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If One is One: The Hypotheses in Plato's *Parmenides*

Scholarship on Plato's *Parmenides* has made great progress since the Third Man was resurrected fifty years ago (Vlastos 1954). But discussion of the dialectical exercise that forms the bulk of the dialogue continues to labor under a basic misunderstanding of the twin hypotheses there examined. All major studies (Ryle, Cornford, Owen, Allen, Miller, Meinwald, McCabe, Turnbull, Gill, Sayre, Scolnicov) construe the hypotheses -- either *ei hen (ouk) esti* or *hen ei (ouk) esti* -- to be "if one (or the one) is (or exists)" and its contradictory. Despite major disagreement about the force of the verb and both the sense and reference of the subject term, there is none about the syntax. I argue that this consensus is mistaken both in construing *esti* as syntactically complete -- whether in an absolute use (existential, veridical, etc.) or as merely contextually incomplete (cf. Brown 1986) -- and also in taking *hen* as its subject. Rather, the verb is predicative, *esti* the predicate, and *to hen* the implied or explicit subject. The twin hypotheses are thus "self-predicational" and the deductions explore what follows "if the one is (or is not) one."

My argument has three parts. The first involves three syntactic points: a) The initial formulation of the hypothesis in 137b explicitly specifies *hen* as both subject and predicate (*pace* Meinwald and others, who emend 137b4). b) Similar hypotheses cited in the prologue employ parallel constructions (127-9; cf. 136a-b). And c) all but one of the initial sentences in the nine deductions have only *hen* without an article in the protasis -- not as subject, but as a predicate for *to hen*, which is mentioned explicitly (either with the article or by anaphoric *auto*) in every initial sentence but one (164b5) -- twice in the protasis itself, otherwise in the apodosis. Thus, the formulation of the hypotheses is uniformly predicational.

This reading of the hypotheses is corroborated by context. Preoccupation with the initial sentences of the deductions has misled scholars into construing $\beta\eta$ (without article) as the subject rather than a predicate. But the absence of an explicit subject in most of the protases of the initial hypotheses is readily explained by the rigorous structure of the deductions and their conversational form. The former firmly establishes *to hen* as the primary focus -- and default subject -- for the entire exercise. And once the contextual frame is widened to encompass sentences that precede and follow formulations of the hypotheses, we find the subject -- namely, *to hen* -- explicitly expressed repeatedly.

The natural reading of the hypotheses is also confirmed by the course of the argument within the several deductions. *Parmenides* frequently invokes the hypotheses as a premise as he proceeds, and regularly in the form "the one is (or is not) one." The only basis for his appeals is the initial hypothesis, and only a predicational reading suits the text. Since this reading preserves validity, logic requires it. I illustrate this point by looking briefly at two arguments: one about sameness in the first deduction, and one about plurality in the second deduction.

The predicational reading of the hypotheses raises many questions, both interpretive and philosophical. In particular, it calls for reconsideration of Plato's conception of "self-

predication” and its role in his later metaphysics. But those are large and complex questions for another occasion. Here my brief is only to remove a major obstacle to accurate interpretation of the dialogue.