

MIDDLE PLATONISM AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY
OF PLUTARCH OF CHAERONEA.
AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY

by

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MIDDLE PLATONISM AND THE DISCOVERY OF INCORPOREALITY.
THE SPIRITUAL SENSE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

In the final part of his dialogue *De tranquillitate animi* Plutarch wrote the following words, which, in my opinion, illustrate the religious and theosophical foundation of his philosophy:

ἱερὸν μὲν γὰρ ἀγιώτατον ὁ κόσμος ἐστὶ καὶ θεοπρεπέστατον. εἰς δὲ τοῦτον ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰσάγεται διὰ τῆς γενέσεως οὐ χειροκμήτων οὐδ' ἀκινήτων ἀγαλμάτων θεατῆς, ἀλλ' οἷα νοῦς θεῖος αἰσθητὰ μιμήματα νοητῶν, φησὶν ὁ Πλάτων, ἔμφυτον ἀρχὴν ζωῆς ἔχοντα καὶ κινήσεως ἔφηεν, ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην καὶ ἄστρα καὶ ποταμούς νεόν ὕδωρ ἐξιέντας ἀεὶ καὶ γῆν φυτοῖς τε καὶ ζώοις τροφὰς ἀναπέμπουσιν. ὦν τὸν βίον μύησιν ὄντα καὶ τελετὴν τελειοτάτην εὐθυμίας δεῖ μεστὸν εἶναι καὶ γήθους...

(*Tranq. an.* 477 C–D)

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the above quote also reflects the religious feeling that was characteristic of Middle Platonic philosophy and the philosophers belonging to this movement, including Plutarch himself. We also need to mention that this religious feeling is typical not only of Middle Platonism, but rather of all philosophy of this period, barring such movements as Epicureanism and scepticism. For this reason some historians call this philosophy “religious” or sometimes even a “religion”¹.

¹ This is an obvious overstatement because religion is a phenomenon of an entirely different nature – those authors evidently mean only to emphasise the spiritual and ethical character of this philosophy.