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Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of Theosophy: Spiritual Underpinnings of the Science of Deduction

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Abstract: Sherlock Holmes is often oversimplified as a secular modern professional, with a remorselessly scientific outlook. This hypothesis overlooks late-nineteenth-century English society's pursuit of new social possibilities for spiritualism, following challenges from Darwinist biological determinism to orthodox biblical mythology and morality. If we see Holmes in a default empirical scientism affiliated to imperial ideologies, we will remain blind to the effects of multiple countercultural and spiritual tones that also underpin the "science of deduction." Holmes' methods were subliminally informed by theosophy, as Doyle gleaned much of his spiritual knowledge from first- or second-hand readings on Blavatsky. Thus, Vedantic and Buddhist philosophy find inadvertent—but not coincidental—traces in Holmes through theosophy. An intellectual offspring of the trinity of Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall, Holmes was also a child of Blavatsky's occult philosophy. Adopting a decolonial praxis, this paper argues that comparisons between the materialistic principles of Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall, on the one hand, and Holmes on the other, are as useful as comparing the detective's work to Blavatsky's theosophy.

Keywords: Arthur Conan Doyle, Blavatsky, Darwin, decoloniality, Sherlock Holmes, Sinnett, theosophy, Tyndall

'There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion', said Sherlock Holmes (Doyle 1904, 215). He was not merely a dilettante when it came to the East but a quintessential outcome of the impact of East's mystical traditions on Victorian England. The Holmesian essence is often mired in anti-imperial critiques that, paradoxically, relegate the detective as a champion of "rigorous empiricism" (Kissane and Kissane, 356–58) or "deeply conservative fantasies of disciplinary control" by the British Empire over its colonies (McBratney, 163). It has become a staple intellectual diet to locate Holmes in a default scientific paradigm (O'Brien 2013). Consequently, he is glamorized, if also oversimplified, as "the ultimate modern professional, a figure who eschews religion and brings a relentless scientific method to bear on every problem"; as someone who exemplifies "the workings of a disciplinary society" (Knight, 127). As Rosemary Jann remarks, "critics have followed Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's biographer Pierre Nordon in viewing Holmes as a resonant symbol of the late Victorian faith in the power of logic and rationality to insure order, but fewer have focused on the narrative manipulation necessary to guarantee his positivistic triumph" (385). Hypotheses that frame Holmes in a purely scientific paradigm—what Jann calls the "myth of [Holmesian] rationality" (386)—are highly inadequate. They overlook the Victorian pursuit of new social possibilities for spiritualism,¹ after Darwinist biological determinism posed robust challenges to orthodox biblical mythology and morality.

Recent scholarship suggests that Victorian English spiritualism shaped numerous aspects of intellectual and cultural life (Chajes, 89), as it emerged from the struggle of modernity to balance individualism with intellectual curiosity, scientific temper, technological modernization, and humanity's inherent need to communicate with the dead (Kontou and Wilburn, 4). There was a strong non-Darwinian resistance to Christian dogmas as well. One of its strands manifested as disenchantment with European religion and secular modernity, culminating in a turn towards Vedantism, Buddhism, and theosophy in English popular culture. Spiritualism, in general, was symptomized in social assertions (of no strict ideological consistency or provenance) like vegetarianism, table-rapping clubs, spirit photography, occultism, and so on. Doyle, for instance, was an admirer of the eighteenth-century mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg's report on ectoplasmic phenomena greatly appealed to him as the "irrefutable proof that life continued on the other side" (Delgado, 35–36). If we see Holmes as a vanguard of empirical scientism, with default imperial affiliations, we would remain blind to multiple countercultural and spiritual tones that underpin the "science of deduction."

According to Michael Saler, Holmes' "animistic reason" and "ironic imagination" reconcile Victorian society's contrary impulses of modernity and enchantment. Saler sees Doyle's spiritualism as a "holdover of premodern enchantment," that did not touch Holmes' secularism, rationality, and scepticism (Saler, 599, 607). For Christopher Keep and Don Randall, the criminal body in the Holmesian universe is typically "grotesque," while the classical imperial body—whose social order and moral hygiene the detective generally restores—is normatively a bourgeois rationalist and individualist. In their analysis, the grotesque body is incapable of leaving "normative traces of the classical body, nor conforms in any simple manner to the demands of individualism and rationalism predicated on its form, that Holmes assumes in his practice of detection" (Keep and Randall 215). This resonates with Christopher Clausen's notion that, despite his cerebral supremacy, Holmes' "corrosive intellect never questions the basic assumptions of his society." Though "Holmes finds aristocrats and industrialists unappealing," he never questions aristocracy, industrialism, or the "unattractive" elements of the social order which he makes his vocation to protect (Clausen 1984, 115). Even so, it is important to rescue Holmes from the kind of imperial ideology that seemed to foreground such values of rationality, classicism, scepticism, and bourgeois individualism that critics have repeatedly highlighted. Critiquing power structures that precipitated the Holmesian persona cannot afford to miss the mechanisms of colonial power embedded in the critical enterprise itself, mechanisms that are entangled with the discourses and texts we use to read other colonial texts.

Critics, after Clausen, have often adopted Eurocentric theory to unmask Holmes' imperialism. That is to say, Holmes is often scrutinized within "a project of post-coloniality heavily dependent on post-structuralism as far as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida . . . [or] Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha" (Mignolo, 452). This is not to attack twentieth-century European theory and pedagogues of postcolonial thought. It is only to say that the influence of post-structuralist and postcolonial thinking is so widespread that canonical nineteenth-century protagonists like Holmes also need to be consciously delinked from that influence, for the sake of interpretative versatility. Postcolonial theory has attempted to articulate the colonizing aspects of the Holmesian canon. Simultaneously, we also need a decolonial perspective that can help us recognize the anticolonial—perhaps even anti-Eurocentric—elements that are immanent in Holmesian methods and the construction of Holmes. Such a perspective can empower interpretation to recognize how spiritual decolonization works from within the canon, notwithstanding its superficial imperialism. There is a great pedagogical need for Holmes to be delinked from the matrix of colonial power by a deeper scrutiny on Doyle's influences. To

quote Walter D. Mignolo, “We can observe many worlds will co-exist, by social actors aiming at de-colonization of knowledge and being and of de-linking from the imperial modernity” (498), as we unravel possible spiritual sources and social possibilities that may have inspired the science of deduction. Surely, as Doyle has hinted in his autobiography (1924, 26), Holmes appears to be a product of the anti-Christian crusade by Victorian rationalists and naturalists like Thomas Huxley, Charles Darwin, and John Tyndall. This paper contends, however, that while Holmes was indeed inspired by them, his creation was also steeped in a spiritual process that eludes recognition owing to the colonized hermeneutics—colonized by the “Eurocentered limits of critical theory” (Mignolo, 485)—within which the detective is always already perceived and critiqued.

Holmes and Indic Philosophy

Lawrence Frank compares Holmes’ methods to Tyndall’s scientific imagination. He infers that “the detective is never only the rationalist and the empiricist”; he possesses “a power that eludes explanation, that can be suggested only through the use of a figurative language” (348–49). But Frank evades the acknowledgment that Holmes’ power approaches the spiritual realm. It might be a Eurocentric blunder to look for Holmes’ spirituality in the number of times words like “religion” appear in the canon. Clausen reckons that Holmes’ reference to Buddhism, in *The Sign of the Four* (1890), indicates not his eccentric omniscience but his astute theses on the late Victorian Zeitgeist (1975, 1). It would probably be an overstatement to suggest that Holmes’ creator, Doyle, was a knower of Eastern mystical traditions in all their nuances. However, the year 1879, an *annus mirabilis* of sorts, which coincides with Doyle’s period of medical training, saw two titles of enormous significance; it was unlikely that Doyle would be untouched by their influence. These were Edwin Arnold’s *The Light of Asia*, written on the life of the Buddha, and Max Muller’s *The Sacred Books of the East*, which prominently featured the *Upanishads*, among other Indian spiritual texts. In 1877, occult theosophist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky had captivated, if also infuriated, the Western imagination with the publication of *Isis Unveiled*. It was a controversial book in a larger theosophical enterprise. Subsequently, she claimed to have met Tibetan Mahatmas and receiving secret occult wisdom from them, which she would use in her, yet more controversial, occult seances in England and India.

The quality of Indic philosophy that Buddhism, Vedanta, and theosophy emphasized was mystical nondualism—though not in as many words. Nondualism implies, at once, a rejection of the Cartesian mind/body dualism, the dualism between the human race and deistic pantheons and the dualism between humans and other sentient beings.² It therefore is also a de facto rejection of key dualisms in the Holmesian world—between the detective and the criminal and between a mystery and its resolution from first principles. Both Vedantism (Upanishadic doctrines) and Buddhism preach the universalism of consciousness or Brahman, the unchanging plane of awareness on which the phenomenal drama of life is cognized. Despite their internal differences—textual, social, and ideological—Vedanta and Buddhism fuelled Victorian popular imagination to seek an ethical system without a physically transcendent god and biblical genesis myths. Attaching the importance of Eastern nondualism to the genesis of Sherlock Holmes—who represents an archetypal Victorian Englishness—is an overlooked source of decolonizing the “science of deduction,” which has laboured for far too long under the weight of British empiricism and secular dogmas. Arguably, the detective’s this-worldly ethical praxis without god, or spiritual consciousness without affiliations to organized religion, as likely draws from Eastern nondualism as it may seem to draw from Darwinian ideology.

Such a thesis relocates the place of mysticism (if understood in the sense of Eastern nondualism) in the Holmesian canon. It displaces the common sense that the detective’s powers

derive only from experiments and empiricism without the need for the “intuitive” powers that summon such scientific materialism in the first place. In the Eurocentric worldview, Holmes appears not necessarily as an anti-religionist but, at best, as a liberal deist (Pearson 1976). Very few critics link his genius to mystical powers, even though a telepathic mode of storytelling is perceptible in some of Doyle’s other works, such as *The Brown Hand* (Ghosh 2009). Chesterton thought that Holmes saw only material or external aspects of reality, although he was not outwardly atheistic (Isley Jr., 280). The counter to this is that “the miraculous findings of deductive reasoning seem sometimes the work of ratiocination blurs with mysticism; Holmes may be a genius, but he also has a divinatory gift.” His dreamy-eyed “mystical states of mind enhance empirical observation and rational deduction” (Neill, 612–13). There is extraordinary resonance between Holmesian observations on trifles and Eastern nondual principles, which make imperative this comparative study, unless one is desperate to censor the likelihood of Eastern metaphysics as being part of Doyle’s inspirations.

On a superficial level, India abounds in the Holmesian canon. So it merits decolonization all the more. A little-known fact is that Indic spirituality and colonial politics were central to the genesis of the Victorian detective genre. Doyle’s second novel, *The Sign of the Four*, is practically a retelling of Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone* (1868), the first English detective novel—published about two decades after Edgar Allen Poe’s detective short stories began appearing in America. In his novel, Collins traced the origins of the loot (the eponymous Indian diamond) to the spiritual history of India and Hinduism. Striking allegorical links have been observed between Collins’ plotline of the somnambulant theft of the moonstone in England and Vedantic nondualist fables (Chatterjee 2020). Doyle secularizes the Indian loot (the Agra Treasure) in altering Collins’ setting from the Siege of Seringapatam to the Great Rebellion of 1857. But *The Moonstone*’s echoes permeate *The Sign of the Four*.

English detective fiction exposed Victorian anxieties over socioeconomic transformations that imperialism brought on its erstwhile pastoralism and aristocracy, along with the anxiety of having to secure imperium from threats of alien races (Siddiqi, 73–76; Kestner, 9–10). This was true especially of Victorian London, where Indians figured prominently as lascars, ayahs, students, delegates, barristers, diplomats, politicians, and so on (Chatterjee 2021). Doyle’s work is often seen as a representation of India in the form of “Oriental” congeries and stereotypes (Thompson, 69–73). But the presence of India in Holmes’ world cannot simply be reduced to stock-Indian tropes like the Andamanese tribesman Tonga, Jonathan Small, the convict from the Andamans, or the Indian-styled homes of the Sholtos. Doyle’s Holmesian canvas of the Indian Empire extends to Watson’s bullet wound from the Battle of Maiwand; the Trichinopoly cigar that Holmes is so fond of; the corrupt retired doctor from Calcutta, namely, Grimesby Roylott, and his train of Indian animals, including the implausible “Indian swamp adder”; and Corporal Henry Wood (a refiguration of the repressed Jonathan Small), who returns to England to avenge his betrayal by Colonel James Barclay, who had sold him out to the Indian rebels in the fictional town of Bhurtee. Holmes’ detour into Tibet and his meetings with the chief llama, during his Great Hiatus, open yet another chapter in this scheme. More strikingly, Indian poisons like aconite (their physical and symptomatic properties) bear extraordinary resemblance to the fictional African poison called *Radix pedis diaboli*, far more than African poisons themselves, in “The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot” (Chatterjee 2022).

These Indian traces trigger a fascinating displacement of Eurocentric common sense. They point us to the less physical and more spiritual loose ends of the canon—the underlying nondualist paradigm governing the detective’s ideologies and spiritual framework. There are good grounds to consider that Doyle imbibed this paradigm in his distillations of Eastern spirituality through secondary sources. Doyle’s short story *The Brown Hand*—the tale of a British

doctor from Bombay, retired to England with an amputated hand of an Afghan patient—is not only an allegory of colonialism but also a fortuitous metaphor to observe the amputated hand (so to speak) of Vedantic and Buddhist nondualism in Blavatsky’s theosophy, which influenced Doyle and, in turn, imbued Holmes with a distinct will to metacognition.

The subsequent sections will demonstrate why it is necessary for pedagogues, cinematic adapters, and readers to recognize not only India’s material presence but also the theosophical underpinnings of Holmes’ science of deduction. Doyle may or may not have learned about Indian spirituality from influential cultural mediators like Arnold and Muller. Nonetheless, his engagement with Blavatsky offered him a middle ground to imbibe Indic philosophy without necessarily knowing the sociological distinctions of Vedantic and Buddhist schools. Consequently, Arnold’s hero, the Buddha, and Muller’s hero, Sri Ramakrishna, seem to cast their inadvertent—but not coincidental—intellectual shadows on Holmes. While being an offspring of the trinity of Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall, Holmes was also equally a child of Blavatsky’s occult philosophy.

Doyle’s Sources of Theosophy

Most orthodox scholars of Buddhism (especially Theravada Buddhism) and Vedanta will find glaring differences between the two schools. The point, however, is not to dwell on similarities or differences of Buddhism and Vedantism but examine how Victorian England understood them.

Writing in *The Monist*, in 1919, William Montgomery McGovern observes that “one of the most striking features of Mahayana Buddhism—the point on which it differs most radically from Hinayana, and approaches more nearly the Vedanta philosophy of India is that regarding its conception of the Absolute.” He rightly adds that “Mahayana is essentially monistic inasmuch as it teaches that all existence is but the manifestation of . . . one Ultimate Reality” (McGovern, 242). This ultimate reality or impersonal universal—“Brahman”—informs Vedantic conceptions of *Sthitaprajna* (equanimous and unfettered yogi) and the Buddhist idea of *Bodhisattva* (essential Buddha nature), in respective schools. *Bodhisattva* implies Buddha in the embryonic state or the Buddha-seeker who has deliberately put off *nirvana* (supreme enlightened inaction) for the sake of emancipating the quality of ordinary lives around. This understanding of the perfection of the Bodhisattva state derives from the *Prajnaparamita sutras* (perfect transcendent wisdom) of Mahayana Buddhism.

In *The Light of Asia*, Arnold refers to Bodhisattvas in “three eras of long toil bring Bodhisats—/ Who will be guides and help this darkling world—/ Unto deliverance” (183). Given the popularity of Arnold’s book, the concept was probably well known in Victorian England.

The notion of the *Sthitaprajna* is defined in *Bhagavad Gita* and is often used for Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples, as “a disinterested witness of the entire scene like a true *Sthitaprajna*, one whose consciousness is anchored in the higher Self” (Saradananda, 1041). When the Holmes stories began being written, it was over a hundred years since Charles Wilkins’ translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* (1785), which led the advent of nondual Indic philosophy in England. Unsurprisingly, buzzwords like “karma” and “enlightenment” “infiltrated the discourse of the late Victorian decades and early twentieth century” (Franklin, 21). But even as late as the late nineteenth century, the English still imagined the Buddha as “an ideal Victorian gentleman, a ‘verray parfit gentle knight’” (Almond, 79). Arguably, then, the general English public perceived Buddhism or Vedantism as heady cocktails of potentially vague mystical notions. Arnold and Muller became popular when Victorian England was recuperating from the Darwinian blow to biblical faith. As biblical cosmology and creationism were defied by Darwin’s

The Origins of Species (1859)—published the year Doyle was born—England’s spiritual compass tilted to Eastern nondual philosophy. Mainstream religion was no longer confined to worshipping a dualistic trinitarian divinity but was redefined by “meditational and related esoteric experiences acquired in the course of a quest for salvation” (Rajapakse, 298–99), as though in an empirical spiritual praxis.

Vedanta and Buddhism, however, were not the only sources for Victorian notions of enlightenment, karma, and metacognition. There were, of course, Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, founders of the Theosophical Society, which later acquired luminaries like Annie Besant and J. Krishnamurti. In Britain, the society would attract the attention of public figures like Thomas Edison, William Butler Yeats, and Doyle himself. A book Doyle considered an important source of Eastern wisdom was Alfred Percy Sinnett’s *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), which recognized theosophy as a “spiritual science” and “the missing link between materialism and spiritualism” (66). Sinnett was no ordinary theosophist. In 1879, he arrived in India and became the editor of *The Pioneer*, a premier English daily. Eventually, he would become the president of the Simla Eclectic Theosophical Society, besides a close friend of Allan Octavian Hume. Hume was a polymath. He was an Indian Colonial Service official, an ornithologist, and a theosophist, before becoming the founder of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Notably, theosophists like Hume and Besant were instrumental in transplanting the fervor of the Irish Home Rule into the Indian Home Rule movement to agitate against British rule. Not just in its philosophical tenets but also its political praxis, theosophy ran on resolutely anticolonial and anti-Eurocentric lines, rejecting the supremacy of elite empirical scientism; Darwinist determinism; racial and cultural hierarchies; and dogmas of European religion in favour of animistic, paganistic, Gnostic, Vedantic, and Buddhist worldviews.

In 1880, Blavatsky and Olcott stayed at the Simla residence of Sinnett and his wife, Patience. Sinnett’s interest in theosophy saw a new peak as he became the addressee of mysterious letters from Blavatsky’s Himalayan Mahatmas, most notably Koot Hoomi (a name that is believed to be a contortion of Rishi Kuthumi from *Vishnu Purana*). It is speculated that Koot Hoomi was Blavatsky’s invention to fabricate a larger-than-life coterie. Sinnett’s ecosystem of nondual Indic ideas was influenced by Blavatsky’s eclectic gleanings. Sinnett’s previous book, *The Occult World* (1881), presented Blavatsky as a celebrity, often misunderstood and unduly suspected of deception. Muller, on the other hand, was a staunch critic of theosophists, whom he thought no better than charlatans. He considered Blavatsky’s “theosophy” to be sheer humbuggery and intricate hoax. Yet his chosen word for what he called “true religion” was “theosophy.” To counter Blavatsky’s claims of meeting reclusive Himalayan masters, Muller took to heroizing the Indian monk Sri Ramakrishna as “A Real Mahatman,” beginning with an eponymous article in *The Nineteenth Century*, in 1896, and followed by *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (1898). As Arnold and Muller became prized in Oxbridge cliques, the creator of Holmes shifted his focus to uncanonical examples of Indic mysticism. It is believed that Muller was so obsessed with presenting Ramakrishna as a spiritual Übermensch to Western readers that he “tailored his exposition of Vedanta to fit Ramakrishna” as an exemplar of Indian spirituality (Green, 254–55). To Doyle, an occultist in making, Blavatsky was a more natural choice over the bespoke Buddha and Ramakrishna of Arnold and Muller. How well Doyle understood the politics of Arnold and Muller is a matter of “mere surmise and conjecture” (as Holmes would have it). But what is evident from his autobiography is that Blavatsky’s ideas strongly resonated in his mind, for a while, albeit through secondary sources.

Initially, Doyle was embarrassed to publicly recognize Blavatsky’s wisdom. Following Sinnett’s advice, he began taking her teachings more seriously (Jones, 61–63). Doyle writes in his autobiography, *Memories and Adventures* (1924), that “for a year or two,” theosophy deeply

appealed to him over European “Spiritualism” (80). The latter seemed chaotic; the former “presented a very well thought-out and reasonable scheme, parts of which, notably reincarnation and *Kharma*, seemed to offer an explanation for some of the anomalies of life” (80). He compared the virtues of Sinnett’s Buddhist scholarship to the alleged fraudulence of Blavatsky’s table-rapping seances that were eventually unmasked in Adyar, India. Doyle lauded Blavatsky’s “extraordinary erudition and capacity for hard work,” though adding that “Theosophy will be in a stronger position when it shakes off Madame Blavatsky altogether” (81). What definitions of spiritualism and theosophy actually inspired Doyle become clearer as we understand that while he was embarrassed to acknowledge Blavatsky’s debt, he made no effort to conceal his occultist borrowings from Sinnett.

Doyle wrote effusively about reading Sinnett’s *The Occult World* (1881), besides meeting and interacting with Sinnett. Further, as he clarified, “[i]t was not Spiritualism and it was not Theosophy, but rather the acquisition of powers latent in the human organization, after the alleged fashion of the old gnostics or of some modern fakirs in India” that really fascinated him (Doyle 1924, 146). Evidently, Doyle was more taken in by the powers of intuitive knowing and metacognition— notions that were yet to be popularly worded—than conjuring spirits. *The Occult World* throws up quite a few passages, like the one in the next section, that may indeed have inspired Doyle with an overarching view on powers of metacognition within Eastern nondualism, Vedanta, and Buddhism, if not a thickly footnoted treatise in their nuances.

The Hindoos are thus well aware, as a body, of the fact that there are persons who by entire devotion to certain modes of life acquire unusual powers in the nature of such as Europeans would very erroneously call supernatural. They are quite familiar with the notion that such persons live secluded lives, and are inaccessible to ordinary curiosity, and that they are none the less approachable by fit and determined candidates for admission to occult training. Ask any cultivated Hindoo if he has ever heard of Mahatmas and Yog Vidya or occult science, and it is a hundred to one that you will find he has-and, unless he happens to be one of the hybrid products of Anglo-Indian Universities, that he fully believes in the reality of the powers ascribed to Yoga. (Sinnett 1882, 10)

Sinnett’s seamless movement from Hinduism to occultism to yoga to the ill effects of colonization may irk theologians and historians. Nonetheless, it points to the esoteric and extra-sensory wisdom of the “old gnostics” and fakirs that Doyle wanted to rejuvenate. We generally consider Watson’s definitions for Holmes’ science of deduction, which, in the doctor’s view, appears as a purely mechanistic way of logical reasoning. Yet the word Holmes chooses to define it with—*intuition*—challenges that hasty interpretation. “I have a kind of intuition that way,” says Holmes. “Observation with me is second nature” (Doyle 1996, 17). Holmes calls Mary Morstan the “model client” because of her “correct intuition” (69). Later, he congratulates Inspector Baynes of the Surrey Constabulary for his ‘instinct and intuition’ (761). One of Holmes’ perpetual grievances against Scotland Yard officials, like Lestrade, is their “want of imaginative intuition” (1035). Gradually, Watson too deploys the word for his companion’s “brilliant reasoning power” that often rose “to the level of intuition, until those who were unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a man whose knowledge was not that of other mortals” (141). Watson admires his “rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions,” which appear to be founded on logical observations and syllogisms (214). Watson’s intellectual tardiness triggers Holmes’ “own flame-like intuitions and impressions” (999). It seems paradoxical that Holmes, the logician and empiricist, gives so much weight to intuition and imagination.

What explains this paradox is Doyle's experience of reading Sinnet, whose writings were in turn shaped by Blavatsky's nondualist theosophy. Theosophical underpinnings of Holmes' methods resist the standard classification of the science of deduction as a mechanistically reducible method of reasoning. Holmes' intuitive yogic faculty—that Watson defines only in nebulous terms—has its precedents in *The Occult World*, which, in this context, clearly derives from Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*. As is well known, hastily stewed theories without facts and imaginative intuition made Holmes peevish. Sinnet too exhibits such peevishness while confronting people “thoroughly enslaved by dogma, or thoroughly materialized by modern science.” Such people have, writes Sinnet,

lost some faculties, and will be unable to apprehend facts that do not fit in with their preconceived ideas. They will mistake their own intellectual deficiencies for inherent impossibility of occurrence on the part of the fact described; they will be very rude in thought and speech towards persons of superior *intuition*, who do find themselves able to believe and, in a certain sense, to understand; and it seems to me that the time has come for letting the commonplace scoffers realize plainly that in the estimation of their more enlightened contemporaries they do indeed seem a Boeotian herd, in which the better educated and the lesser educated—the orthodox savant and the city clerk—differ merely in degree and not in kind. (Sinnett 1882, 189)

The preceding passage, absent in the 1881 edition, was added to the 1882 edition of *The Occult World*. Turning to Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, we find intuition as a *de facto* spiritual quality, a key “criterion for ascertaining truth” and a shield against the barriers of Maya in the physical world. The lack of intuition leads one to descend into false theology and scientific materialism (xiii–xiv). Blavatsky called reason “the clumsy weapon of the scientist,” while “intuition [was] the unerring guide of the seer” (433). In *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), Blavatsky elevated intuition to the threshold of karmic wisdom (305). Undoubtedly, Sinnet's “Boeotian herd” referred to dilettantes of mechanistic science in a post-Darwinian world. The faculty of intuition that Blavatsky, Sinnet, and Holmes repeatedly alluded to leaves little doubt as to the karmic underpinnings of the science of deduction. Holmesian deduction is a science, nominally speaking, but in practice, it craftily subverts scientific and theological dilettantism. Consequently, as one goes further into the canon, Watson and Holmes often use the word “art” to qualify the detective's faculty of detection and logical deduction.

Darwin may have left behind a thriving community of materialist scientists. But among them, there were those like Tyndall, who still adhered to a non-reductionist view of human consciousness. Despite his avowed materialism, Tyndall was loath to reduce the nonlocal human mind to a brain or neurological phenomena. According to him, mental states could not be viewed simply as physiological, actively explainable by biological determinism; he “proclaimed the enduring mystery of a mind beyond the reach of physiology and biology” (Frank, 338). In his autobiography, Doyle mentions, in passing, the effects of Darwinism on the Victorian mind, which were propped up by the Darwinist Thomas Huxley, the utilitarian John S. Mill, and the social Darwinist Herbert Spencer. Doyle saw “the foundations not only of Roman Catholicism but of the whole Christian faith” crumble, leading him to an agnosticism that never descended to atheism (1924, 26–270). A Eurocentric reading of the Holmesian canon misses the practical locus between Tyndal's attack on biological determinism and Sinnet's denunciation of Western scientific dilettantism that manifested in Holmes. Predictably enough, the Holmesian tale works on a principle of a “causal network of human interactions” eventually leading to a “karmic fruition in the stories” (Van Stenis, 50). Holmes' dependence on nondualist and metacognitive modes of experience—that undoubtedly bear greater imports from Eastern spirituality than Catholicism, Darwinism, and imperialism—is expressed subtly

but never marginalized. With Holmes' heroization of intuition (that subverts nineteenth-century reductionism) and his towering over the "Boeotian herd" of tiresome theorists from Scotland Yard, the detective's theosophical and nondualist leanings are reaffirmed. As the subsequent section underscores, the burden of proof to demonstrate that Holmes was any less an outcome of theosophy and Eastern mysticism than Darwinism, English empiricism, and imperial ideologies lies with the naysayer.

Slaying Darwinist Reductionism

Holmes' theosophy is overshadowed by criminal plotlines and cognitive biases of readers looking for secular dénouements. Chesterton was among the first to catch that bias. For him, it was erroneous to think that "philosophy and poetry would not be good for a detective" (Chesterton, 172). Holmes would have agreed with Chesterton. His views on religion were far from dismissive. "It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner," said Holmes. To him, flowers were the "highest assurance of the goodness of Providence." The rose, he said, "is an extra. Its smell and its colour are an embellishment of life, not a condition of it. It is only goodness which gives extras, and so I say again that we have much to hope from the flowers" (Doyle 1996, 419). Being an intuitive thinker, the detective abdicates the simplistic mind-body duality. His discourse on the rose—which might as well have been a discourse on the Buddhist symbol of the sacred lotus—considers it vital for its power to facilitate human sensory perception onto a concentrated zone. The rose unconditionally embellishes not only the phenomenal world of human senses but is also a window for human experience to transcend itself. Elsewhere, Holmes would say that he is nothing more than "a brain," the rest of him being "a mere appendix" (Doyle 1996, 970). This is usually interpreted as the dispensableness of his material desires. However, his reflection on the human soul, from *A Study in Scarlet*, demands a more nondualist understanding. "There are vague memories in our souls of those misty centuries when the world was in its childhood," says Holmes. He recommends a broadness of mind comparable to nature; one is "to interpret Nature" (Doyle 1996, 27). This panpsychist or animistic ideology pervades the canon, especially in the first three novels. Seen in this light, the experience of the rose sharpens his mental horizon to itself; the "rose," then, is a Holmesian lotus, if you will. It adds a poetical and almost sacred dimension to his deductive method. His "train of thoughts" is rapid; even though he is sometimes unconscious "of intermediate steps," his inferences are exact (Doyle 1996, 17). His method is not purely mechanistic; it transcends scientific knowability.

Holmes' rejection of Scotland Yarders, who, by and large, allegorize the Boeotian herd of contemporary theorists and Darwinist reductionists, is exemplary in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1903). Though the novel is mostly read as an outright rejection of supernaturalism, it characterizes the detective's theosophy and animistic philosophy that outshine Victorian materialism. From the outset, Holmes rejects supernatural agency in Sir Charles' death. Yet at the Charing Cross station, he warns Sir Henry to "avoid the moor in those hours of darkness when the powers of evil are exalted" (Doyle 1996, 470). Just a few days ago, Holmes has visited the moorland, not in person, but spirit. His "body" remains in the armchair, consuming "two large pots of coffee and an incredible amount of tobacco," while his "spirit" hovers over Dartmoor's Ordnance map (Doyle, 464). The transformation of 221B Baker Street as a non-local extension of Devonshire recalls the yogic powers of the Indian fakirs that Doyle learned about from Blavatsky, via Sinnett. Devonshire is anticipated and simulated in London through "the noxious environment created by Holmes' tobacco smoke in his rooms and the gloomy fog and cloud cover of the moor" (Scarborough, 53). Seated in his armchair, Holmes investigates the

powers of the hound by meditating on the powers of the human mind, a mind that is capable of exacting retribution for itself, a retribution that manifests and becomes magnified as the hound. If the hound is indeed a work of supernatural powers, it can only be observed supernaturally (Blanchette, 82–83). But the hound’s footprints can be discerned by human eyes and are traceable to the Yew Alley. This exposes the likelihood of an almost-material phantom creation that works in close collaboration with intangible vectors like betrayal, jealousy, revenge, guilt, anxiety, and panic. The hound is described as “gigantic.” But Mortimer’s testimony, that the hound’s footprints had not approached the body of Sir Charles (Doyle 1996, 459–60) adds a new implication to the word in Holmes’ intuition. Curiously, the word gigantic appears only once in connection to the hound. And interestingly enough, Sinnett too deploys the word in *The Occult World*, albeit only once, in a telling discourse on occultism. For Sinnett, Victorian naturalism had become as dogmatic as orthodox Christianity in its denial of the existence of “those gigantic ancestors of ours” whose skeletons and memories still lay buried “in the Hima-vats [Himalayas],” relegated as “isolated freaks of Nature” or treated as a myth (1882, 97). More interestingly, Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* is an archive of myriad “gigantic” forms. To her we must turn to unravel the significance of that word in Doyle’s understanding.

Like Darwin,³ Blavatsky’s theosophy and occultism vetoed the existence of God as an anthropomorphic being; “for IT is nothing, *No-Thing*,” she argued. Theosophy believed in a god of organic principles and energies, in opposition to “those who call God a HE, and thus make of Him a gigantic MALE.” Blavatsky rejected the orthodox Christian dualism between god and devil, adding that “Father and Son are a gigantic, personified and eternal LIE” (Vol. I: 414). Citing Olcott’s *Buddhist Catechism*, she defied the notion of a personal creationist god. Instead, she foregrounded “absolute consciousness” or “Adi-Buddhi” as the essence of planetary life, recalling Olcott’s description of the phenomenal world as “self-produced beings, the creatures of Karma,” and god “as only a gigantic shadow thrown upon the void of space by the imagination of ignorant men” (635). Seen in this light, the hound is gigantic only in the human mind’s propensity to mythicize it and being hounded by it.

Blavatsky would remark in *Isis Unveiled*: “[l]et the bloodhound snuff an article of clothing that has been worn by the fugitive, and he will track him through swamp and forest to his hiding place” (462). The scent of Baskerville blood sniffed by the hound recapitulates Blavatsky’s talisman, “imbued by the influence of that greatest of all magnets, the human will, with a potency for good or ill just as recognizable and as real in its effects as the subtile property which the iron acquired by contact with the physical magnet” (462). Blavatsky’s metaphorical hound and its functional resemblance with Doyle’s titular beast are no coincidence. Like the magnet, the hound’s agency supersedes the mechanistic domain. It is, thus, invisible to common eyes that would rather elevate it to supernatural causes or reduce it to naturalistic correlates.

Blavatsky and Holmes operate on a proto-scientific ideology that embraces principles of *anima mundi* (the global soul) and metacognition. Sending Holmes on a spiritual journey to the hound’s territory in Dartmoor is the best that Doyle can afford to match the so-called telepathic, teleportational, and levitational skills of the Indian fakirs whom he mentions in his autobiography. Eventually, the bloodhound is revealed to be a dog (anagram of “god”). The slaying of the “supernatural” beast signals the death of the naturalist Stapleton—the archetype of Darwinist science and biological determinism. Stapleton is sure of his legitimate inheritance of Baskervilles’ wealth but with a profoundly immoral understanding of his evolutionary purpose and place in the family. The novel allegorizes robust challenges to both orthodox conceptions of a supernatural god and radical oppositions to theism posed by mechanistic science, while Holmes towers above the Boeotian herds of both kinds.

An Allegory of Anima Mundi

Doyle was not contented with simply charming his audiences. Frank rightly points to the “the satisfaction of other desires that Doyle shared with his readers,” besides the lure for adventure or profit, “including a need for the rendering in detective fiction of a coherent vision of the universe in a post-Darwinian moment” (337). However, Frank associates the Holmesian persona with the naturalist Stapleton somewhat hastily. He takes Stapleton’s naming himself to the cabman as “Sherlock Holmes” as evidence for the latter to be considered as the former’s imago or doppelganger. The association fails to emphasize that Holmes is also a staunch critic of naturalism. If anything, as Frank himself suggests, the novel begins as a critique of the mechanistic impulses of Victorian society. Mortimer, who has published works like “Is Disease a Reversion?,” “Some Freaks of Atavism,” and “Do We Progress?,” is keen to procure a cast of Holmes’ skull as an anthropological exhibit. He admires Alphonse Bertillon, the Parisian police chief and inventor of anthropometry. Yet Mortimer, the physician and physiologist, is “so shaken by the death of Sir Charles Baskerville and so influenced by the legend of a hell-hound that he is willing to entertain a supernatural explanation for that mysterious event” (Frank, 340). Holmes espouses neither the kind of supernaturalism that Mortimer does (only for Stapleton to exploit it) nor the mechanistic physiology and naturalism that Mortimer and Stapleton espouse. So although Holmes is agnostic to the legend of the Baskervilles, he advises Sir Henry to avoid the moor at night. Unlike Holmes, the latter is a believer of the legend; the moor can therefore endanger his life. Holmes, on the other hand, is empowered with a god’s-eye view of the moor as he dons the figure of the Man on the Tor.

The moon was low upon the right, and the jagged pinnacle of a granite tor stood up against the lower curve of its silver disc. There, outlined as black as an ebony statue on that shining back-ground, I saw the figure of a man upon the tor. Do not think that it was a delusion, Holmes. I assure you that I have never in my life seen anything more clearly. As far as I could judge, the figure was that of a tall, thin man. He stood with his legs a little separated, his arms folded, his head bowed, as if he were brooding over that enormous wilderness of peat and granite which lay before him. He might have been the very spirit of that terrible place. (Doyle 1996, 506)

The Man on the Tor personifies a fleeting glimpse into the workings of the human mind, if also a glimpse into the archeological excavations of Devonshire that began in the early 1800s. In the avatar of the moorland spirit, Holmes observes mortals like Franklin, Stapleton, Selden, prehistoric cottages and the ephemeral turrets of Baskerville Hall, brooding over the past, present, and future of the “inscrutable” landscape’s evolution, as if reconjuring the vast expanses of the human mind that he had laid out on his knees in the large-scale map of Devon, back in 221B Baker Street. Seen in the light of Blavatsky’s theosophy, Holmes’ unexpected arrival in Devonshire as the Man on the Tor makes of him a personification of *Brahman*, the absolute consciousness, watching over the diurnal drama of goings-on in Dartmoor and Baskerville Hall. From the primitive huts on the Tor, he surveys his own surveillance machinery in Watson. While the Man on the Tor has been interpreted as a thinly disguised allusion to Huxley’s *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* and Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* (Frank, 344), such correlations are inadvertent and by no means exhaustive.

The Man on the Tor is as likely an allusion to the lamaseries, the subterranean Himalayan crypts and cave-libraries that Blavatsky extols in the introduction to *The Secret Doctrine*. She presents a fleeting glimpse of the north-western Tibetan plateau and sequestered passes of the Kunlun Mountains, where none of the European Empires was able to penetrate. There, inside

a deep gorge, she had come across “a small cluster of houses, a hamlet rather than a monastery, with a poor-looking temple in it, with one old lama, a hermit, living nearby to watch it” (1: xxiv). Apparently, “the subterranean galleries and halls under it contain[ed] a collection of books, the number of which, according to the accounts given, is too large to find room even in the British Museum” (xxiv). We cannot ascertain precisely how much Doyle gleaned directly or indirectly from Blavatsky. Yet though he supposed theosophy to be much better off without Blavatsky, he nevertheless eulogized her “extraordinary erudition and capacity for hard work” and her ability to channelize “old wisdom” even if in a “volcanic” style (1924, 810). Given Doyle’s reluctant acknowledgement of how much Blavatsky fascinated her, it is hard to evade the echoes of her theosophical musings in the Holmesian canon.

Written in 1927, *The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger* has Watson make a fortuitous association between Holmes and the Buddha (Doyle 1996, 1108). It becomes more than a coincidence as we turn to *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905), where Doyle gives the detective an easterly detour into Tibetan geography resembling the one that Blavatsky had touched upon. As Holmes’ visit to Tibet follows his supposed death at Reichenbach Falls, it metaphorizes a karmic reincarnation. “I travelled for two years in Tibet,” says Holmes, “and amused myself by visiting Lhasa, spending some days with the head Llama” (Doyle 1996, 559). This detour is vital to the cause of interpreting the Man on the Tor. Seen from a purely materialistic vantage, the figure is a manifestation of the omniscience of Holmes’ intellect. However, Watson’s description of the figure brooding over the ghostly terrain, like the very “spirit” of the moorland, is instructive and ties Doyle’s story intertextually to Blavatsky’s theosophy.

The imagery of brooding abounds in nineteenth-century English literature. Naturally, Darwin’s remarks on brooding occupy a wholly biologically deterministic scheme in *The Descent of Man*, which reserves the imagery for the avian species, where brooding functions in a purely reproductive capacity. Huxley’s *Man’s Place in Nature*, by contrast, almost wholly glosses over the activity of brooding. Predating Darwin’s *Descent* by a year, Tyndall’s essay “The Scientific Use of Imagination” somewhat alters the paradigm of brooding from a purely biological to a creationist act. He calls it the “power of expansion—I might almost call it a power of creation,” sketching the legend of “the Spirit brooding over chaos” (8–9). But it is Blavatsky who truly adapts that sketch into a sprawling canvas. Brooding imagery is abundant in her writings. Her passing glimpses of the phenomenon of *anima mundi* are striking in their resemblance to Watson’s vision in the moor. In *Isis Unveiled*, she alludes to “that [primeval] period when nascent vapours and Cimmerian darkness lay brooding over a fluid mass ready to start on its journey of activity at the first flutter of the breath of Him, who is the Unrevealed One” (1877, 134). Among several passages in *The Secret Doctrine*, where she describes the brooding *anima mundi*, this one stands out in underscoring the principle of *Brahman* or *Adi-Buddhi*.

In the Orphic hymns, the Eros-Phanes evolves from the Spiritual Egg, which the Aetherial winds impregnate, Wind being “the Spirit of God,” who is said to move in Aether, “brooding over the chaos”—the Divine “Idea.” In the Hindu *Katakopanisad* [*Katha Upanishad*] Purusha, the Divine Spirit, already stands before the original matter, from whose union springs the great Soul of the World, “Maha Atma, Brahm, the Spirit of Life;” these latter appellations being again identical with the Universal Soul, or *Anima Mundi* (1888, 461).

Back at 221B Baker Street, Holmes informs Mortimer of the strong material grounds for “his scientific use of the imagination,” after discerning the motives and circumstances of the sender of the mysterious letter to Sir Henry containing this message: “As you value your life or your reason keep away from the moor.” Only the word *moor* is inscribed in ink, whereas the

rest of the words are cut-outs from a *Times* article on “free trade” (Doyle 1996, 466, 468). Holmes’ choice of phrase, undoubtedly, derives from the title of Tyndall’s essay (Frank, 346). Frank makes a persuasive claim on the lineage of the figure of the Man on the Tor, whom he believes to have originated from Tyndall’s allusion to the Spirit brooding on Chaos, which finds precedents in English poetry, from Milton to Shelley to Wordsworth, and mountain imagery that inspired an entire canon of Romantic poetry. However, to be satisfied by this intertextual tracing would imply a territorial bias, presuming that only English precedents could inspire Doyle. That is certainly not true, given Doyle’s direct occultist and theosophical leanings and his imports of Blavatsky’s musings on Devonshire and the Devonian period (approximately dated between 420 and 360 million years ago). “Does the finding of the remains in the cave of Devon,” asks Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*, “prove that there were no contemporary races then who were highly civilized?” (722). The thematic resonance between the huts of primitive man wherein Holmes resides and Blavatsky’s allusion to archaeological and geological explorations in nineteenth-century Devonshire deepens as we encounter her next example.

“When the present population of the earth have disappeared,” adds Blavatsky, “and some archaeologist belonging to the ‘coming race’ of the distant future shall excavate the domestic implements of one of our Indian or Andaman Island tribes, will he be justified in concluding that mankind in the nineteenth century was ‘just emerging from the Stone Age?’” (1888a, 722). Blavatsky’s words are significant for their questioning of empirical teleology as well as for the geographies she invokes. Devonshire’s moorland (of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*) is preceded by the Andaman Islands (from *The Sign of the Four*) in the Holmesian canon. The Andamans are to *The Sign of the Four* what Dartmoor is to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*; both signify that timeless swampland on which the drama of creation, destruction, excavation, investigation, the chaos of superstitious and scientific dogmas, and eventually, a new order unfolds.

Written a year after *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky’s *The Key to Theosophy* (1889) compares European progress and civilization to a “will-o’-the-wisp, flickering over a marsh which exhales a poisonous and deadly miasma” (Blavatsky 1896, 219). Devonshire’s moorland, with its “[r]ank reeds and lush, slimy water-plants,” mired by the “odour of decay and a heavy miasmatic vapour” (Doyle 1996, 545), comes exceedingly close to that metaphor. Doyle’s moorland signals the other end of “selfishness, crime, immorality, and all the evils imaginable, pouncing upon unfortunate mankind” (Blavatsky 1896, 219) that Blavatsky condemns in *The Key to Theosophy*.

Seen in that light, the ebony figure of the Man on the Tor, rising against a dazzling moonlit backdrop, signifies what Blavatsky calls the radical “inertia and inactivity of Buddhist countries” (Blavatsky 1896, 219). It is made up of painstaking equanimity—Holmes’ *Sthitaprajna* nature—while the supposedly active Watson, Sir Henry, Stapleton, and their collectively imagined hound battle for epistemic or territorial supremacy over the Baskerville estate. The verbal and functional correlates between the Man on the Tor and Blavatsky’s *anima mundi* reaffirms her hypothesis of how Tyndall’s “scientific imagination approaches . . . to the borderland of our occult teachings” (1888, 137). Blavatsky’s ideas were deeply maligned in Victorian England’s intellectual circles. Still, her thoughts are as relevant to the figuration of the Man on the Tor as Tyndall’s scientific use of imagination is in Holmesian methods.

Conclusion

To pose the obvious question then: why Sherlock Holmes and theosophy?

As I have demonstrated, the Holmesian ideology cannot be wholly explained by anticolonial or postcolonial interpretations which, in turn, may recentre naturalistic, empiricist, and

Eurocentric critiques of political and cultural hegemony. What is required, above all, is an epistemic decolonization, or a new “grammar of de-coloniality” (Mignolo, 500), when it comes to interpreting the worldview of figures of like Holmes. It is hermeneutically reductive to perpetuate Holmes’ position as an active proponent of biological reductionism and imperialism. Thankfully, there are legitimate grounds to consider his “science” outside fundamental binaries of modernity, such as oppressor versus oppressed, victim versus victimizer, racial and gender hierarchies, and so on.

The focus on spirituality and theosophy is in no way to suggest that Holmes (and his creator Doyle) were above criticism in their social ideologies and vocation of preserving the imperial social order. Nor is it to reconstruct Holmes as a practising religionist of a particular religious affiliation. But unravelling Holmes’ spiritual praxis adds versatility to the science of deduction, whose demonstrable linkages with Blavatsky’s theosophy—if also other eclectic sources of Indic nondual philosophy—marginalizes the territorial bias in the Eurocentric hermeneutic often deployed to understand and critique Holmes. More than critiquing Holmes as a de facto imperial ideologue, we need a decolonial perspective into his methods. As Mignolo says, “Post-colonial criticism and theory is a project of scholarly transformation within the academy” (452). But decoloniality ought to go further in delinking figures like Holmes from the hegemony of Eurocentric criticism and interpretation. Blavatsky was certainly not one such thinker. It is perhaps owing to her refusal to simplify her theosophical lexis that her influence on Doyle has been accorded the status of *persona non grata*.

The spiritual and mystical side of Holmes has received scarce attention. As a result, the detective of Baker Street remains colonized by imperial ideology and anti-imperial critiques, ultimately stemming from a Eurocentered academia. In popular perception, Holmes appears more of a worldly eccentric than a detached Bodhisattva or personification of Adi-Buddhi. Shorn of this mystical side, the caricature we see is invariably an ill-tempered, self-obsessed psychopath rather than someone who can be a remarkable pedagogical example to inspire readers, especially young audiences, towards a union of scientific temper and metacognitive abilities. The yogi-like theosophical consciousness lurking in the disguise of an imperial detective redefines the Holmesian art of detection. It potentially leads to comparative analyses with what has been recently termed Ramakrishna’s *Vijnana Vedanta* (Maharaj 2018) or Buddhist conceptions of Bodhisattva.

This paper has adopted a decolonial praxis to determine that comparing the materialistic principles of Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall, on the one hand, and Holmes on the other, is as useful as comparing the detective’s work to Blavatsky’s theosophy. The point here is not to deny the widespread impact that Darwin had in Victorian England and beyond. Rather, it is to argue that there were several militating positions outside the framework of a theistic Christian mythology, both scientific and spiritual, that the Victorian mind eagerly responded to. Interpretations of Eastern nondualism emerged in radically diverse geographical and cultural contexts, including the Victorian context. To take the appellation of “East” as a geographical denotation of the Indian subcontinent would be problematic. Just like Darwinist determinism cannot be taken as the only universal cultural context for a Sherlock Holmes to thrive, Blavatsky’s theosophy, or Vedantic and Buddhist doctrines, cannot be considered the origin dogmas of such a creation, but only the thresholds to a pluri-versal spiritual praxis. While we acknowledge the debts that the science of deduction owes to Darwin and Tyndall, we cannot be as reluctant as Doyle to acknowledge the importance of Blavatsky’s theosophy in the quasi-spiritual modes of knowing that lurk in Holmesian methods.

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Notes

1. I use “social possibilities” in the sense deployed by David Feltmate in his recent argument that studies of new religions are largely driven by a paradigmatic assumption that new religious movements are a “social problem,” while they should instead be located in a new “paradigm of social possibilities.” See [David Feltmate. 2016](#). “Rethinking new religious movements beyond a social problems paradigm.” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 20 (2): 82–96.
2. Nondualism, as a key concept of Vedantism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Taoism, is variously defined. Devasia M. Antony describes it as “the primal metaphysical concept descriptive of ‘that which is,’ and both ‘play’ and ‘theater’ as derivative of this fulcrum conception embodying the dialectic of the self and its apparent other or not-self” (Antony 5). David Loy sees the Taoist principle of “wei-wu-wei” as nondual action: “that is, action in which there is no bifurcation between subject and object: no awareness of an agent that is believed to do the action as being distinct from an objective action that is done” (1985, 73). He adds that “[a]s with the Vedantic realization of *Brahman* and the Buddhist attainment of *nirvana*, this experience is nondual in the sense that there is no differentiation between subject and object, between self and world. The implication of this for action is that there is no longer any bifurcation between an agent, the self that is believed to do the action, and the objective action that is done” (1985, 77). Elsewhere, he revisits the concept of *wei-wu-wei*, which he calls “the central paradox of Taoism,” that is “nondual action: that is, action without the sense of an agent-self who is apart from the action and who experiences herself as the one doing it. The usual interpretations of *wu-wei* as non-interference and passively yielding view not-acting as a kind of action, whereas nondual action reverses this and sees nonaction—that which does not change, a stillness that is not lost—‘in’ a nondual action” (1997, 253). Joseph Milne, who tries to define nonduality through the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta and Adi Sankaracharya, describes it as something transcending “phenomenal existence” or, at any rate, not demonstrable in the rational sense. Nonduality refers to the highest knowledge, “[that] is knowledge of the Self and that with knowledge of the Self comes the realization that the Self, brahman, and the universe are one. This nondual knowledge alone, he contends, is absolute knowledge (*brahma-jnana*), and that all other knowledge is, by comparison, only relative knowledge or simply ignorance” (Milne, 166).
3. In September 2015, Darwin’s famous letter to a young barrister named Frederick A. McDermott went on auction ([Barry 2015](#)). It was a living testament to Darwin’s rejection of the God of the New Testament. On 23 November 1880, McDermott’s letter reached Darwin, stating, “If I am to have the pleasure of reading your books, I must feel that at the end I shall not have lost my faith in the *New Testament*. My reason in writing to you therefore is to ask you to give me a Yes or No to the question Do you believe in the *New Testament*.” Darwin replied, unequivocally, on 24 November 1880, “I am sorry to have to inform you that I do not believe in the Bible as a divine revelation, & therefore not in Jesus Christ as the son of God” ([Darwin 1880](#)). However, as William E. Phipps has suggested, although Darwin distanced himself from religious discussions, “admired the ability of some scholars to establish a rapprochement between science and theology” (Phipps, 150). Gillian Beer argues that Doyle “sought to appropriate and to recast inherited mythologies, discourses, and narrative orders” (Beer, 3). In Darwin’s vocabulary, “natural selection appears as an aspect or avatar of the more general ‘Nature,’ whose maternal ordering is contrasted with the egocentric one of Man. She tends and nurses with scrupulous concern for betterment” (64). Darwin replaced “the space left by God” with a “personification of nature as female” (64).

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