The Multitude View on Logic*

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1 Introduction

Some philosophers defend claims of the form logic so-and-so is the right logic. Call the idea that there is a ‘right’ logic PARTISAN.

In fact, there are different kinds of ‘which is the right logic?’ questions. One type of question – the vertical question, we may call it – concerns the scope of logic: is second-order logic really logic? what about modal logic? etc. Another type of question – the horizontal question – concerns which of many in some sense rival logics is the right logic, classical logic or intuitionistic logic, or fuzzy logic, or paraconsistent logic, etc. I will here solely be concerned with the horizontal question.

One doubt regarding PARTISAN that some theorists might have centers on a thesis we may call MULTITUDE: that there are different possible languages with different logics. A friend of MULTITUDE might add that since MULTITUDE is true, there are intuitionistic languages, classical languages, paraconsistent languages, etc., and then there is no interesting sense in which a particular logic is the right one.

Of course, there is not necessarily a conflict between PARTISAN and MULTITUDE. A friend of PARTISAN might say that when she says that a given logic is the right logic, all that she means is that this is the logic of the language we actually speak, or that this logic is somehow better than other logics, even if there are other languages with other logics.

No doubt this is right. But the friend of MULTITUDE might attempt to argue that although PARTISAN can be true even if MULTITUDE is,

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MULTITUDE deflates the debate over which is the right logic, for if MULTITUDE is right, then the following claim is true:

[DEFLATE] All that the (horizontal) issue of which logic is the right logic amounts to is (a) which logic is the logic of the language we actually use, or (b) which logic it is best to use for pragmatic reasons, whence the question of which logic is the right logic lacks the depth and significance otherwise accorded to it.

I will do three main things in this paper. First, I will discuss how MULTITUDE is best understood. As stated, MULTITUDE is rather unclear. I will discuss how best to make it precise, so that it amounts to a philosophically significant claim. Second, I will discuss the plausibility of MULTITUDE thus sharpened. Third, I will discuss the relation between MULTITUDE and DEFLATE. Even when MULTITUDE is sharpened, it will be clear that it does not entail DEFLATE. Discussing the reasons why will be instructive. Fourth, I will discuss some issues regarding the plausibility of DEFLATE.

2 Sharpening MULTITUDE

First, sharpening MULTITUDE. What does it mean to say that there are “different logics of different languages”? Glosses such as, e.g., “there are some languages in which the law of excluded middle holds and others in which they do not”, or “there are languages in which everything follows from a contradiction and languages in which this is not the case” are potentially misleading. These glosses make it sound as if the view is that particular propositions are, somehow, true in one language but false in another, or that certain propositions stand in the consequence relation “in one language” but not in another. But that, I take it, we will want to shy away from. The idea that propositional truth and the consequence relation on propositions are somehow language-relative seems absurd.¹

MULTITUDE is better understood as saying something along the following lines: for some different logics, the sorts of utterances and inferences those employing those logics accept and reject are such that there is a possible language such that under the hypothesis that those employing those logics speak that language, their use is correct. This is easiest to explain if we focus attention on particular disputes. The classical logician says “p ∨ ¬p”, for some given p, and maintains further that this is a truth of logic; a certain kind of many-valued logician refuses to accept “p ∨ ¬p” or at any rate maintains that it is not a truth of logic. They can each be correct in doing what they do, on the assumption