

【논문】

## Pretense and Autism

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【Subject Class】 analytic metaphysics, philosophy of mind

【Keywords】 Hermeneutic Fictionalism, the Autism Objection, Pretense, Pretend, Autism, the Metarepresentational Capacity, Psychological Studies

【Abstract】 Jason Stanley raises an important objection to hermeneutic fictionalism. The objection is called “The Autism Objection.” In this paper, I examine Stanley’s objection and defend hermeneutic fictionalism against it. After I show that the Autism Objection assumes the metarepresentational theory of pretense, I argue, mainly based on recent psychological studies, that pretense does not require the metarepresentational capacity. By doing this, I show that there are no good reasons to accept one of the premises the Autism Objection, that people with autism lack the capacity to pretend. Finally, I mention two limitations of this paper.

### I . Introduction

Fictionalists about the entity E claim that E does not exist. So they claim that any statements which imply the existence of E are false (or untrue). For example, fictionalists about mathematical entities say “the number of apples on this table is 3” is false, because this sentence implies the existence of number, and there are no numbers. Fictionalists about E claim that the discourse about E is only a useful fiction. Among

fictionalists, hermeneutic fictionalists claim that we, ordinary people, are already fictionalists in some sense. That is, we, ordinary people, do not believe in the existence of numbers, and when we utter “the number of apples on this table is 3” we do not sincerely assert it, but only pretend to assert it. When we engage in the discourse about E, our attitude toward statements made within this discourse is a pretense. We, ordinary people, already have a fictionalist attitude toward the discourse about E. For example, Stephen Yablo is a hermeneutic fictionalist about arithmetic.<sup>1)</sup>

Jason Stanley raises an important objection to hermeneutic fictionalism. The objection is called “The Autism Objection.”<sup>2)</sup> In this paper, I will examine Stanley’s objection and defend hermeneutic fictionalism against it.

## II. The Autism Objection

Stanley’s objection can be formulated as follows:<sup>3)</sup>

### The Autism Objection to Hermeneutic Fictionalism in General

Suppose, as hermeneutic fictionalists claim,

1. Engagement in *D* involves pretending.

But we know that

2. People with autism are capable of engaging in *D*.

3. People who lack the capacity to pretend are incapable of engaging

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1) See S. Yablo, “Go Figure: a Path through Fictionalism”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 25 (2001), pp.72-102; Yablo, “The Myth of the Seven”, in Kalderon (ed.), *Fictionalism in Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp.88-115.

2) J. Stanley, “Hermeneutic Fictionalism”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 25 (2001), pp.36-71.

3) I take this formulation from D. Liggins, “The Autism Objection to Pretense Theories”, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 60 (2010), pp.764-782, at p.769.

in *D*. (from (1))

But we know that

4. People with autism lack the capacity to pretend.
5. Therefore, people with autism are incapable of engaging in *D*.
6. (5) contradicts with (1).
7. Therefore, (1) is false.

Applying this objection to hermeneutic fictionalism about arithmetic in particular, we get the following objection:

The Autism Objection to Hermeneutic Fictionalism about Arithmetic

Suppose, as hermeneutic fictionalists about arithmetic claim,

- 1\*. Engagement in arithmetic involves pretending.

But we know that

- 2\*. People with autism are capable of engaging in arithmetic.
- 3\*. People who lack the capacity to pretend are incapable of engaging in arithmetic. (from (1)\*)

But we know that

4. People with autism lack the capacity to pretend.
- 5\*. Therefore, people with autism are incapable of engaging in arithmetic.
- 6\*. (5)\* contradicts with (1)\*.
7. Therefore, (1)\* is false.

If engagement with arithmetic involves pretense, then people with autism are incapable of engaging with arithmetic because people with autism cannot pretend. But we know that people with autism have no difficulty in engaging with arithmetic. So, the objection goes, engagement with arithmetic does not involve pretense, and thus

hermeneutic fictionalism about arithmetic is false.

### III. Autism and Pretense

It is well known that children with autism have difficulty with pretend play. It is also well known that children with autism have difficulty with understanding mental states, what is often called “theory of mind.” Some psychologists claim that pretense and mental state understanding requires the same underlying mechanism. They claim that the lack of this mechanism in children with autism explains both their inability to pretend and inability to understand mental states. According to them, this mechanism is “metarepresentation.” This account was first proposed by Alan Leslie,<sup>4)</sup> and is accepted by many psychologists.<sup>5)</sup> The Autism Objection assumes this metarepresentational theory of pretense. Stanley himself makes it clear that he assumes this theory. He says:

There is much discussion of pretense in the psychology literature on “theory of mind.” A good deal of the literature is devoted to autism, which is used by theorists in support of the existence of a specialized mechanism devoted to the development of notions such as pretending and believing, what is sometimes called a “theory of mind” mechanism.... The majority of autistic persons fail at false-belief tasks, suggesting they lack the concept of belief. More relevantly for our purposes, autistic persons also exhibit a striking lack of make-believe play (which is in fact one of the behavioral diagnostics for autism). Perhaps there is some deep capacity that underlies successful performance on false-belief tasks, and

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4) A. Leslie, “Pretense and Representation: The Origins of ‘Theory of Mind’”, *Psychological Review* 94 (1987), pp.412-426.

5) For example, see F. Happé, “Understanding Minds and Metaphor: Insights from the Study of Figurative Language in Autism”, *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 10, pp.275-295.

the ability to engage in game of make-believe. Or so goes a trend in the psychology literature.... [L]et us suppose it is correct.<sup>6)</sup>

Then, the Autism Objection is supported by the following argument:

Argument from the Metarepresentational Theory of Pretense

- (A) In order to pretend, one needs the metarepresentational capacity.
- (B) People with autism lack the metarepresentational capacity.
- (C) Therefore, people with autism lack the capacity to pretend.

(C) is premise (4) in the Autism Objection. Below, I will argue that the argument from the metarepresentational theory of pretense fails.

#### IV. The Metarepresentational Theory of Pretense

Let us look into the metarepresentational theory of pretense in detail. Consider children's pretend play in which a banana is a telephone. Children know that a banana is not a telephone. So they need some way to mark the fact that the function of the expression "a banana is a telephone" is different from its normal function when it is used in a normal and serious context. They need some means to signify the fact that the expression's usual reference, truth and existence relations are suspended. That is, they need some mechanism to make sure that the original expression (primary representation) is decoupled from "its normal input-output relations."<sup>7)</sup> This is done by enclosing the original expression (primary representation) in quotation marks. The resulting expression is then a representation of a representation, a second-order representation, that is,

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6) J. Stanley, "Hermeneutic Fictionalism", p.48.

7) A. Leslie, p.417.

metarepresentation. According to Leslie, the form of metarepresentation is as follows:<sup>8)</sup>

Mother **PRETEND** “a banana is a telephone.”

Leslie claims that the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and to others and to predict behaviors on the basis of these states, that is, “theory of mind,” also requires the metarepresentational capacity. To understand mental states, one needs to be able to decouple the primary expression from its normal function. For example, suppose I think Susie mistakenly believes that there is a banana in the fridge. But I know that there is no banana in the fridge. Then I need some way to mark the fact that the function of the expression “there is a banana in the fridge” is different from its normal function. And this requires of me to decouple the original representation from its normal input-output relations, which is done by having a representation of a representation. That is, it requires the metarepresentational capacity. Thus, when I attribute the (false) belief that there is a banana in the fridge to Susie, it will take the following form:

Susie **BELIEVE** “there is a banana in the fridge.”

According to Leslie, the same mechanism, the metarepresentational capacity, is involved both in pretense and in understanding mental states. There are two crucial sub-capacities underlying the metarepresentational capacity. The first one is the capacity to decouple the original representation from its normal input-output relations. This explains the “a banana is a telephone” and “there is a banana in the fridge” parts. The

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8) *Ibid.*

second one is the capacity to understand the mental state concepts. This explains the **PRETEND** and **BELIEVE** parts. The metarepresentational capacity is the mechanism crucially consisting of these two sub-capacities, and this capacity, the same capacity, underlies both pretense and understanding mental states. In fact, pretense is just one of many mental states, and understanding pretense in others is just one case of understanding mental states in others. Leslie even says “Pretending oneself is thus a special case of the ability to understand pretense in others (someone else’s attitude to information). In short, pretense is an early manifestation of what has been called *theory of mind*.”<sup>9)</sup>

Leslie’s metarepresentational theory of pretense implies that pretense necessarily requires one unique mechanism, the metarepresentational capacity, and that without this capacity, people cannot pretend. Many psychologists accept that people with autism do not have the metarepresentational capacity. Therefore, this theory implies that people with autism cannot pretend. If we accept the metarepresentational theory of pretense, then we have to also admit that people with autism cannot pretend, which is what premise (4) in the Autism Objection says.

As I have said above, the Autism Objection assumes that the metarepresentational theory of pretense is true, and as the result of this, it assumes two things: that pretense necessarily requires one unique mechanism, namely the metarepresentational capacity, and that people with autism cannot pretend because they lack this capacity.

Fortunately for hermeneutic fictionalism, there have been studies and experiments which show that the metarepresentational theory of pretense is false. Below, I will argue that pretense does not require the metarepresentational capacity. By doing this, I will show that the argument from the metarepresentational theory of pretense does not

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9) *Op.cit.*, (italics in original)

work. This will lead us to see that there are no good reasons to accept premise (4) of the Autism Objection.

## V. Conceptual Response

We have seen that the metarepresentational capacity is the mechanism crucially consisting of two sub-capacities, and one of them is the capacity to understand the mental state concepts. This implies that in order to pretend, it is necessary that we understand the mental state concept of pretense.

There is an argument to the effect that this is not necessary. We can want to drink water even if we do not have the concept “want” or “desire” and thus do not have any belief of the form “I want that I drink water.” We can believe that I am drinking water even if we do not have the concept “believe” and thus do not have any belief of the form “I believe that I am drinking water.” This shows that even if we do not have any mental state concepts, we can still desire and believe many things. If pretense works in a similar way, then it is possible that we can pretend that I drink water even if we do not have the mental state concept “pretend” and thus do not have any belief of the form “I pretend that I drink water.”

Thus, Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich claim that it is not necessary to understand the concept of pretense in order to pretend.<sup>10)</sup> Similarly, Chris Jarrold, Peter Carruthers, Peter K. Smith and Jill Boucher argue that the only reason for thinking that pretense is metarepresentational is that pretenders have some self-awareness of their pretending, but it is very

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10) See S. Nichols and S. Stich, “A Cognitive Theory of Pretense”, *Cognition* 74 (2000), pp.115-147, at pp.137-138.



unlikely that when young children engage in pretend play they are necessarily self-aware that they are pretending.<sup>11)</sup> We do not need to think that children are metarepresenting their own pretense.<sup>12)</sup> These show that in principle, it is conceptually possible that people can pretend without understanding the mental state concept “pretense” and without the metarepresentational capacity.

## VI. Empirical Response

Recent psychological studies show that it is not only conceptually possible, but it is also in fact the case that people are capable of pretending even if they do not have the mental state concept of pretense. These studies show that people can understand pretense in others and can engage in pretense even if they do not have the mental state concept of pretense and do not have the metarepresentational capacity.

Many psychological studies show that although children of around age 3 are perfectly able to understand pretend play acts performed by another person,<sup>13)</sup> the theory of mind does not develop until around age 4.<sup>14)</sup> This means that children’s understanding of pretend play in others does not require the metarepresentational capacity. In one experiment, even 4 year old children say that the person who is hopping like a rabbit is pretending to be a rabbit, even though they are told that the person does not know anything about rabbits.<sup>15)</sup> This shows that young children do not

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11) C. Jarrod, P. Carruthers, P. Smith and J. Boucher, “Pretend Play: Is It Metarepresentational?”, *Mind and Language* 9 (1994), pp.445-468, at p.451.

12) *Ibid.*, p.452.

13) Jarrod, Carruthers, Smith and Boucher, p.456.

14) Jarrod, Carruthers, Smith and Boucher, p.459.

15) A. Lillard, “Young Children’s Conceptualization of Pretense: Action or Mental Representational State?”, *Child Development* 64 (1993), pp.372-386.

understand pretense as a mental state, and their earliest understanding of pretense is as acting-as-if.<sup>16)</sup> This study concludes that “children do *not* understand mental representation in pretense several years before they understand it with regard to other mental states.”<sup>17)</sup> Young children only “understand the ‘action component’ of pretense, not necessarily its ‘representational component.’”<sup>18)</sup>

Nichols and Stich claim that for young children to understand what another person is doing when that person is pretending, they do not need a “mentalistic understanding of pretense,”<sup>19)</sup> that is, they do not need to attribute any mental states to that person. They only recognize that that person is “*behaving in a way that would be appropriate if p were the case.*”<sup>20)</sup> All of these studies show that the understanding of pretense in young children does not involve understanding the mental state concept, and many authors support these behavioral accounts of pretense recognition.<sup>21)</sup>

Many psychological experiments also show that pretend play emerges at around age 2, but children do not begin to understand mental states until a later age,<sup>22)</sup> and that “there is no convincing evidence of [the metarepresentational] ability in pretend play until the much later age of three to four years.”<sup>23)</sup> This means that children engage in pretend play even if they do not have the mental state concept, and do not have the

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16) *Op.cit.*, p.380.

17) *Op.cit.*, p.383. (emphasis in original)

18) Jarrold, Carruthers, Smith and Boucher, p.458.

19) Nichols and Stich, p.139.

20) *Ibid.* (emphasis in original)

21) See P. Langland-Hassan, “Pretense, Imagination, and Belief: the Single Attitude Theory”, *Philosophical Studies* 159, 2012, pp.155-179, at p.173 for further references.

22) Jarrold, Carruthers, Smith and Boucher, p.446.

23) Jarrold, Carruthers, Smith and Boucher, p.458.

metarepresentational capacity.

According to Angeline Lillard, sociodramatic play emerges around age 3, and early sociodramatic play appears to be scripted behavior. That is, it involves “the carrying out of scripted routines, rather than imagining others’ mental representations of the world and acting on them.”<sup>24)</sup> She notes that at about age 2, children begin pretend play with dolls. First, children attribute independent agency to dolls, and then later, they attribute perceptual and emotive experiences to them. Just before 3 and a half years of age, they attribute cognitive experiences to dolls. Lillard claims that only the third stage, at which children attribute cognitive experiences, which are intentional states, can truly be considered metarepresentational.<sup>25)</sup> She concludes that young children’s pretend play does not require the same skills as mental state understanding, that is, it does not require the metarepresentational capacity.

Jarrold, Carruthers, Smith and Boucher argue that many instances of pretend play in young children can be explained without appealing to the metarepresentational capacity.<sup>26)</sup> They claim that there is a gradual transition and gradual development from non-metarepresentational individual pretense (from 24 to 30 months) to metarepresentational complex social pretense (from 42 months and after).<sup>27)</sup> These studies show that young children’s engagement in pretense does not necessarily involve the mental state concept, and that pretense does not require the metarepresentational capacity.<sup>28)</sup>

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24) A. Lillard, “Pretend Play Skills and the Child’s Theory of Mind”, *Child Development* 64, 1993, pp.348-371, at p.363.

25) A. Lillard, “Pretend Play Skills and the Child’s Theory of Mind”, p.363.

26) Jarrold, Carruthers, Smith and Boucher, p.463.

27) Jarrold, Carruthers, Smith and Boucher, pp.464-465.

28) See M. Rutherford and S. Rogers, “Cognitive Underpinnings of Pretend Play in Autism”, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 33, 2003, pp.289-302, at p.291 for further references.

So far, I have shown that there are psychological studies which show that young children understand pretense in others even before they understand mental states and before they begin to have the metarepresentational capacity. They understand only the action component of pretense, and “[r]ecognizing that someone’s behavior is of the kind that would be appropriate if  $p$  does not require attributing to that person any mental states-it does not require ‘metarepresentation.’”<sup>29)</sup> I have also shown that there are psychological experiments which show that young children engage in pretend play even before they understand mental states and before they begin to have the metarepresentational capacity. Children’s early pretend play revolves around scripts, and carrying out scripts does not entail metarepresentation.<sup>30)</sup> Understanding and engaging in pretense does not require the metarepresentational capacity. This shows that premise (A) is false, and this shows, in turn, the argument from the metarepresentational theory of pretense fails.

## VII. Conclusion

Premise (4) of the Autism Objection is that people with autism lack the capacity to pretend. This comes from two assumptions. The first assumption is that pretence requires the metarepresentational capacity, and the second assumption, which is accepted by many, is that people with autism do not have the metarepresentational capacity. Above, I have argued that the first assumption is false. Now, if this assumption is false, then the argument from the metarepresentational theory of pretense fails. Since the Autism Objection is supported by the argument from

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29) P. Langland-Hassan, p.173.

30) A. Lillard, “Pretend Play Skills and the Child’s Theory of Mind”, p.363.

metarepresentational theory of pretense, and the latter argument fails, we have no good reasons to think that the Autism Objection goes through. In particular, we have no good reasons to accept premise (4) of the Autism Objection (at least before some other good reason is given). My strategy of defending hermeneutic fictionalism against the Autism Objection is to refute the argument from the metarepresentational theory of pretense, which support premise of (4) of the Autism Objection. I have done this mainly based on recent psychological studies.

Before closing, I will mention two limitations (shortcomings) of this paper. Firstly, I have not shown premise (4) of the Autism Objection is false. Although it is very significant to show that we have no good reasons to accept premise (4), it would be better if it is shown that premise (4) is false, and thereby show directly that the Autism Objection fails. Fortunately, many recent psychological experiments show people with autism can pretend under certain conditions.<sup>31)</sup> More examines need to be done on these psychological studies and experiments in order to show that premise (4) is false.<sup>32)</sup>

Secondly, even if it can be shown that people with autism can pretend, it is still well known that people with autism do have difficulty with an ordinary kind of pretend play like children's make-believe play. Then, hermeneutic fictionalists need to show whether there is any significant difference between an ordinary kind of pretend play and engagement in the discourse *D* in question. For example, hermeneutic fictionalists have

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31) See for example, Jarrold, Boucher and Smith, "Generativity Deficits in Pretend Play in Autism", *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 14, 1996, pp.275-300.

32) See D. Liggins, "The Autism Objection to Pretense Theories" for directly rejecting premise (4) by claiming that whether people with autism can pretend is an open question. I agree that we have reasons to reject premise (4). But I have reservations about his understanding of hermeneutic fictionalism and the autism objection to it, so I think it is not clear whether he can defend hermeneutic fictionalism in a proper way.

to explain why people with autism are capable of engaging in arithmetic whereas they have so much difficulty with an ordinary kind of pretend play. If both activities involve pretense, as hermeneutic fictionalists about arithmetic claim, then why do they show this difference? Hermeneutic fictionalists need to explain this difference. The completion of these two tasks will have to wait for another paper.<sup>33)</sup>

투 고 일: 2013. 01. 09.  
심사완료일: 2013. 02. 09.  
게재확정일: 2013. 02. 12.

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33) I deeply thank many helpful and important comments on this paper from anonymous referees. Fully reflecting those comments and making this project more complete will require writing another paper as I mentioned in section 7 on the limitations of the paper. Although this paper does not reflect and respond to many of the comments, I will seriously consider the comments in my future projects.

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국문요약

## 프리텐스와 자폐

김 세 화

해석학적 허구주의에 대하여 제이슨 스탠리가 제시한 “자폐 반론”이라 불리는 중요한 반론이 있다. 이 논문에는 나는 스탠리의 반론에 대해 살펴보고 해석학적 허구주의를 변호한다. 구체적으로, 자폐 반론이 프리텐스(~하는 척함)에 대한 메타표상적 이론을 전제하고 있다는 것을 보인 후 최근의 심리학 연구를 바탕으로 프리텐스가 메타표상적인 능력을 요구하지 않는다는 것을 이 논문에서 밝힌다. 이를 보임으로써 자폐 반론의 전제 중 하나인 자폐증을 가지고 있는 사람들은 프리텐드(~하는 척하다)를 할 수 없다는 주장을 받아들일 만한 좋은 근거가 없음을 밝힌다. 마지막으로 나는 본 논문의 두 가지 한계를 지적한다.

**주제어:** 해석학적 허구주의, 자폐 반론, 프리텐스, 프리텐드, 자폐증, 메타표상적 능력, 심리학 연구

