

An Open Letter to Frank E. X. Dance

Re: On you Holmes example

Thursday, September 6, 2007

From: clifton_adams@yahoo.com

To: fdance@du.edu

W C Adams wrote:

Professor Dance:

I hope you will read this email with the same attitude you attribute to critical thinkers in SPEAKING YOUR MIND: they are always willing to question. Ralph Behnke speaks so highly of you, I think that you might.

In regards to your Sherlock Holmes example (pp.87-88):

Sherlock Holmes was a scientist and did often do inductive reasoning. He examined a series of weighted shoes to establish the relationship of depth of imprint to weight; he studied cigarette butts to understand the relationship of fiber to burn rate. In these studies he looked at a series of specifics to arrive at a general principle. Yes, by definition, these are inductions.

In your example, he chains a series of deductive arguments (see below) to arrive at a very specific conclusion: Watson did not propose (actually plan at that time) to invest in South African securities (the specific ones that Thurston had to sale). My additions here, I hope you agree, are certainly within Holmes claim; he isn't concluding that Watson will never make this investment under other circumstances. As indicated in the chain that Holmes outlines, the conclusion is very specific to the observations. He has gone from general to specific each time. Holmes is the master of deduction – as well as induction; he is a scientist and does induction; but someone else could give him the principles and he would still solve cases – by deduction, applying those principles to what he sees in order to arrive at conclusions.

Thank you for your time in considering this note,
w. clifton adams
writer of SUNSPOTS

Breakdown of Holmes' deductive chain:

W: You use chalk on your fingers (only) when you play billiards.

D: You had chalk on your fingers when returning from the club last night.

C: You played billiards last night.

W: You only play billiards with Thurston.

D: You played billiards last night.

C: You were with Thurston last night.

W: Stock options must be exercised before they expire.

D. Thurston's stock options expire this week.

C: Thurston must invest now or lose the option.

W: When people want others to participate, they often ask.
D: Thurston wants your participation in the investment.
C: Thurston asked you (again) to participate last night.

W: If you are going to participate, you must do it before the options expire.
D: The options expire this week.
C: If you are going to participate, you must do it now.

W: When you make investments, you use your checkbook.
D: You haven't opened your check book.
C: You are not going to participate with Thurston in this specific investment at this specific time.

[Note: Given the criticisms of my interpretation of Toulmin's model (see discussions with Handcock and Gronbeck), the letters in the above example would seem to be more appropriate as B for W, P for D, and C for C in keeping with the Adams Bridge Models of Reasoning where B is for Bridge, P is for Premise and C is for Conclusion. Of course, the first five sets above would all represent Extension Bridges for Holmes final conclusion in the last set.

Re: On you Holmes example

Friday, September 7, 2007

From: "Frank E. X. Dance" <fdance@du.edu>

To: "W C Adams" <clifton_adams@yahoo.com>

Hmmmm, Watson "you bring up an interesting matter indeed." "Perhaps I *was* using both deduction and induction in the example cited in your e-mail."

A little anachronism here with the e-mail, Mr. Adams.

I've lived with that example so long I am having some difficulty reframing it to a deductive sequence- but troubled or not I think you make a very solid point. Next edition I'll raise the question.

Thanks for your interest and post.

Frank