

## **Intuition, logic, Popper, and BBC Sherlock**

by mazaher

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I am hooked.

Completely won over.

BBC Sherlock made me finally watch DVDs without a dubbing in my own language.

I am smiling wide at Sherlock's occasional bursts of ecstasy and even wider at John's understatements.

I am also delighted at the quantity and quality of fanfiction being produced online, which helps a lot with my withdrawal crisis while waiting for the next season.

Most especially, I realize that those stories make me feel happy, despite the angst and sometimes the gore: Holmes and Watson face some quite tragical and dangerous situations, but they seem untouchable by tragedy themselves.

I wondered why, and I believe the reason is this: they only have to fight against their enemies, not also against an impersonal organization which entertains expectations of them.

They are freelance, they have no conflicting duties, no interfering allegiance (e.g. to Starfleet as Kirk and Spock), they don't have much to suffer from narrow social standards (which e.g. murder Twist and stifle Del Mar in BBM).

They can do whatever damn they choose with themselves, and if ever disaster or death should reach them, they will probably think it has been well worth the ride.

There is so much less injustice inbuilt in their world.

They are so much more free.

All the same, there is a detail which irks me.

I tried to let it go, but I can't.

It still irks.

It is this:

Sherlock's remarkable mind works on intuition. A bunch of scattered pieces pop up at him from the undifferentiated rubbish on a crime scene, and they snap into a pattern with a satisfactory \*click\*. (The \*click\* is the mental equivalent of an orgasm: imo, this is what Sherlock means when he tells John in ep. 1, "A Study in Pink", that he is "married to his job".)

The problem is the aftermath.

Once intuition has produced the global picture, it is time for that tiresome, dull, \*boring\* task of falsification as Karl Popper defined it: i.e. the process of trying to demonstrate that one's smooth, perfect, beloved hypothesis is ...false.

Have all the relevant elements, and only the relevant ones, popped up at me and snapped into that lovely pattern?

Can the picture of the facts as I have it in mind stand against every sort of contrary proof?

Or is there some element that, like the anachronistical comet in the alleged Vermeer in ep. 3, "The Great Game", seems to fit nicely, but doesn't?

Sherlock often flaunts his use of logic: major premise, minor premise, one and only one correct conclusion.

But what if the premises are falsifiable?

What if, e.g., one premise is not a fact but a generalization?

It is the most common trap logical premises fall into: insufficient definition, like a pixelated picture which could represent more or less anything. (It is what happens e.g. in the 1987 film by Roger Donaldson "No Way Out").

Generalization can thus be a synonym for prejudice: a judgement issued before having evaluated the proofs exhaustively.<sup>1</sup>  
Omitting the falsification process before issuing judgement reduces intuition to inquisition.

I am afraid Sherlock is not immune to this fault by omission.  
He acts precisely in this way when he labels Molly's boyfriend as "gay" in ep. 3.  
An oversight, by the way, which bites back hard, as the man in question turns out to be Moriarty.  
Sherlock's bypassing of the falsifying process has not only the consequence that he issues a prejudiced judgement on a largely irrelevant matter (Moriarty's sexual orientation), but also that he completely misses the actually relevant piece of the pattern (Moriarty's identity as consulting criminal), simply because it did not "pop up" at him like Moriarty's artful campy hints did.

This is not enough to make me like Moriarty.  
But it does make me like Sherlock a very little bit less.  
I am left hoping that he will learn from his mistake.  
(And, of course, that he will \*live\* to learn...)

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<sup>1</sup> One chilling instance relates to the murder of a family, which happened in my country a few years ago. There had recently been bloody home robberies by foreign citizens, and the newscasts took as a given that this was the case, according to the early statements of the surviving teenage daughter of the family. It was not: the culprits were found to be the daughter herself and her boyfriend. In that occasion, the stolid, plodding proceedings of the police worked better than immediate intuition of an apparently obvious pattern. See a summary of the case at [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delitto\\_di\\_Novi\\_Ligure](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delitto_di_Novi_Ligure).