Even for a rather late Platonic dialogue, Parm. is, on many counts, unusual, not the least in its formal character. The usual conversational tone of the first part passes almost abruptly into a series of rather strictly deductive, and quite often baffling, arguments. Although it has been read as metaphysically oriented, even as systematizing Plato’s mature metaphysics and epistemology, it is no wonder that it has, in the last half-century, attracted the attention of logicians and of philosophers with an analytical bent of mind. More or less meticulous logical reconstructions of this dialogue have been offered, notably by Brambough. This book of Rickless (R.) fits squarely into this tradition of interpretation. He aims at checking the logical validity of the arguments in the First Part and the Deductions (traditionally called, since the Neo-Platonists, ‘Hypotheses’) in the Second Part of Parm.

1 F. sieht nur (77) πόλις ἥδε 39 «in the first couplet» (77) – κείνην πόλιν 47 «in the last couplet» (78).
2 fehlt im ‘Index of passages’ anders als «49–52» (192); man beachte die Responsion ἀλλήλους δ᾽ ἀπατῶσιν 59 ~ ἀλλὰ δόλους ἀπάτας τε 67.
3 Sol. 4.10 und Thgn. 48 «end their stanzas ... with similar phrases» (85).
4 Daß «the last stanza ... shifts the theme ... from drunkenness to the foolish talk generated by it» (90), ignoriert v. 481.
The main thesis of this book is that Prm. is a (successful) attempt to correct the «high theory of forms», namely, the theory underlying Men., Phbd., R., Sym. and Phdr., by showing the necessity of abandoning some of the basic propositions of that theory, namely, in R.'s notation, P (Purity), RP (Radical Purity), U (Uniqueness) and, later, NCC (No Causation by Contraries) (6). In line with recent interpretations of the dialogue, R. maintains that «it is possible to read the Second Part of the Prm. as a direct and rational response to the problems raised in the first part of the dialogue», which, he claims, represents the ‘high theory of forms’ (95, cf. 45). To this effect, he accepts the division of the Second Part of the dialogue into eight Deductions (D1, D2, etc.) and divides each Deduction into Arguments (A1, A2, etc.), with the occasional addition of auxiliary Lemmata (L1, L2, etc.), often rather ad hoc.

R.'s ‘high theory of forms’ is predicated on several basic assumptions, some of which are regularly and popularly accepted as beyond doubt, but are, under closer scrutiny, doubtful. So, for example, each of the forms of the ‘high theory’ is ‘itself-by-itself’ (II). But a glance at, e.g., the discussion of κοινωνία at 158d4, referring back to R. 5.476a5–8, will show that the forms, from the onset of Plato’s mature philosophy, are supposed to mix with each other. The same goes for RP (Radical Purity): already Phdr. 265dff. clearly contradicts RP.

These supposed axioms of the ‘high theory’ immediately imply a simple ‘two-world’ ontology. This, indeed, seems to be the case at R. 5.477b10ff., where a direct correlation between cognitive states and objects is mistakenly assumed by commentators, even at the price of a gratuitous textual correction. But this two-world theory is taken by R. too lightly at 224. If there is an immediate correlation between cognitive states and their objects, then one is indeed constrained to accept that «forms are not opinable» (245). But, surely, this cannot be the case? One can have true, and even false, opinions about forms, or recollection as in Men., let alone Socratic elenchus, would have been impossible.

R. is to be commended for his painstaking logical analysis of the arguments. But, faithful to this approach, he relegates the literary elements to a secondary role: «Attention to dramatic clues and stage directions [...] just play a role secondary to the role of logical reconstruction. [...] The interpretation of literary tropes is the servant, not the master, of logical analysis» (7). However, the alternative to a strict logical analysis is not a ‘mystical’ or ‘religious’ approach, as R. seems to imply (ibid.). Downplaying the dramatic aspects of the work necessarily leads to ignoring the dialectical and dialogical nature of the argument. This dialogical nature is always crucial to the understanding of any Platonic dialogue. Thus, Socrates is not always up to showing that «the interlocutors’ beliefs [...] are logically inconsistent» (1). Callicles’ beliefs, for example, in Grg., are not. He is at first reduced to silence, at 494e7ff., not because of an inconsistency in his position, but because he is ashamed to maintain it in public to its last consequences. In Plato’s dialogues, speakers speak ‘in character’, and what they say cannot be detached from him who says it. And in Prm. only the more so.

The formal framework of the Second Part of the dialogue does not detract from its dramatic aspect, but rather attention to dramatic clues and nuances of language is crucial for the understanding of the dialogue. A specially important example is young Aristoteles’ answer to Parmenides’ question, at the end of D1,
whether this can be the case with the one, namely, that it cannot be spoken about and there can be no δόξα of it: ‘Οὔκουν ἐμοὶ γε δοκεῖ’, says he at 1427–8. Not ‘I certainly don’t think so’, as R. quotes Gill and Ryan’s translation (134), but ‘I, for one, do not think so’. There is no flaw in the development of the D1, as R. carefully shows. The difficulty is not logical, but pragmatic. For Aristoteles, who has been engaged in speaking about the one and formulating his opinions about it, whether right or wrong, this cannot be the case (cf. 155d7). As the conclusion of a purely logical argument, this is unimpeachable. But, since it blatantly clashes with the facts, for him who is engaged in developing the argument, another argument has to be devised, from an alternative premiss, instead of the one just presented. As propositions, on their own, the steps of the previous argument can stand, and so can the whole argument as logically reconstructed. But as utterances, they cannot be detached from their speaker, or from him who accepts them, and the conclusion of the Deduction is unacceptable for pragmatic, not logical reasons. The argument has to be reconsidered. D2 is, thus, not a continuation of the D1, but an alternative to it, as Parmenides characterizes it in saying: ‘Do you wish, then (οὖν), that we go over our hypothesis again from the beginning, to see whether, in doing so, something of another sort will appear?’ (142b1–2). Thus, Aristoteles’ previous reply, ‘Οὔκουν ἐμοὶ γε’, does not signal agreement with Parmenides’ summary, as R. concludes (135). If it did, there would be no need of a new start.

If the Deductions are pairs of alternatives, it is unwarranted to take assumptions from one Deduction into its counterpart, as R. does, e.g., at 229, where he carries over the premisses of D6 into D7. In D6, ‘is not’ signifies, indeed, absence of being without qualification (228). But not in D7, as it is clear from 164b6, where the others are said to be affected by difference. Similarly, in D2, ‘is’ means, indeed, ‘partakes’ (139). But this is not true of D1 (122), where having a predicate is ruled out by the strict interpretation of ‘is’.

The formal logical approach invites the assumption of univocity of the terms in the arguments. So, as R. writes, «by SBP, to say that X partakes in being is to say that X is» (138). But this is true only on the assumption of the univocity of ‘is’. This, however, is the purely formal logic of the type that Plato opposes, e.g., in Euthd., and in our dialogue. Accordingly, by R.’s TT (Transmission Theory), «whatever makes something be (or become) F must itself be F» (xii). But, as has been already recognized long ago by Robin, the F and the f’s are not F in the same way (as R. recognizes at 41), and the distinction must be kept between being F and having F (which R. disregards at 50). There is here a systematic ambiguity, or two modes of being F, namely being F by itself (καθ’ αὑτό) and being F by participating in the F. This Plato called attention to already at Phd. 100d5ff. And once this is taken into account, self-predication becomes more and more of a ‘red herring’. Plato’s strict analysis of participation comes in the fifth Deduction, at 161e3–162b8. It is not clear how R. reads the passage (cf. 218). One would like a careful analysis of those difficult lines.

A very important point in case is the question of the separation of forms from sensibles (R.’s S). Plato was notoriously accused, not the least by Aristotele, of

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separating the forms from their sensible participants. However, a quick examination of the texts shows that ‘μαρτιμ’ is a Parmenidean term (cf. fr. 8, 56), used by him in this dialogue five times in short sequence (130b2, 3, 4, e1, d1), and nowhere by Plato in a technical sense, except in Prm. The term is indeed introduced in the dialogue by Socrates, but he asks for forms to be shown as both separate and mixed with each other (129d6–e3). It is Parmenides, acting in character, who asks about separateness without mixing. R. himself quotes the passage in full (51) but later (227; cf. 119), disregards its second part. Socrates’ demand is, no doubt, paradoxical, even self-contradictory. The paradox can be dissolved by a distinction between καθαρον αὐτὸ (or πρὸς αὐτὸ) and πρὸς τί, as has been suggested by various interpreters. But R. dismisses the distinction as unsupported and speculative (101–106). See, however, Prm. 136a6 and 166d4, where precisely this distinction is made. The acceptance of S goes together with the assumption of RP (Radical Purity), and R. sees it as an essential element of the ‘high theory of forms’. But this assumption, in its simplistic formulation, has already challenged in the R. and in Phdr.

As already Pico della Mirandola noticed, all the arguments in Prm. are hypothetical. Nevertheless, it is not normally taken into account that all the Second Part of the dialogue is written in the subjunctive. The conclusions of the several arguments are the apodoses of conditionals, whose protases are the definitions at the beginning of each Deduction. If the hypothesis ‘(the) one is’ were to be understood as in the D1 (and those that assume the same unrestricted meaning of ‘ἐστι’, namely, D4, D6 and D8), then the consequences would be such and such. But if it were to be understood restrictively as in D2 (and those compatible with it, namely D3, D5 and D7), then the consequences would be otherwise.

In this dialogue, in particular, the method of hypothesis method is crucial. But if one assumes that it is «a [deductive] bidirectional procedure» (246), one will not be able to explain, for example, the moves in D2, with its seemingly contradictory conclusions. But, if Cornford is right in his important 1912 article – nowadays almost perfunctorily quoted but seldom engaged – to the effect that the implication runs from the hypothesis, intuitively arrived at, to the conclusion, but not vice-versa, then the hypothesis is a necessary, but typically not a sufficient, condition of the conclusion. In any case, R. must be wrong in his description of the hypothetical method in Phdr., that «[i]f careful consideration of the consequences of H that [the higher hypothesis] does not reveal inconsistency at the heart if H, then H [which is supposed to follow from H] is confirmed» (246). This is not what Plato says at Phdr. 101d, and the inference is invalid. If Hp is not found to be inconsistent (or, rather, more accurately, as Plato says, if its consequences are not found to be so), H is at most not shown to be false, but certainly not proved to be true.

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1 C.C. Meinwald, Plato’s ‘Parmenides’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); S. Scolnicov, Plato’s Parmenides (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and others.
2 G. Pico della Mirandola, De ente et uno, in: Opera omnia (Venice 1492).
If one accepts the conclusions of Prm. as establishing Plato’s revised thinking about forms and takes seriously Plato’s plain words, as R. rightly purports to do, one cannot claim that Plato came to reject P and RP. Plato admits them in half of the Deductions and the conclusion of the last Deduction comes as close as possible to accepting these two premisses without admitting the possibility of any predicates to the one. Moreover the general conclusion of the dialogue (166c2–5) asserts the conjunction of all the partial conclusions of the Deductions. R. takes it to confirm the hypothesis that the one is, because it says that if the one is not, the others both are and are not, and this impossible, since it is a contradiction. But Plato is careful to point out that these results are καὶ πρὸς αὐτόν καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλων (c4), thus dissolving the contradiction into different aspects.

R.’s work usefully brings to the fore the advantages and shortcomings of a logical reconstruction, by trying to rescue Plato from the common accusation of inexact thinking, but, on the other hand, assuming the neutrality of propositional logic and imposing a concept of consistency that may not be applicable to all philosophical positions.

It is regrettable that the bibliography is all in English, except for an indirect reference to Wundt’s 1935 study.