Philip Merlan, in chapter V of that most stimulating book *From Platonism to Neoplatonism*, first published in 1954, presented powerful arguments for identifying the substance, at least, of ch. IV of Iamblichus' work *De Communi Mathematica Scientia* as taken directly from a work of Speusippus', and as presenting a fuller and more accurate account of his doctrine of first principles than that relayed to us by Aristotle.

Merlan's arguments convinced many, including myself, but have recently come under attack from Leonardo Tarán, in his edition of the 'fragments' of Speusippus. Judging, correctly, that it is a matter of some consequence whether or not Merlan was justified in his attribution, he devotes a separate chapter of his Introduction (ch. V, pp. 86-107) to this question.

It is indeed a matter of consequence, since ch. IV of *DCMS*, if really Speusippean, yields a relatively coherent metaphysical schema which would provide us with a most useful control to Speusippus' doctrine on the allusive and polemical references of Aristotle. This Tarán rejects, on the grounds of what he sees as a series of irreconcilable contradictions between it and what we know, or think we know, of Speusippus' doctrine from other sources, particularly Aristotle. It is my purpose in this article to argue that these differences are not irreconcilable, and that there is nothing in *DCMS* IV that is not attributable, at least in substance, to Speusippus — and, indeed attributable to no other philosopher of whom we have knowledge.

---

1 The Hague. Merlan brought out a second edition in 1960, in which he replied to various criticisms of his views, and yet a third one in 1968.
2 Ed. N. Festa, Teubner, Leipzig, 1891 (hereafter cited as *DCMS*). Refs. are to Festa's pages.
I will take Tarán’s objections in order, without dwelling on the various points of similarity, which he admits (p. 104). The first significant doctrine of *DCMS IV* is that the One, which, with Multiplicity (πληθος), is one of the two highest principles (of mathematical numbers in the text, p. 15, 6-7 Festa, but necessarily of all other things as well), “should not yet be described as ‘being’” (ὁσερ οὐδὲ ὅν πω δεῖ καλεῖν, 15, 8). Merlan naturally picked on this statement, comparing it with the well-known testimony of Aristotle at *Met. N*, 1092 a 11-17 (fr. 43 Tarán):

Nor is someone correct who compares the principles of the universe to that of living things and plants, on the grounds that the more complete always comes from what is indefinite and incomplete (this being his reason for saying that this applies to the primary principles too, so that the One itself would not even be an existing thing). For even in this case the principles from which these things come are complete: it is a man that produces a man, and it is not true that the sperm is primary. (tr. Julia Annas, modified).

The contentious phrase here is that italicised above, ὡσεῖ μηδὲ ὅν τι εἶναι τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ. As Tarán correctly reminds us (p. 104, and in his commentary *ad loc.*) this is a clause of natural or intended result, not one of actual result. Annas in her translation — “so that the One is not even an existent thing” — distorts this, though in her notes she recognises, as do most other commentators, including Merlan (*op. cit.* p. 104), that it is presented as Aristotle’s own inference. Tarán’s argument is that the ὡσεῖ-with-infinitive construction implies that this is Aristotle’s inference (a reduction ad absurdum), and not Speusippus’ conclusion.

I in turn beg to differ with Tarán on this. One may grant that Aristotle is presenting this as the natural, and absurd, conclusion of Speusippus’ position (the τι is, I think, a touch of sarcasm), but the natural result construction does not seem to me to exclude this being Speusippus’ actual conclusion. As in the case of his other objections also, Tarán, in my view, is being excessively ‘legalistic’ in his interpretation of the text. Aristotle is certainly laying emphasis on the natural conclusion of Speusippus’ theories, and Speusippus himself may have shrunk from presenting his conclusion in just these terms (the expression in *DCMS IV*, οὐδὲ ὅν πω, implies not so much something baldly non-existent as something which may not properly be said yet to exist), but I do not see that the ‘natural result’ construction *contradicts* the supposition that Speusippus himself advanced this theory.

The line of reasoning presented in *DCMS IV* (p. 15, 9-10) is that ‘a