In the portrayal of his youthful views in De E, Plutarch already shows a tendency toward allegorical interpretation. Much of this has to do with speculation on the pempad (five) along Pythagorean lines, including its designation as “marriage” and “nature.” Apollo is then split in two. In his deathless, eternal, pure, and solitary state he is Phoibos and Apollon. In his turning into winds and water, earth and stars, generation of plants and animals, fire and the like he is Dionysos, Zagreus, Nyktelios, and Isodaetes. For this god they sing emotional dithyrambic strains; for Apollo they sing the paian music, regulated and chaste. Apollo is ageless and young, Dionysos in many guises; Apollo orderly and serious, Dionysos playful, wanton, and frenzied. Equally related to the number five is the harmony of music, composition of the world’s elements, senses, parts of the world, animate beings (gods, daimones, heroes, men, the irrational and beastly), the supreme first principles of the Sophist (Being, Identity, Divergence, Motion, and Rest), and finally the categories under which the Good displays itself (moderation, due proportion, mind, science and arts and true opinions, pleasure, 387F–391E). In Ammonios’ speech at the end of this dialogue, we find similar interpretation: Apollo the supreme being, unity; Hades or Pluto, symbols of diversity and the forces of destruction and change.

Finally, Plutarch’s inclination toward simpler, more direct solutions to religious problems, letting certain elements serve perhaps as symbols, can be seen in De Pythiae oraculis 397C, where in spite of the long discussions on daimones and pneuma in De defectu, Theon, the speaker who is given the principal place in the dialogue, opts for a very simple, uncomplicated, and reasonably acceptable solution to the problem of Delphic prophecy: in inspiration the god puts into the mind of the prophetess a vision and creates a light in her soul regarding the future, “for this is inspiration (enthousiasmos)”; neither the voice, utterance, or diction (γῆρυς, φθόγγος, λέξις) is that of the god. This in general seems to be Plutarch’s method of arriving at a solution, to propose a number of solutions, some of which are chosen for their bizarreness, then to gradually arrive at a rather elevated intellectual and spiritual answer. This method leaves the impression of disorganization and incoherence, and one must admit that his addressee, Klea, must have been very confused at times by his explanations.
J.G. Griffiths has given an excellent commentary and introduction to *De Iside*. Plutarch’s work is too long and diverse to treat it in much detail here, but some of the major attitudes and tendencies can be noted. First of all Griffiths points out that Plutarch’s sources were very old. The principal ones were Manethon and Hekataios of Abdera, both under the first Ptolemy. Griffiths would see his sources as primarily Eudoxos of Knidos, Hekataios of Abdera, Hellanikos of Lesbos, Manethon, and Timotheos from the fifth and fourth centuries, Antikleides, Archemachos of Euboia, and Phylarchos from the third. After this he finds few sources and only two from the Roman era. The general picture of the cult fits the early Hellenistic period, with only some features of cult practice drawn from the Imperial period. Griffiths gives the sources for various parts of the work. Important for our purposes would be the myth (Manethon, Hekataios, and Eudoxos), euhemerism (an unknown third century or later source) and daimonology (Xenocrates and Chrysippos), dualism (Theopompos and possibly Eudoxos), and interpretations (Pythagorean, Platonic, Stoic, Gnostic, with mostly pre-Hellenistic references to myth and cult). The inconsistencies in the final conclusions lead Griffiths to suspect that Plutarch was using some handbook, a missing link, but in Griffiths’ view it was most likely “a Stoic author of Neo-Platonic sympathies”—a rather strange use of terminology in itself.

In the introduction to *De Iside*, Plutarch tells the addressee, Klea, a devotee of Isis, though it is not clear that she was a priestess in the cult, that the key to appreciating Egyptian religion, and the Isis myth in particular, is allegorical, or symbolic interpretation. Though the lines are not always immediately evident, there is an ascending scale of interpretation in which one goes beyond the literal meaning. Thus we find first the euhemerist solution, the daimonological—leading into Zoroastrianism and Greek dualism—and, finally, after warning against Stoic physical allegory, a symbolic interpretation of the Isis myth along Platonic lines. However, as Griffiths notes, in spite of certain attitudes taken in the treatise, Plutarch, like Cornutus, used every conceivable type of allegorical interpretation: etymological, physical and moral allegory. And Flacelière remarks, in his introduction to *Theseus and Romulus*,

1 Griffiths, *Plutarch, De Iside et Osiride*.
2 *De Iside et Osiride*, 75–100, on the sources. Griffiths does not want to rule out Poseidonios, though preferring “a Stoic author of Neo-Platonic sympathies,” (100). Hani, *La religion égyptienne*, 12–22, esp. 13–14, however, citing recent source work on Plutarch, believes he personally read a considerable number of the authors he cites.
3 Griffiths, *De Iside et Osiride*, 100–101. On this see also Wehrli, *Zur Geschichte*, 26–40; Pápin,