

No False Premises

- **Second Analytical Reply: No False Premises**
- This second kind of reply to the Gettier cases, also known as *No False Lemmas*, consists in a strengthening of the notion of justification so as to exclude the possibility of true beliefs being epistemically justified by false beliefs (even if the latter are justified)
- The general idea is to exclude the existence of false propositions as defeaters of epistemic justification
- In other words, a necessary condition for a subject **x** to be justified in believing a proposition **p** is that there not be any proposition **q** such that **q** is false and **x**'s belief in **p** is justified by a belief of **x** in **q** (even if the latter belief is itself justified)

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- The true beliefs (that are not knowledge) mentioned in the usual Gettier cases are all supported by certain false beliefs held by the subjects
 - Thus, Smith's true belief that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket is supported by the false belief that Jones will get the job and the true belief that Jones has ten coins in his pocket
 - And Socrates's true belief that the road to his right leads to Larissa is supported by the false belief that Larissa is to the North and the false belief that the road to his right goes North
 - The general idea behind this second analytical reaction is that a belief is justified only when it is supported by *good reasons*
 - Such reasons need not be conclusive, but to support a belief in a true proposition by some belief in a false proposition is not to have a good reason to accept that proposition as true

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- We do not have a rational justification for our true beliefs if the reasonings we execute to obtain such beliefs depend on our employment as premises of beliefs that are themselves false
 - Obviously, we can validly infer true propositions from false propositions
 - What we cannot rationally do is to justify our acceptance of true propositions by means of our acceptance of false propositions from which those propositions are inferred by us
 - Hence, given the presence in the usual Gettier cases of false beliefs as premises, those cases do not constitute genuine counter-examples to the joint sufficiency of belief, justification and truth for knowledge

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- The justification condition is not really satisfied in such cases
 - So the tripartite theory, appropriately reformulated in its justification component, can be preserved
 - Or else we could add to the original tripartite theory a fourth condition requiring that the supporting or grounding beliefs be all true (as Clark does in his paper) and argue that the four conditions are separately necessary and jointly sufficient for knowledge
 - However, this second analytical rejoinder to the Gettier cases is **far from being forceful**
 - Indeed, there are at least two problems with it

• (1) The Closure Problem

- The reaction seems to be inconsistent with the Principle of Closure for justification, the principle that the justified beliefs of a subject are closed under deductions made by the subject
- More precisely, if a subject holds certain justified beliefs and correctly deduces from those beliefs as premises other beliefs as conclusions, then the latter beliefs are justified on that basis
- In its simpler version, the closure principle states the following
- If a subject **x** is justified in believing a proposition **p** and **x** correctly deduces a proposition **q** from **p**, then **x** is justified in believing proposition **q**

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- For instance, if I justifiably believe that fish breathe by means of gills and if I justifiably believe that whales do not breathe by means of gills, then I am on that basis justified in believing that whales are not fish (assuming that I infer this proposition from those two propositions).
 - Since it is possible to correctly deduce true propositions from false propositions, the second analytical reaction collides with the principle of closure
 - However, this seems to be a plausible principle about the justification of beliefs

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- It is important to note that the second reaction excludes the possibility of a subject having a justified belief correctly deduced from at least one false premiss in which the subject believes
 - Furthermore, it excludes the possibility of a subject having justified false beliefs obtained by means of correct deductions, since at least one of the beliefs used as premises must be false and this is not allowed by the reaction in question
 - These results do not seem to be plausible

- **(2) The Problem of New Gettier Cases**

- The most serious problem with the No False Premises view is that it is possible to devise possible situations that generate Gettier cases, cases in which we have JTB but not K, but in which there are **no false premises**, no false supporting beliefs
- In such situations, the true beliefs that are not knowledge come in two kinds
- **Kind (a)**: Those beliefs are not justified on the basis of **any inferences** drawn from other beliefs as premises
- **Kind (b)**: Those beliefs are justified on the basis of inferences drawn from **true beliefs** only

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- The new Gettier cases are easily found throughout the current philosophical literature in the area
 - **New Gettier cases of kind (a)**
 - Here is one of those cases, adapted from an example given by Roderick Chisholm, one of the leading figures of 20th Century Epistemology
 - Looking through my office's window while preparing my classes, I get surprised to see a large bull in the courtyard of the Faculdade de Letras
 - I come to believe on that basis that there is a bull in the courtyard of the Faculdade de Letras

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- However, things are not what they seem to be
 - Indeed, what I see when I look through the window is rather a skilfully built tri-dimensional dummy, something which is virtually indiscernible from a true bull, that the students are using in their academic rituals
 - But there is more to the situation than meets the eye
 - It turns out that, behind the large dummy, there is indeed a bull in flesh and blood, an animal that is on the loose and that I am unable to see
 - In such situation, I surely hold a true belief, the belief that there is a bull in the courtyard of the Faculdade de Letras

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- And I am surely justified in holding such a belief, since the kind of observational evidence available in the case is plausibly taken as sufficient justification for forming that perceptual belief
 - In general, if a subject has a visual experience of something **y** that seems to him to be present in his visual field, then he is justified on that basis only in coming to believe that **y** is present in his visual field on the occasion (even if such belief is false and **y** is not in fact in the visual field of the subject)
 - But it cannot be said, with respect to the envisaged situation, that **I know that there is a bull in the courtyard**, for the (true) bull is outside my visual field

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- Thus, we have here a situation that is typical of a Gettier case, a case of a justified true belief that does not amount to knowledge
 - However, there does not seem to be involved therein any reasoning or inference that I might have executed, or any other beliefs that somehow serve as inferential justificatory support to my belief that there is a bull in the courtyard
 - By looking at what happens to be in reality a dummy, I just form, without any intervention or mediation of any inferential process, the belief that there is a bull in the courtyard

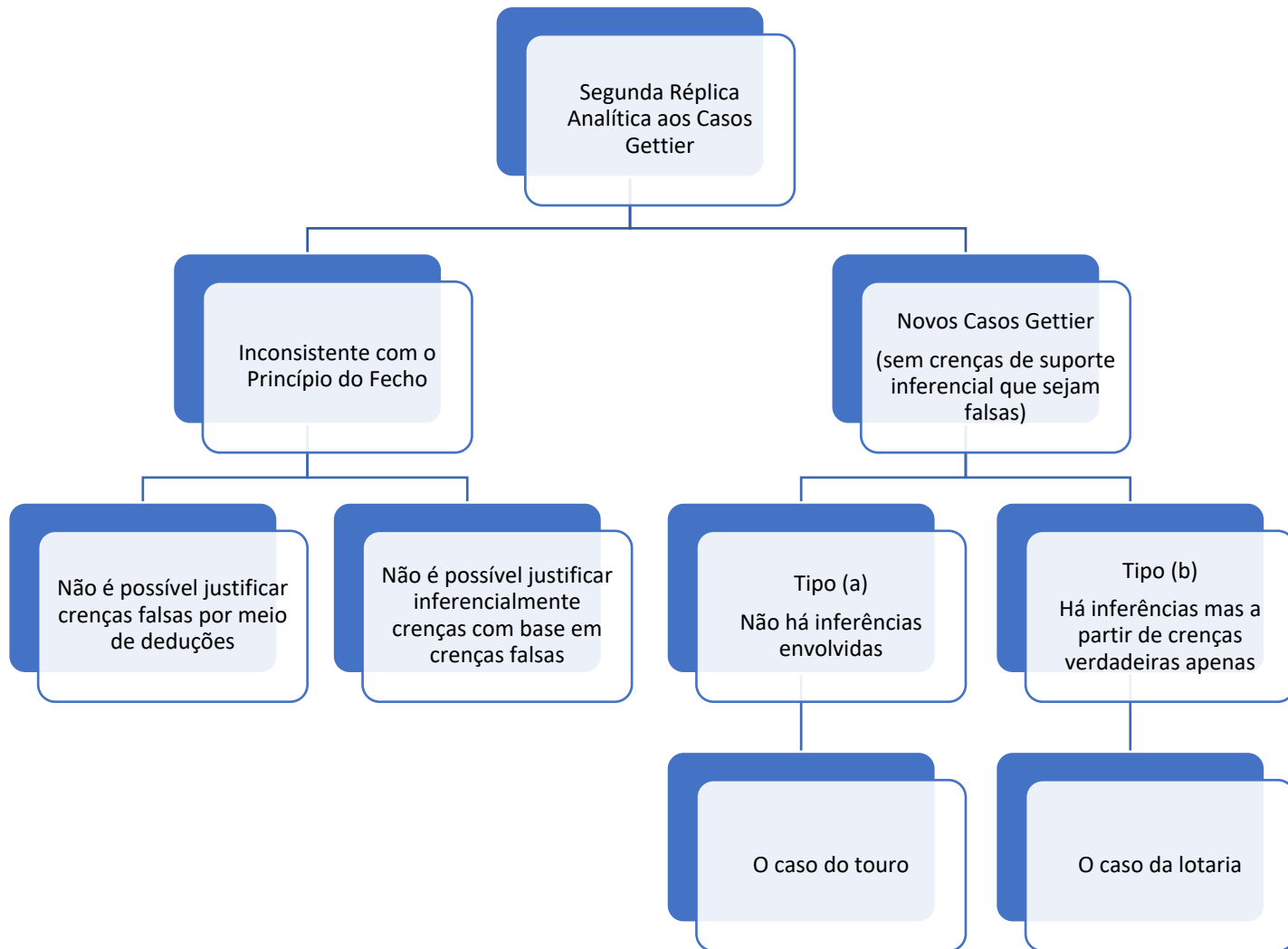
- **New Gettier cases of kind (b)**

On the other hand, there are also Gettier cases in which the true beliefs that are not knowledge are inferred by the subject from other beliefs

- However, none of these beliefs is false, all of them are true
- Here is a case of that kind, a simple situation where clearly there are not false propositions that “defeat” the inferential justification
- Someone plays the lottery by buying a single ticket
- The person knows that he has just one ticket out of a million tickets that are going to be drawn

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- The person also knows that there is only one person that will win the lottery, he knows that the first prize will be assigned to one and only one ticket
 - The person inductively infers, with a very high degree of probability, viz. 0.999999, that he is not going to win the lottery, since 999.999 of the one million ticket holders are not going to win
 - However, it cannot be said that the person KNOWS that he is not going to win
 - Now suppose that the person in fact does not win
 - Thus, he holds a justified true belief that he is not going to win, but this belief is not knowledge
 - Nevertheless, the person's belief is not inferred by him from any false beliefs

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- There is no knowledge in this case because the person's belief is not safe
 - A belief is safe when not only it is actually true but also remains true in all counterfactual situations that slightly differ from the actual situation
 - Suppose that the lottery ticket bought by the person has number 118
 - Suppose that the first prize is assigned to number 119
 - And suppose further that when the lottery draw takes place the spinning wheel moves a bit slower so that the ball numbered 118 falls down (rather than the ball numbered 119)
 - This counterfactual scenario is slightly different from the actual one and in it the person's belief turns out to be false
 - So, the person's belief that he will not win is false with respect to such counterfactual situation and hence it is not safe
 - Assuming that knowledge entails safety, the person cannot be said to know that he will not win the lottery



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