Conjectural Detection: Platonists and Plato's Text

The procedure of Thrasyllan Platonism, Harold Tarrant's most recent book on the history of Platonic philosophy and scholarship, is akin to that of a detective sorting through evidence which raises his suspicions of a long concealed but disturbing crime. While policing our understanding of the evolution of 'Platonism', during and after the demise of the school Plato founded in the Athenian Academy, Tarrant has come upon what he suspects are the fingerprints of the emperor Tiberius' astrologer Thrasyllus, known for his organisation of the Platonic dialogues into the tetralogies in which they have come down to us, linked to indications of perhaps deliberate tampering with the texts. This is a book of subtle conjectures about intriguing possibilities, not promising many determinate results for the practicing textual critic (who nevertheless should see ch. 7, esp. 185-201, discussing exemplary passages in the Meno and Timaeus, and 82-84 on Rep. X.616c-ff.). The lesson here is summarised as 'that we should be on our guard against the possibility that the occasional odd word or phrase within the dialogues, and even short passages in some cases, may be the result of post-Platonic interference, perhaps Thrasyllan interference' (201).

Tarrant's real achievement consists not so much in this modest proposal as in his attempt to establish for Thrasyllus the motive, means, and opportunity for such interference. Here is a potentially very significant claim regarding the history of Middle Platonism. Tarrant seeks to show not merely that Thrasyllus was a textual scholar who also arranged the Platonic

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corpus, but that in order to do so he must have held significant interpretive views about each of the dialogues and how to read them, and furthermore about Plato's metaphysics and epistemology as a whole, while his theological account of Platonic doctrine was, on this account, profoundly influential in the evolution of Neo-pythagoreanism and Platonism in the first couple of centuries A.D.

**Thrasyllan Platonism** develops its argument in the light of a thorough analysis of the principles of Thrasyllus' tetralogies (chs. 2-4). The system is compared with Theon of Smyrna's alternate tetralogical arrangement, the trilogies of Platonic dialogues arranged by Aristophanes of Byzantium, as well as the dialogue orders of Albinus and of a source for al-Farabi identified by Tarrant as 'Galen (?)'. He also considers in detail the related question of the origin and principles of the ancient classification of dialogues into different pedagogical types. Thirty five pages of Thrasyllan testimonia are collected as an appendix (215-59), including significantly the whole of Diogenes Laertius III.47-66, a discussion of the types of Platonic dialogue and the principles of their ordering, and five pages of Porphyry, *In Ptolemaei Harmonicis* (11-15 Düring), presenting a general theory of logos.

The main bases for Tarrant's account of Thrasyllus' philosophy include, firstly, his identification of the latter as the source for these passages of Diogenes and Porphyry (see chs. 1.iv, and 5), and secondly that of either Thrasyllus or else the middle Stoic Poseidonius as the 'philosopher from Rhodes' whom Proclus, *In Parm.* 1057.5-7 Cousin, reports as first introducing a fivefold metaphysical schema of interpretation for the hypotheses in Plato's *Parmenides* (ch.6). This second point further involves a radical revision of E.R. Dodds' now standard view of the Neo-pythagorean Moderatus as having interpreted the *Parmenides* in this manner later in the first century A.D.² Tarrant argues that

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Moderatus actually transformed the earlier interpretation into an eight hypothesis positive schema in reaction against the sanguine view of sense objects implied by Thrasyllus’ theory of *logos* and matter.

In order to highlight the nicety of the kind of interpretive and speculative judgments Tarrant is required to make by the nature of his evidence, and so the hypothetical status of his conclusions, I shall mention a few specific issues. Firstly, while this is not unusual in such cases, no objective confirmation is available for the identifications of Thrasyllus as a continuous source for the passages in Diogenes and in Porphyry. For example, Thrasyllus is not mentioned until (and only at) D.L. III.56, specifically to report his justification for the tetralogical arrangement of dialogues, following a passage which by Tarrant’s own admission (89, 234 n.31) might derive from Aristophanes of Byzantium, and so not necessarily by way of Thrasyllus. The latter is clearly followed as far as III.61 in the list of tetralogies, but thereafter Diogenes might well be referring back to Aristophanes himself or another source regarding that critic’s arrangement of the dialogues in trilogies. Tarrant (18) argues against seeing Favorinus, mentioned twice (III.57 and 62), as well as at III.48, as the main source.

To identify Thrasyllus in Porphyry Tarrant has made extensive and skilful use of electronic lexical searches in the TLG (see 109 n.2, 122 n.43, 129 n.59; cf. 108 n.1), which provides an interesting opportunity to evaluate the kind of results this resource can produce. In fact Tarrant shows (108-9) that the vocabulary of the extended passage at issue is distinctive, containing terms not to be explained as Plotinian, and with some links to Philo and Theon. Yet in order to attribute *In Ptol. Harm.* 12-15 Düring to Thrasyllus, Tarrant is reliant on one mention (12.21), the observation that the content involves a ‘semiempirical epistemology with a Hellenistic flavour’ (*loc. cit.*), and the possibly self-cancelling argument that while

contemporary writers were happy not to name their sources, and Porphyry in particular did not regard this as important, he ‘has stated that he will name his sources on 5.7-8, and no other source is mentioned throughout this section’ (110). The TLG then does not here succeed in replacing the traditional subjective judgments of probability typical of source attribution arguments, although it does allow manipulation of a new class of significant evidence.

Tarrant’s interpretation of the epistemology of the Porphyry passage deserves comment. I believe he is right to use Republic VI to unravel the account of noësis of the forms (125-26) in this apparently early example of the integration of a Peripatetic/Stoic account of perception with a truly Platonic theory of transcendent form. Tarrant’s interpretation of this requires an account of the obscure term epibolē (128-31 and cf. Porph. 240 §32 Tarrant) as referring to ‘accumulations or layers of similar relevant experience, and the act of building up layer upon layer’ (130). Yet the function of epibolē is associated not with concept formation but with the attainment of knowledge by securing the content of a universal already grasped, and therein of direct intellectual insight (nous) into the reality of that content (the transcendent form). It might rather seem in this context that epibolē is likely to refer to the penetrating concentration of the mind which achieves direct access to the independently real form it encounters in the universal, in accordance with the philosophical uses listed at LSJ s.v. ἐπιβολή I.2a and b. The

3 Contrast the equivocations and compromises of Antiochus of Ascalon as reported by Cicero, Ac. I.30-33, II.30, and cf. Dillon 91-96, who also quotes and discusses Or. 8ff.

4 βεβαιωθεῖσσα (240 §29 Tarrant) and τὸ βέβαιον (240 §32) seem at least as likely to indicate the internal transformation from an insecure to a secure grasp of the cognitive content as any external confirmation by further experience (cf. 124 §29 and 127 §32 trans. Tarrant), particularly when the step from experience (or rather, from its product the universal) to knowledge is precisely what is here at issue. Note, by way of contrast, that for Arist. Ari. Post. II.19 this is not a problem because the universal is already knowledge and an object of nous.
lexicon here seems quite defensible. This concentration would produce a secure insight into the independent truth about what was previously only assumed to be the formal structure, abstracted by way of the picture in the imagination, of the external object of sense-perception.5

The sense ἐπιβολή = 'concentration' accords with the expression ἐπιβάλλω τὸν νοῦν (cf. LSJ s.v. ἐπιβάλλω II.3); consequently ἡ ἐπιστήμη καθαρὸν τὸν ἐπείτα καθόλου νοῦν ἐπιβλητικὸν6 λαμβάνει (Porph. 240-41 §32 Tarrant) should mean 'knowledge receives insight in its pure state when that by its power of concentration is universal', referring to transcendent insight into the independent being of the immaterial form. Knowledge makes use of this insight to reach truth (loc. cit.), and by means of it the knower attains self-recognition as in intellectual contact with true being (Porph. 240 §29 Tarrant). The distinctively 'Platonist' feature of this formulation is the attribution to nous of an ontological prominence the equal of its eternal objects.

I also want to discuss at somewhat greater length Tarrant's reinterpretation of the account of Moderatus' theory of matter in Simplicius, In Phys. 230.36-231.24 Diels, derived again from

5 Cf. η δοκαστική ύπόληψις, 240 §26 Tarrant, τῆς ύπόληψις §30, and see §32. The Epicurean use of the term epibolē discussed by Tarrant (129 n.57) can also be explained this way: empirical epibolē (concentration) on the external object's image carried by atomic films constitutes a conceptual access (prolepsis) to that object. This also fits Tarrant's citation of Galen (129-30) and certainly Philo Post. 20 (denying we can get to the truth of God by way of a concept of Him; cf. Tarrant 129 n.58). Philo's disparagement of epibolē generally seems informed by his promotion of an intellectually passive attitude to the divine revelation of truth.

6 Cf. Tarrant 127 n.54, who amends τὰς ἐπιβλητικὰς. I understand the predicate adjective ἐπιβλητικὸν to specify the condition under which insight grasps the universality and hence independent being of the forms. It is admittedly awkward that the sentence contains another predicate adjective (καθαρὸν), but not unintelligible.
Porphyry. Tarrant’s position is that this passage can be reconciled with the identification of Moderatus as a precursor of Plotinus’ follower Amelius, who is reported as finding eight hypotheses containing positive metaphysical doctrine in Plato’s *Parmenides*. Tarrant wishes to finger Thrasyllus as an adherent of an earlier five hypothesis interpretation admitting the existence of imminent forms in matter, as implied by the epistemology of the *In Ptol. Harm.* passage (see Tarrant 165-170). Moderatus would be reacting against this with the denial, reported by Simplicius 231.3-4, that perceptible objects participate in forms. Tarrant (153-54) first argues that the details of Moderatus’ position, even on the obvious reading, must be distinguished from the five positive hypothesis schema of *Parmenides* interpretation described as ‘ancient’ by Proclus, *In Parm.* 638-40 Cousin. At this point I will just raise the possibility that Moderatus may have merely *interpreted* the participation in unity by the others of the fourth hypothesis as a mirroring of forms, while Porphyry then understood him to be thus *denying* participation in a more proper sense.9

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7 For the text see below note 12.


9 At *Parm.* 157c1-e5 Aristoteles agrees that the others participate in a whole which is one apart from the One; at 157e5-158b1 that each of the others as individually one participates in the One. In the Neoplatonic metaphysics of a descending ontological sequence of Ones dependent upon the first, this One would be the second, responsible for limit and eidetic character. However 158b1-159b1 assumes that the others have an unlimited and homogenous nature apart from their relation to the One (cf. 158c6, d5-6), so that their participation, whereby they derive limit and difference among themselves is merely superficial, as in a reflection (cf. the lowest level of the divided line in *Rep.* VI). Note, regarding my argument below, that this means the nature of the others taken apart from participation in limit (form), i.e., their matter, is indeterminate quantity, not that their nature as participating in (reflecting) form, whereby they are perceptible things as such, is so; this perceptible (that is, form-reflecting) nature would be the last trace of unity in the world.
Tarrant’s view that (on Proclus’ count) Moderatus held that there are eight referring hypotheses involves him in two bold manoeuvres in relation to Simplicius’ account, which, following Dodds (op. cit.) seems to distinguish just three metaphysical unities, then perceptible objects, their matter, and a principle of privation. First, Tarrant posits a lacuna at Simp. 231.3, so that both hypotheses three and four refer to Soul (respectively rational and irrational, Tarrant 158, cf. 154, and Pl. Parm. 155e-159a). Then he uses Simplicius’ further report of Porphyry’s discussion of matter (231.7-24), which explains its derivation from pure privation, to identify three levels of matter corresponding to hypotheses five to seven (Pl. Parm. 159b-164b), so that ‘the final nature, that of perceptible things’ (Simp. 231.3-4) fits hypothesis eight (Pl. Parm. 164b-165e, on which see Tarrant 154-55 and 158-59). Tarrant emphasises that if Simplicius rightly reports Moderatus as asserting that the nature of perceptible things does not participate in the forms, the latter could not have endorsed ‘forms in matter’ in hypothesis eight, unlike Amelius. Hypothesis nine (165e-66c) would then describe nothing at all (154), and be meaningless. This would differ significantly both from Amelius’ account, in which there is no ninth hypothesis (Proclus, In Parm.1052-53), and also that of Proclus, following Plutarch of Athens and indirectly ‘the philosopher from Rhodes’, whereby hypotheses six to nine (or ten), although not describing the way things are, provide an integrated reductio ad absurdum of their shared premise, that the One does not exist (Proclus 1057-60).

Tarrant (160-61) appeals to another passage of Moderatus identified at Porph. V. Pythag. §49, 44.10-14 to justify finding a distinction between a world soul and individual ensouled beings (as opposed to objects of perception as such), which would correspond with that between the third and fourth hypotheses in the Parmenides (155e-59a). Tarrant admits this is not exactly the distinction between rational and irrational soul he wants for the precursor of Amelius (Proclus In Parm. 1052), but does not discuss the use of the plural τῶν ὅλων (V. Pythag. 44.11), which suggests a reference to soul as such as the cause of continuity of life within all living wholes taken universally, including the world soul,
rather than the latter apart from other ensouled beings. Furthermore the following sentence (12-14), beginning καὶ γὰρ, seems to be justifying the previous general claim with a familiar example, an individual organic whole, rather than introducing a further distinct level of unity. The subsequent lines (15-18) could then be said to distinguish the indeterminate dyad, as principle of matter, from perceptible material bodies as such.  

On such a view Moderatus would have taken the first four hypotheses of the Parmenides to refer respectively to the One beyond Being, the One true Being, Soul, and perceptible things, while the fifth would refer to matter as privation (cf. Pl. Parm. 159d-160b). Perceptible things then derive their nature from both their reflection of forms (an activity involving perceptive soul), by which they are ordered (Simp. In Phys. 231.5), and from 'the nature of duality' (V. Pythag. 44.18). Their bodily material could then be called a shadow of pure privation in quantity (Simp. 231.6-7), which in turn would be identified with the indeterminate dyad (cf. V. Pythag. 44.17). In that case perceptibles are called 'the final nature from this' (Simp. 231.3-4) with reference to the principle of unity, of which they show the final vestiges, by reflection (if not participation), while they also reveal material dependence upon the opposed principle, 'the nature of duality'. This would admittedly involve a problem in mapping the distinction reported in Simplicius between pure privation in quantity and its shadow in the matter of perceptible things onto the hypotheses distinguished in the Parmenides, but the whole question presupposes that Moderatus both intended to

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10 It would remain a problem for Moderatus in any case, if he really meant to deny that perceptible bodies participate in forms, as to how there is organic structure, and hence unity, in ensouled bodies. Contrast the doctrine of spermatikoi logoi central to Plotinus, and inherited from the Stoics by way of earlier Platonists (indeed mentioned by Thrasyllus apud Porph. In Ptol. Harm. 12.6ff. and 12.21ff. Düring = 238 §2 and §11 Tarrant; cf. also Tarrant 112-13).
do so, and counted these in the same way as later Neoplatonists.\footnote{Both in V. Pythag., and in his On Matter followed by Simplicius, \textit{loc. cit.}, Porphyry may well be responsible for reformulating Moderatus’ views into the later Neoplatonist language of hypostatic Ones which is applied to the interpretation of the \textit{Parmenides}. Yet V. Pythag., \S 53 suggests Moderatus would have the motive for interpreting the \textit{Parmenides} of showing that Plato’s doctrines were borrowed from the Pythagoreans. For dispute about distinguishing the identity and number of different hypotheses see Proclus, \textit{In Parm.} 1039-43 and 1052-64, with Morrow and Dillon 385-88.}

Tarrant’s innovative view of Moderatus’ theory of matter as reported in Simplicius requires closer inspection.\footnote{For subsequent convenience I reproduce here the whole passage (Simp. \textit{In Phys.} 230.36-231.24 Diels) from Tarrant 150 and 155:}

\[\text{(230.36) οὔτος γὰρ κατὰ τοὺς Πυθαγορείους τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἐν ύπὲρ τὸ ἐίναι (231.1) καὶ πᾶσαν οὐσίαν ἀποφαίνεται, τὸ δὲ δεύτερον ἐν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ τὸ (2) δύτως ὁν καὶ νοητόν, τα ὅτι εἴδη φησιν ἐίναι, τὸ δὲ τρίτον, ὅπερ (3) ἐστὶ τὸ ψυχικόν, μετέχειν τοῦ ἐνὸς καὶ τῶν ἐλέων, τὴν δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦτο (4) τελευταίαν φύσιν τὴν τῶν ἀισθητῶν οὐσίαν μὴ δὲ μετέχειν, ἀλλὰ (5) φασιν ἐκείνων κεκοσμηθῆσθαι, τῆς ὑπὸ τοῦτος ὅλης τοῦ μὴ δύτως (6) πρῶτος ἐν τῷ πόσῳ δύτως οὐσίας σκλασμα καὶ ἐπὶ μᾶλλον ὑποβέβη: (7) κυίας καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦτο. βουλήθεις ὁ ἐνιαίος λόγος, ὃς σοῦ φησὶν ὁ Πλάτων, (8) τῆς γένεσιν ἁφ’, ἐαυτοῦ τῶν δύτων συστήσασθαι, κατὰ στέρησιν αὐτοῦ (9) ἐχώρισε τὴν ποσότητα πάντων αὐτῆς στερῆσαι τῶν αὐτοὺς λόγων καὶ εἰ- (10) δώμ. τοῦτο δὲ ποσότητα ἐκάλεσεν ἀμορφόν καὶ ἀδιαίρετον καὶ ἀσχήμα- (11) τοῦτον, ἐπιδεχόμενον μὲν τοῦτον σχῆμα διαίρεσιν ποσότητα πάν τὸ (12) τούτου. ἐπὶ ταύτης ἔσοικε, φησί, τῆς ποσότητος ὁ Πλάτων τὰ πλεῖον δύσ- (13) ματα κατηγορήσαι, πανδεχὴ καὶ ἀνέδεου λέγων καὶ ἀόρατον καὶ ἀπὸ (14) ρώτατα τοῦ νοητοῦ μετειληφθέναι αὐτὴν καὶ λογισμῷ νόων μόλις ληπτήν (15) καὶ πάν τὸ τοῦτος ἐμφέρει. αὐτὴ δὲ ἡ ποσότης, φησί, καὶ τοῦτο τὸ ἐδός (16) τὸ κατὰ στέρησιν τοῦ ἐνιαίου λόγου νοούμενον (τοῦ πάντας τοὺς λόγους (17) τῶν δύτων ἐν ἐαυτῷ περιελήφοτος) παράδειγμα[τα] ἐστὶ τῆς τῶν σω- (18) μάτων ὑλῆς, ἢ καὶ αὐτήν πόσον καὶ τοὺς Πυθαγορείους καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα (19) καλεῖν ἔλεγεν, οὔτε τὸ ὡς ἐδός ποσόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ κατὰ στέρησιν καὶ παρά (20) λυσιν καὶ ἐκτάσειν καὶ διασπασμὸν καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ δύτως παράλλαξιν, (21) δι’ ἄ κα κακῶν δοκεῖ ἡ ὑλή ὡς τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἀποφεύγουσα. καὶ κατα (22) λαμβάνεται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ}
attributes to Moderatus a distinction between (a) paradigmatic matter, the pure privation of the second One, negating its Being and all the transcendent forms there contained, leaving indeterminate quantity, (b) the matter of body, organised from the above with determinate magnitude and divisibility, and (c) the matter of perceptible things, which Tarrant claims is by contrast not mathematically organised, but consists in disorderly internally unbounded masses bordering each other (159, cf. 156). Yet the account of the rôle of bodily matter does not address an important question.

It seems that this matter would not be subject to functional organisation by the kind of organic form which is responsible for qualitative differentiation and integration of a living body. Tarrant suggests as much at 159: ‘He (Moderatus) appears in fact to have rejected the notion of immanent form as a real constituent of bodies; bodily material is mathematically organized (231.23-24), but there is no direct talk of forms being impressed upon matter.’ Curiously, in that case, the bodies of perceiving animals (whereby they have organs of perception) have merely the status of objects of perception, rather than being ‘true’ material bodies. Furthermore it does seem implausible that someone might postulate both a bodily material which cannot be formed into functionally organised bodies, and also that perceptible forms are perceived as bodily, with a matter responsible for bodily appearance, which all the same is not bodily material as such.  

13 The exclusively mathematical characteristics of bodily matter on this view might seem reminiscent of the primary qualities of Locke’s ‘I know not what’, but the latter does impinge on the senses, even though what we perceive involves secondary qualities not attributable to independent body. Note that none of those Proclus reports as proposing three kinds of matter or body (In Parm. 1052-55) make Tarrant’s perplexing distinction. His conception of Moderatus’ bodily matter could perhaps be rescued by revising it as the intellectual matter of geometrical construction (ordered
But there is no room in the eight hypothesis *Parmenides* interpretation attributed to Moderatus by Tarrant for perceptive (as opposed to perceptible) bodies, if, as he says (158-59) both hypotheses three and four refer to kinds of soul as such, and hypothesis six just to the merely mathematically organised matter of bodies.

In fact Tarrant recognises a pressure to modify this view, as a result of his appeal to the *V. Pythag.* passage. He there allows, regarding ‘that One in particular things...unified in its parts and conanimate by participation in the first cause’ (Porph. 44.12-14), that ‘even if it were not soul, then it would at least appear to be something ensouled’ (161). But this passage, which also specifies that ‘the nature of the two’ also belongs to such particular things (44.17-18), so that they are material entities, does not distinguish between bodily and perceptible matter at all. What it does emphasise is the distinction between soul as such, as the cause of unity and life in all living wholes, particular and cosmic, and body, which participates both in the former and the material principle.

Tarrant’s main justification for distinguishing between bodily and perceptible matter is that following the denial that perceptible things participate in forms (Simp. 231.4), Simplicius quotes Porphyry’s extended explanation of Moderatus’ position that the matter of perceptible things is a shadow of ‘primary Non-being which is in quantity’ (5-6), including the assertion that bodily matter has received the *logos* of the form of magnitude, and is informed by arithmetic division (23-24). In Tarrant’s words, ‘corporeal matter is made to participate in geometrical and arithmetic form. It is altogether more orderly than the matter of sensibles’ (156). In considering this argument I shall leave aside the possibility raised above that Moderatus merely interpreted the participation of sensible things in forms as a mirroring, while Porphyry read in a distinction between the terms here, as well as

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space); nevertheless I further argue that the text of Simplicius cannot support his distinction.
the alternative possibility that in explaining the constitution of a
derivative matter which is both corporeal and sensible Porphyry
is using the non-Moderatan language of participation.

What Porphyry, apud Simplicium, says, is that the nature, not
the matter, of perceptible things, does not participate (τὴν δὲ ἀπὸ τούτου [= τοῦ ἐνὸς] τελευταίαν φύσιν τὴν τῶν αἰσθητῶν οὐσιῶν μηδὲ μετέχειν, 231.3-4), but only reflects the forms. This
nature presumably consists not in their matter, which as such is not
directly perceptible, but in their quasi-formal character as images
of forms, whereby they are perceptible. By contrast then, their
matter, whatever it is, may well be bounded by and accept the
logos of the form of magnitude, and arithmetic division, whether
or not that process is itself properly called participation. In that
case there would be no need to distinguish bodily from sensible
matter as does Moderatus apud Tarrant.

Tarrant finds the language of the text to indicate such a
distinction on the following grounds. Simp. 231.6-7 distinguishes
(i) between the matter of perceptible things and that of which it
is a shadow, τοῦ μὴ ὄντος πρῶτος ἐν τῷ πόσῳ ὄντος. The text
immediately continues by describing the constitution of Tarrant's
(a): a unitary logos containing the forms, which must be the One
Being (the second One), is deprived of all its determinate content,
leaving only quantity (τὴν ποσότητα, 9, cf. 10, 12, 15), which is
identified with the receptacle of the Timaeus 51a7-8 and 52b2
(Simp. 231.10-15). This indeterminate quantity is then
distinguished (ii) from bodily matter, explicitly also called
quantity (πόσον, 17-19), as the latter's model. A further
distinction (iii) immediately ensues between the form of quantity
and quantity characterised by the privative condition of Non-
being (19-20), whereupon Porphyry describes whatever he means
by this latter (see below) as being bounded by the good and the
logos of the form of magnitude and arithmetic division (21-24).

Tarrant does not consider that distinction (ii), between the
primary indeterminate ποσότης and bodily πόσον, is the same as
that previously drawn (i) between 'the primary Non-being in τὸ
πόσον' (5-6) and the matter of perceptible things, because the two
uses of τὸ πόσον, as opposed to the abstract term ἡ ποσότης, should correspond for terminological consistency (p.156). In that case the former distinction (i) would be between bodily, not primary, matter and perceptible matter, giving us a total of three kinds.

Yet the word πρώτως at 231.6 suggests strongly that distinction (i) involves primary (pre-bodily) matter. Furthermore the use in distinction (ii) of ἠν καὶ αὐτὴν πόσον κτλ at 231.18 (‘which too he (Moderatus?) said both the Pythagoreans and Plato called quantity (πόσον)’14 implies that the terms ἡ ποσότης and τὸ πόσον are used here indiscriminately. Thirdly Tarrant’s own distinction between these terms would imply yet a fourth matter, intermediate between pure privation and bodily matter: that material referred to in distinction (iii) at 231.19-21 (‘not quantity [τὸ πόσον] as a form, but that [τὸ [sc. πόσον>] resulting from privation and unleashing and extension and dispersion and deviation from Being’), which is organised into bodily matter only when bounded by the good and the logos of magnitude and arithmetic division. On Tarrant’s principle of consistent terminology this phrase could not refer back to the pure privation of 15-17 (αὐτὴ δὲ ἡ ποσότης ...καὶ τούτο τὸ ἐίδος τὸ κατὰ στέρησιν κτλ), but neither, in fact, can it refer to bodily material as mentioned in the interval (17-19) despite the juxtaposition, since it describes a matter still deprived of the defining organisation of bodily matter. Further this ‘new’ matter cannot be the perceptible kind, since on Tarrant’s view perceptible matter is a shadow of bodily matter, while this is a constitutive element of the latter.

Despite the hyperbaton, οὐ τὸ ὡς εἶδος πόσον, ἀλλὰ τὸ κατὰ στέρησιν κτλ (231.19-21) must in fact refer back past bodily matter to pure privation, in apposition to αὐτὴ δὲ ἡ ποσότης ...

14 Tarrant’s translation, ‘...both the Pythagoreans and Plato also...’ (156, my emphasis) tends to absorb the force of the first καὶ into that of the second and third.
καὶ τοῦτο τὸ εἴδος τὸ κατὰ στέρησιν κτλ (15-17). The denial of form (19) is to be contrasted only with the form of magnitude (τοῦ εἰδητικοῦ μεγέθους) and the formative (εἴδοποιουμένου) action of arithmetic division which together with the effect of the good constitute bodily matter (23-24). It cannot be contrasted with the negative form of pure privation in quantity, which is an explicit defining feature of the matter in question in distinction (iii). Moreover another defining feature here, its ‘deviation from Being’ (20) also parallels both the earlier account, before distinction (ii), of the constitution of the primary matter, in a self-privation of forms and logoi, and so of Being, by the second One identical with true Being (7-10), as well as the description in distinction (i) of that of which perceptible matter is a shadow as ‘primary Non-being in quantity’ (5-6). Finally, the claim ‘he (Plato) called this a quantity (ποσότητα) which is shapeless, indivisible and unstructured but receptive of shape, structure, division, quality, etc.’ (10-12) looks forward to the account of the reformation of τὸ κατὰ στέρησιν ...<πόσον> (19-20): ‘it is contained by it (the good) and not permitted to exceed bounds, its extension receiving the logos of the form of magnitude and being bounded by this while its dispersion is given form by arithmetic division’ (21-24).

It seems then that Porphyry in Simplicius cannot be distinguishing between ἡ ποσότης and τὸ πόσον in reporting Moderatus’ theory of matter, and that he only describes one kind of derivative matter, that which is subject to spatial limits and in which, presumably, the forms of perceptible things are merely mirrored. It is this limited matter which is a shadow of pure privation in quantity, since within it pure negativity, upon which it depends, is compromised and reformed. Thus there is no third kind of matter in Moderatus, whether his theory involved an interpretation of the Parmenides or not. A final question I merely note before leaving this topic is why, if Moderatus had held an eight hypothesis interpretation of the Parmenides, Porphyry would have reported his view, as repeated at Simp. 230.36-231.7, in a way so suggestive of a five positive hypothesis interpretation.
On the view I have presented, Moderatus could still be seen to have reacted against Thrasyllus, if Tarrant is right to identify the latter as the source for the doctrine of *logos* in Porph. *In Ptol. Harm.*, in which the objects of perception are forms in matter. Moreover Thrasyllus may or may not have engaged in metaphysical interpretation of the *Parmenides*, and again he may or may not have set the One beyond Being over the forms and that *nous* which ‘is revealed like an accurate vision for contact with true Being’ (Porph. *In Ptol. Harm.* 240 §29 Tarrant). At the next level Tarrant seems right to identify Thrasyllus’ cosmos-organising ‘*logos* of the forms’ (*In Ptol. Harm.* 239 §11 Tarrant) as the object of mind of the imminent world-soul, here called ‘the god and leader of all’ (§9; see 114-15), whether or not Thrasyllus would identify the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* as the rational nature of this being, or as a superior deity identified with *nous* and true Being. To complete the picture, subordinate to soul are forms in matter as perceptual objects (§§6-8, 11, 24, 30, 34-39), and *a fortiori* also matter itself, although there is no discernible distinction of types or levels of matter.

We might then indeed speculate that Thrasyllus interpreted the *Parmenides* in the way ‘the philosopher from Rhodes’ is reported to have, but we might equally well, on the available evidence, identify him with those Proclus criticises for interpreting the dialogue as concerned with the method required ‘to apprehend the One Being, for the plurality of Ideas has its foundation in the One Being, as the corresponding number does in its monad’.15 It would be, after all, quite a significant result to show that a specific Platonist early in the first century A.D. held

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15 Proclus *In Parm.* 636 trans. Morrow and Dillon. Dillon, *ibid.* xvii, offers ‘the rather desperate suggestion’ that this refers to the Platonist Origen (cf. Proclus 1064-65, 1070, 1091, 1096, and 64 Klinbansky with Morrow and Dillon 419 n.38, 386, 424 n.46, 439 n.70, 443 n.77, and 596 n.125). But this does not exclude the possibility of other earlier proponents.
the doctrine of a One beyond Being, but the texts Tarrant presents do not imply this in the case of Thrasyllus. After making the best he can of the three kings of [Pl.] Ep. 2, Tarrant admits that 'the Epistle reveals too little to confirm that the metaphysical progression interpretation of the Parmenides was yet current, but if it was, then the Epistle was such as to bring that interpretation immediately to mind' (p.172). Indeed, Moderatus' most significant innovation might well have been in first applying the doctrine of a One beyond Being to the interpretation of the Parmenides half a century after Thrasyllus.

Thrasyllan Platonism presents us with a fertile and suggestive system of interconnected hypotheses regarding the nature and influence of the philosophy and scholarship of the formulator of our Platonic tetralogies. While I have tried to cast doubt on some of the positions Tarrant has taken, I must admit that the picture he paints of the significance of Thrasyllus remains challenging, and will have to be taken into account in future work on Middle Platonism. Tarrant is careful to acknowledge the unproven status of his suggestions and of the possible implications he traces in the

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16 Eudorus of Alexandria, datable to the second half of the first century B.C. (Dillon 115) is reported by Simplicius, In Phys. 181.10ff., to have posited a One beyond the forms and the indefinite dyad as his supreme god, but this is possibly rather the principle of Being, and the forms thoughts in this god’s mind (Dillon 126-28). See also the perhaps earlier fragment of the Neo-pythagorean pseudo-Archytas in Stob. I.278-79 Wachs and the reported views of Archaenetus and Brontinus in Syrianus In Metaph. 166.3ff. (and perhaps 112.14ff.) Kroll, with discussion by Dillon 120-21, 127 with n.1. and 134-35, and cf. Tarrant 172. Philo Judaeus, contemporary with Thrasyllus, regards Yahweh, his supreme One, as true Being (cf. Dillon 155 referring to Deus 11 and Heres 187). See further the references in Dillon 351 n.1.

17 Tarrant appeals to Porph. V. Plot. 20.71-76 and 21.1-9 (230; cf. 162-63), associating Thrasyllus with Neo-pythagoreanism and Plotinus, but at most this emphasises the difference between Plotinus and his predecessors, not any similarity among their doctrines.

18 I.e., presumably, when Thrasyllus incorporated the Epistles in the tetralogies.
texts he discusses. So long as the reader remembers this, he or she need not be led astray, but may well find a hitherto dark period in the history of Platonism tolerably, albeit indirectly, well lit, and take our possession — and interpretation — of Plato’s corpus a little less for granted.

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