

# Relevance: A Fallacy?

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**Introduction**     Responding to Harvey’s theories about the circulation of the blood, Dr. Diafoirus argues (a) that no such theory was taught by Galen, and (b) that Harvey is not licensed to practice medicine in Paris. Plainly there is something wrong with a response of this sort, however effective it may prove to be in swaying an audience. For either or both of the allegations (a) and (b) might well be true without Harvey’s theory being false. So Diafoirus’ argument can serve only to divert discussion from the real question to irrelevant side-issues. The traditional term for such diversionary debating tactics is “fallacy of relevance”.

In recent years this traditional term has come to be used in a quite untraditional sense among the followers of N. D. Belnap, Jr., and the late A. R. Anderson. (All citations of these authors are from their masterwork [1], and are identified by page number.) According to these self-styled “relevant logicians”, it is items (IA) and (IIA) in the accompanying table that constitute the archetypal “fallacies of relevance”.

Table

(I) $p \text{ or } q$ $\frac{\text{not } p}{q}$	(II)   not both $p$ and $q$ $\frac{p}{\text{not } q}$
(IA) $p \vee q$ $\frac{\sim p}{q}$	(IIA) $\sim(p \ \& \ q)$ $\frac{p}{\sim q}$
(IB) $p + q$ $\frac{\sim p}{q}$	(IIB) $\sim(p \ 0 \ q)$ $\frac{p}{\sim q}$