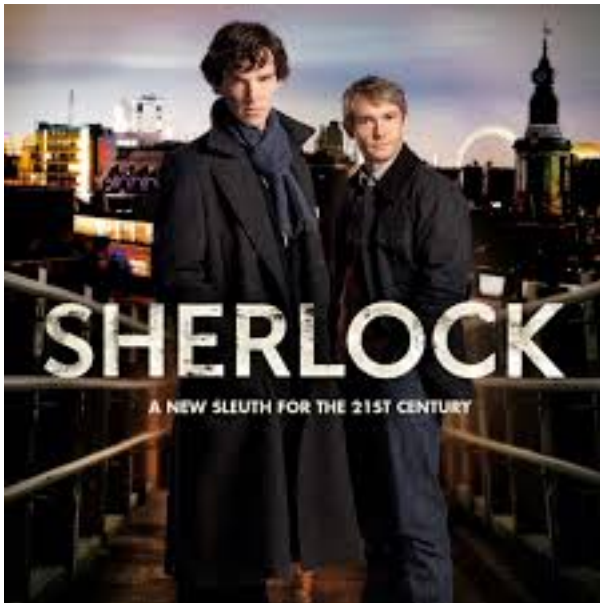


Sherlock Holmes and Analytic Philosophy

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Analytic philosophy claims itself to be a method. And who better can be found as a follower other than Sherlock Holmes. He is a character that transcends the boundaries of time as well as genres. A fictional character of a detective first created in 1887 by Sir Arthur Canon Doyle, has captured the imagination of the audience like none before. He gets recreated in films, television and web series till now. This paper is an attempt to analyze the character in the light of analytical philosophy. For this purpose, the reference has been delimited to the two television shows, out of the multitude of works based on the character - Sherlock Holmes (BBC production) and Elementary (CBS production).

We find influence of Realism and logical positivism on Analytic Philosophy. The method of analysis in Analytic Philosophy aims at reaching what is real. Sherlock also analyses in the quest of reaching the real - what actually happened, which may not always coincide with what is visible, and thus reaching who is behind it. He uses the method of sciences in his investigation. He keenly observes everything that meets the eye, what others may ignore as banal and mundane. He forms a hypothesis, then uses this data of observed facts and analyses them, and his result is like a discovery of science - the real perpetrator of the crime. In this process, whatever data does not fit in the picture,

he delves into it further to find something of it that starts fitting. This is the process through which he reaches to his culprit.

He is always experimenting. All his cases are an experiment for him. He takes up these cases out of sheer interest, to keep his brain active and engaged in what he considers a superior activity i.e. analysing. He keeps a skull, and in the show Elementary a head, as his friend. This shows the huge importance he places on the rational faculties of man, whose seat is considered to be the brain.

According to G. E. Moore, the task of philosophy should not be to focus on finding the truth (Ozmon, 1999, p. 281). Rather he focused on analysis of ordinary language, the everyday and often loosely used, as this analysis will ultimately lead to what is actually true. Sherlock also follows the same path. In solving cases his focus is not who did it. Just as Moore begins with focussing on common words, their commonly understood meanings (p. 281), similarly Holmes begins his investigations by observing the common, ordinary and often banal aspects of the crime scene and the victim. This ordinary gives him insight into the context of both the victim and the situation, and thereon builds up his investigation further. He makes sure that no ordinary fact gets ignored. E.g. He breaks into a house when the owner doesn't answer the doorbell. He smells the bottle of milk in the fridge, finds a bunch of damp magazines on the doorstep and he is able to deduce that the owner has not been inside the house since the last three days as it hasn't rained in the last three days before in that area. But the open window in the back of the house indicates that someone else had also broken into the house. But it being open even at the present moment when Holmes himself entered, prepares him for the imminent attack as the open window indicates that the other person has not yet left the house.

In another example from the same episode, a dead body of a banker is seen lying with a bullet in the temple and revolver near the hand. It was

an open and shut case of suicide for the police. But Holmes looked around the whole house. He found the arrangement of the toiletries in the bathroom, clothes, kitchen, pen and writing pad beside phone and even the coffee mug as clear markers of the user, i.e. the owner and only resident of the house, to be left-handed. But the wound of the gunshot was on the right. Hence, he concludes it was a murder. But why was the victim's gun also near him? Holmes hypothesizes that someone broke into the house, the victim tried to shoot the other person in order to save himself, his bullet goes out of the window instead and he is shot by his visitor. Police are not ready to accept his hypothesis as there were no signs of any break in into the house. To this, Holmes replies that the killer entered the flat through the balcony, where he jumped off from the floor above, which was unoccupied till recently, as he had proven that in the previous scene itself. Since the killer entered through the balcony, that's why the bullet from the victim's gun got shot out of the house and is not to be found inside. Later the ballistic reports also confirmed his hypothesis that the victim was shot with some other gun than that he owned. Next his task was to simply find the missing pieces of his hypothesis and place them into the picture. This further search, rather research takes him every step closer to the perpetrator.

Bertrand Russell's analysis practice was closer to science (p. 282). His main focus was on implication and atomicity of meaningful sentences. Russell's logic in language was about implications on how A will definitely lead to B but B might not be a result of A always (p. 283). Holmes practice of analysis of data from the crime scene and ensuing investigation process gives close attention to all possible implications but keeping it wary not to fall prey to 'what might happen' being considered as an implication. Only when all possibilities lead to the conclusion of A leading to B, only then he claims it and delimit the further direction of investigations. Russell talks about atomicity of sentences i.e. those sentences that are complete in themselves and cannot be broken down further. The sentences that are formed by joining any such two or more atomic sentences are called molecular sentences. These molecular sentences can be broken down into their constituent atomic sentences.

Crime scene and evidence are to Holmes what language is to Russell. He looks at all the evidence in their atomicity. First of all, he observes each and every evidence existing on its own. Then he joins these evidences together, forming a logical coherent picture in which they all can fit together. Like this he keeps on furthering his investigation. This is how he differs in his practice from regular police investigations. Industrial to following the lead and the web that the evidence has formed, other policemen follow the trail of and ignore those facts that appear to be unrelated to the problem at hand. While Sherlock observes everything that meets the eye in its own context and then sees if this data can be attached to the web or the picture that has been formed by the previous evidence. Even if not he does not discard them away and keep the window open to use them even if it requires to change the picture or the web completely. In an episode Holmes has to investigate a missing lady from her house. There is a big footprint on the door depicting forced entry, signs of struggle in the kitchen and the lady of the house missing. But in that footprint was a speck of blood. This entailed nothing but this evidence was still kept in mind by Holmes. Holmes looks at the volume of the shreds of the broken glass on the floor and deduces that it is not one but two glasses. To prove this, he looks for the base of another glass and finds it beneath the kitchen cabinet. This was proof enough that the victim knew the person who had entered the house and hence was offering water to him. And hence it could not be a forced entry. Therefore, Hence the footprint was to cover this fact that a known person had entered. In case of missing or kidnapping it was not necessary to show a forced entry. As there was no ransom call received since long, and the footprint had a tiny blood speck, he joined these atomic facts, otherwise ignored by others, he deduces that the implication could only have been a murder and directs his investigation in looking for a dead body rather than finding a living person.

In the same episode he notices that in all her photographs she looks the same. Which means that she had got her plastic surgery done. This fact holds no relevance in the investigation of her murder. But Holmes holds on to this observation and at the end it does become relevant in making her the target of the murderer. She was influenced to look in this manner as to attract the particular serial killer! And how does

he reach the conclusion that she had her plastic surgery done? By looking at the frames of the photographs on the wall being changed as the older frames had left their marks. The victim's phone had her photographs only till two years back while many other photographs of other people as old as five years. Looking at these two atomic facts, he joined them. When they corroborated each other and fell in line, he moved his investigation further. He is no god or fortune teller to predict the past and future. He simply tries hard to do accurate analysis and is able to find what had happened and what could happen, relating to the evidence at hand and their connections.

It seems Holmes doesn't only apply Analytic philosophy to his cases, but also follows similar ideas about language. Analytic philosophers' quest is to make language minimalistic, to the point and universal. Looseness in use of words and too much explication leads to confusion and poses hindrance in communication. He prefers texting over phone calls as it doesn't require speaking unnecessary words. Texting is to the point and sends the message efficiently and more accurately. With changing times, and increasing shows and seasons, he increasingly starts using abbreviations while texting. He even says "language is evolving Watson, becoming a more efficient version of itself" (Elementary, episode 4). He doesn't explain it further like he explains his cases, obviously for the audience more than for his companions in the story, but his idea of evolving language is lesser confusion and more and more clarity with minimum words. He finds talking futile. He informs Watson about himself that he might go on for days without talking if he doesn't deem necessary. He seems to share Wittgenstein's view that "the only significant use of language was to picture the facts or to state tautologies; beyond this...language was nonsensical" (Ozmon, 1999, p. 286). That is why he is not found sharing his feelings or talking about anything other than related to cases. Probably that is why he has no friends in the conventional manner. We find him speaking and talking incessantly only when explaining his cases to others as they are not able to analyze those like him and they need to understand only then they won't hinder his work further. He is even interested in code languages and expects the present language in some form of coding format with specific symbols for particular

meaning, much like analytic philosopher Wittgenstein considers an ideal language removing the trouble of thinking. Probably that will make his work easier and he won't have to explain his development on a case to others in so much detail.

Since the people around him, and the larger public do not think in this manner, he finds them dull and boring. They are mere followers of norms and categories. They do not stretch their limits, widen their horizon and do not try to use their brains to its full capacity. Since they take things for granted, as they are these people are mere followers. They do not analyze and hold their convictions. They do not trust their rational faculties. Hence, he calls them boring. Only person that interests him the most and gives tough competition is Moriarty, the anti-hero to Holmes. He understands Sherlock's method of deduction, of analysis and in fact applies the same in his planning as well. They are shown to be equals to each other but with different paths. Probably that is why it is hard to say whether Holmes defeats Moriarty or it is the other way round. Nonetheless, both admire each other for their intellect and commitment to use their brain's capacity to the fullest.

Sometimes it is said that Sherlock has a hunch or intuition and follows it. And he also gets lucky. Sherlock is himself seen to be saying so at times. But his hunch comes from a very thought out process. The picture that he makes of the entire series of events, whatever he finds missing, and does not find fitting satisfactorily, he notes it and goes further exploring it. Just like in an experiment you keep on looking until you find evidence to back it. He makes guesses, but calculated ones, and tries to find evidence to support it. If not, he keeps that guess aside and makes another one. What he shrugs by saying guess is actually probability. He says elsewhere as well that when not sure about something, it is all probability. Some or the other of all the possible ones will fit. Probably he calls it a guess or hunch just to avoid the whole explanation to others whenever he can avoid it and move further with his work. Mathematics and science, for their correctness are his favored domains of approach as these are the ones leading to most certainty. For now, I will sum up by saying that what language is to analytic philosophers, investigation is to Sherlock Holmes.

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