Sherlock Holmes as a philosopher? Elementary


One might wish to follow Holmes’s example with caution, however. As ably documented by Dr Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes’ scientific credentials are mixed. Watson’s note, headed “Sherlock Holmes: his limits”, includes:


• Knowledge of geology: practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.

• Knowledge of chemistry: profound. … Anatomy: accurate, but unsystematic.”

Famously, despite referring to his methods as “the science of deduction and analysis”, Holmes was unable to distinguish between a deductive and an inductive inference. A failing that might be accounted for by the fact that Watson also documented Holmes’s knowledge of philosophy as “nil”.

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