dependable, responsible, calm, peaceful, stubborn, and rigid.

Leo

The person is magnanimous, generous, hospitable, proud, and authoritative.

One's personality can vary depending on the exact birth day and birth time, and so on.

My proposal is that many ordinary people take astrology as prop oriented make-believe with types of personalities as props. To these people, the reason why a certain person exhibits, for example, a Taurus personality is not that he or she was influenced by certain stars and planets at birth. His or her personality has certain features which can be compared to characteristics of a bull, and this is why

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11) Again, this is only rough and common-sensical knowledge of astrology, which is available to ordinary people.

a game of prop oriented make-believe is created according to which this person's star sign is Taurus. Think of a bull. It works for people. It grazes happily and peacefully. It is strong, tenacious, but at times it is stubborn and shows its temper. If a certain person is dependable, calm, but sometimes stubborn and rigid, calling this person a Taurus person is a convenient way to indicate what he is like. He's like a bull: as it works for us so that we can depend on it, he's dependable and responsible; as it grazes happily and peacefully, he is calm and peaceful; but as it has a bad temper when angered, he is sometimes stubborn and rigid. Think of a bull, and we can grasp this person's characteristics more easily.

We can say similar things about other star signs. Let's see one more example. In Greek mythology, centaurs are adventurous, brave, and wise. Since it's also half animal, its behavior is sometimes uncivilized. Thus, if a certain person is adventurous, brave, wise, but sometimes irresponsible and careless, calling this person a Sagittarius is an illuminating way to indicate what he or she is like.

With astrology, many ordinary people play a game of prop oriented make-believe with types of personalities as its prop. This game is created for illuminating and communicating certain characteristics of different types of personalities.

## V. Modification and Extension

I have claimed that many ordinary people take Sa-Ju and astrology as prop oriented make-believe, with types of personalities as props, and this is why they have an ambivalent attitude toward them.

One might complain as follows. Fortune-telling does not describe people's personalities correctly. According to Sa-Ju or astrology, people who are born at the same time are supposed to have the same personality, and this seems just wrong. Games of prop oriented make-believe are created for articulating, illuminating, and exposing features of props in a vivid and convenient way. So, if fortune-telling is prop oriented make-believe and types of personalities are its props, it should illuminate and expose features of people's personalities. But if fortune-telling fails to describe people's personalities correctly, it cannot illuminate and articulate features of those personalities. Then, the complaint continues, it cannot be prop oriented make-believe.

I agree that it seems plainly false to say that people who are born at the same time have (or at least tend to have) the same personality. However, this does not make my proposal false. It only makes the games which Sa-Ju or astrology invites poor or inapt.

There might be another objection to my proposal. Some people think there is no such thing as personality types or characters.<sup>12)</sup> If they are right, then there is no prop for Sa-Ju or astrology. Then, how can we engage in the game of make-believe with personalities as its prop?

Even if it is true that there is no such thing as personality types, it does not make my proposal wrong. All that is required for someone to play a game of prop oriented make-believe is that he or she believes that its props exist. It is not required that its prop actually exists. Most ordinary people seem to believe that there are different and fixed personality types, so they can still play a game

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12) See for example Harman [1998-1999]. I thank Gregory Currie for this point.

of prop oriented make-believe having in mind these personality types as its props.

However, the above objections lead to a more important objection. Most ordinary people reject the idea that people who are born at the same time have (or tend to have) the same personality. Yet, they still think that Sa-Ju or astrology does a quite good job in describing their personalities. How is this possible? Without explaining this, my proposal remains weak.

I think the following small modification to my proposal can explain this. Props of Sa-Ju or astrology are not the actual, inherent, and fixed personality types as a whole. Their props are only some aspects of our personalities or characters. They make us focus on some *aspects* of our personalities which can be compared to the element or the star sign they assign to us. So when we play a game of prop oriented make-believe involving Sa-Ju or astrology, its props are some aspects of our personalities.<sup>13)</sup>

If Sa-Ju says I am a Metal person, I will focus on some aspects of my personality which can be compared to a metal, for example, the fact that I am stubborn at some time. Similarly, if astrology says I am a Taurus, I will focus on some features of my personality which can be compared to a bull, for example, the fact that I am stubborn and rigid at some time. I do have those aspects or features, or at least I exhibit them at some time. Similar things can be said about most ordinary people. Everybody will be cheerful and passionate at some time, but also be stubborn and persistent at other time. Everybody will be secretive at some time, kind and sympathetic at other times, but not so at still other times.<sup>14)</sup> In the

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13) I thank Kendall Walton for helpful discussions on this point.

14) This seems to corroborate Harman's skeptical thesis about personality traits.

Sa-Ju terminology, everybody will have some of Fire and some of Metal, and everybody will have some of Soil, some of Wood, and some of other element. In fact, we all have some of all 5 elements. We all have some features of personalities which can be compared to fire, and some features of characters which can be compared to water, and so on. In astrology terminology, we all have some features of all 12 star signs. We all have some features which can be compared to a lion and some features which can be compared to a ram, and so on. Whatever personality Sa-Ju assigns to you or whatever star sign astrology assigns to you, you will have some aspects which correspond to it or at least your behaviors exhibit them at some time. This is why most ordinary people think Sa-Ju or astrology does a quite good job in describing their personalities.

Note that this holds even if there is no such thing as personality types or characters, because, as I have said above, as long as people believe that there are personality types, they can play a game of prop make-believe with aspects of personalities as its props. Note also that this still holds even if people do not believe that there are personality types. Only this time the props are not aspects of personalities, but aspects or features of my behaviors which people ordinarily describe with character trait terms or personality traits terms.

Now, with this modification, it is easier to extend my proposal to the other function of fortune-telling, predicting the future. A Sa-Ju practitioner might tell you that you are likely to get a job in your late 30s because a certain element which rules your career will visit your chart at that time. An astrologer might tell you that you will meet your soul mate next year because a certain planet which rules your romantic life will enter at that time. These won't be literally

true. People do not take them to be literally true. When we hear them, we will focus on those aspects of our life which are related to career or marriage. We might think of whether we are ready for a job, what kind of job we want, what kind of person we want to meet, what our view on soul mate is, and so on. Many ordinary people engage in games of prop oriented make-believe with some aspects of our life as their props.

We can see that this can be easily extended to other kinds of fortune-telling. There are many other kinds of fortune-telling. Some use people's birth date just like Sa-Ju or astrology. Others instead use palm creases, tarot cards, tea leaves, a crystal ball, grains of rice, horse shoes, or some other thing. Many ordinary people consider all of them as prop oriented make-believe. These people take them to invite to play games of prop oriented make-believe with some aspects of our personalities or some aspects of our life as their props. To them, fortune-telling is prop oriented make-believe.

## VI. Alternative Explanations

So far, I have argued that many ordinary people consider fortune-telling as prop oriented make-believe, and I have claimed that this can make us understand and explain ordinary people's ambivalent attitude toward fortune-telling.

In this section, I will argue that my proposal is a better explanation than alternative explanations. What are alternative explanations? One is that people have inconsistent beliefs. That is, ordinary people believe that fortune-telling is true, but at the same time they also believe that it is not true. Because of the former

belief, they go to see a fortune-teller, and because of the latter belief, they deny that they really believe fortune-telling. Another explanation is that people deceive themselves. They really believe fortune-telling, but they are in a state of self-deception and thus claim that they do not really believe it. Another explanation is that people really believe fortune-telling, but when asked, they are embarrassed to admit and lie about their real belief.

I think all of these alternative explanations are not charitable and not desirable. Lots of ordinary people go to see a fortune-teller or visit a web site to read their horoscopes, and so on. Do we have to attribute inconsistent beliefs, the state of self-deception or dishonesty to them, so as to amount to claiming that these people are irrational in some way or dishonest? I think, other things being equal, we should prefer a theory which can explain ordinary people's attitude without attributing irrationality or dishonesty to them.

## VII. Against Criticisms of Fortune-Telling

We are now in a position to tell what is wrong with some of usual criticisms of fortune-telling and people who go to a fortune-teller. One main criticism of fortune-telling is that it is not scientific. A related criticism is that it is not (literally) true. I think these criticisms are mistaken. Fortune-telling, as practiced by many ordinary people, is prop oriented make-believe. So there is no problem if it is not scientific and not literally true.

Consider other prop oriented make-believe: a frisbee is a flying saucer; Crotone is on the arch of the Italian boot. Are these scientific statements which are literally true? No. They create games

of prop oriented make-believe. There is no requirement that a game of prop oriented make-believe must be scientific, and that what is true in the game must also be literally true. These examples of prop oriented make-believe are not meant to be true scientific statements. So if someone criticizes them as not scientific and not true, it would be a mistaken criticism. The same is the case with the above criticisms of fortune-telling. Now, these criticisms are not false. That is, they are right in claiming that fortune-telling is not scientific and not literally true. But they are mistaken in the sense that they miss the point of fortune-telling as practiced by many people.

Another main criticism of fortune-telling is that it is a superstition, and people who go to a fortune-teller are superstitious. I think this criticism is mistaken as a criticism of many ordinary people this paper is about and fortune-telling as they practice and enjoy it. These people engage in games of prop oriented make-believe involving fortune-telling. Thus, they do not think that fortune-telling is literally true, so they do not form any belief in its literal truth. Since there is no belief in their truth involved here, there is no superstition involved in going to see a fortune-teller. So the criticism, directed to these people and fortune-telling as they practice it, is false.<sup>15)</sup>

Of course, there might be some people who literally believe fortune-telling and their belief might be called a superstition. So the criticism in question, when directed toward these people and fortune-telling as practiced by them, is a good one. However, it is

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15) I am not claiming that make-believe can never be a superstition. One might think that religion involves pretense or make-believe, but it still is a superstition for other reasons. I thank Eric Chwang for helpful discussions on this.

not a good criticism of people in general and fortune-telling in general.

### VIII. Objections and Responses

I have argued that many ordinary people take fortune-telling as prop oriented make-believe with some aspects of our personalities or some aspects of our life as their props. I have also claimed that, first, this can make us understand and explain ordinary people's ambivalent attitude toward fortune-telling, second, this is a better explanation of those people, and finally, this makes some of usual criticisms of fortune-telling and people who go to a fortune-teller wrong. In this section, I will examine a few objections to my proposal and respond to them.

One objection is that my proposal completely ignores the original function of fortune-telling. To this objection, I reply that my proposal is not about the origin of fortune-telling or its original function when it was initially created. The question of its origin or original function is an empirical question, and my paper has nothing to say about that. The target of my proposal is the fortune-telling as enjoyed by many ordinary people with an ambivalent attitude toward it. Perhaps originally Sa-Ju and astrology were created as theories of the universe which are meant to be literally true. Or perhaps originally they were created as make-believe. This does not matter. Many ordinary people do not take them as true theories of the universe nowadays. And my proposal is an attempt to best understand fortune-telling as enjoyed or practiced by these ordinary people nowadays. Thus, it is no objection to my view to say that

fortune-telling was not originally created as make-believe.

One might complain that my explanations and descriptions of the theoretical frameworks of Sa-Ju and astrology are too simplified, and thus do not do justice to them. But, again, the target of my proposal is the fortune-telling as enjoyed and practiced by many ordinary people with an ambivalent attitude toward it. These people do not usually have sophisticated understanding of complicated details of the theoretical frameworks of Sa-Ju or astrology. This is why I have provided only rough and common-sensical knowledge of Sa-Ju and astrology, which is available to ordinary people, and this is enough.

One might object that many people really and literally believe fortune-telling. This is not an objection to my proposal. My claim was that many people have an ambivalent attitude toward fortune-telling, and their attitude can be best explained by my proposal. I also have argued that my proposal is better than other explanations according to which they really believe fortune-telling. So if this objection is the claim that among people who have an ambivalent attitude toward fortune-telling, many of them really believe fortune-telling, I have already given a reason why my proposal is preferable. And if this objection is the claim that there are many other people who do not have an ambivalent attitude and these people really believe fortune-telling, it is irrelevant to my proposal.

But this objection can be strengthened and lead to another objection. One might object to me that most ordinary people really and literally believe in fortune-telling and they do not show an ambivalent attitude, and there are not so many people who have an ambivalent attitude toward it in the first place. Thus, the target of my proposal is only a small number of people, and therefore, it

does not have a value as an explanation of people in general.

I doubt that many people really and literally believe fortune-telling. I also doubt many people even believe that they purport to be literally true. After all, no one (or at least only a few people) really demands a refund from a Sa-Ju practitioner for false fortune-telling or demands apologies and corrections for false horoscopes in a newspaper. I think many ordinary people do have an ambivalent attitude. In this paper, I assume that there are many such people.

However, the question of what proportion of ordinary people are ambivalent about fortune-telling is empirical. And it is true that I have not established the truth of the assumption of my paper with any serious empirical investigations. It was not part of my goal to establish its truth. So the objection in question does have force against me. But, I claim that it is the default position to assume that many ordinary people have an ambivalent attitude these days. It is based on our ordinary experiences with other people around us. When you ask your friends, they shrug their shoulders; people do not hear other people request a refund from a fortune-teller, and so on. Perhaps 500 years ago, the default position was different. Perhaps 200 years from now, if nobody enjoys fortune-telling any more, the default position will be changed. But nowadays, in the contemporary society, when we see many people still enjoy and practice fortune-telling but not many people who openly advocate its truth, the default position should be that many people have an ambivalent attitude. I think until some evidence against it is given, it is legitimate to maintain this default position.

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요약문

## 운세와 메이크빌리브

김 세 화

많은 사람들은 운세를 진짜라고 믿지는 않으나 동시에 그것이 완전히 말도 안 되는 것으로 여기는 것도 아니다. 보통 사람들이 대체로 운세에 대해 가지는 태도는 이와 같이 이중적이며 이러한 이중적인 태도는 설명을 요한다. 본 논문에서 필자는 메이크빌리브라는 개념을 이용하여 사람들의 이러한 이중적인 태도를 철학적으로 설명할 수 있는 논제를 제시한다. 필자는 사람들이 운세를 대할 때의 태도를 메이크빌리브로 이해하면 이러한 이중적인 태도를 가장 잘 설명할 수 있을 것이라고 주장한다.

**주요어:** 운세, 메이크빌리브, 성격, 월튼, 보통 사람들