

Notes on Hellenism

- I. Hellenism
 - a. Refers to the period of Greek cultural and political domination of the eastern part of the Mediterranean through Persia to India
 - b. Lasts from the lifetime of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) until the dawn of the Roman Empire in 50 BCE
 - c. Spread Greek culture and philosophy throughout the empire
 - d. Influx of other cultures mixing with Greek culture created a number of new philosophical schools
 - e. Founded the city of Alexandria in Egypt, where he was buried
- II. The Cynics
 - a. Founded in Athens around 400 BCE by a student of Socrates (Socrates was said to have remarked, upon looking at goods in the market, “what a lot of things I don’t need”)
 - b. Emphasized detachment from all material wealth and social power
 - c. Diogenes, who lived in a barrel, was asked by Alexander the Great if he desired anything of him and answered by asking him to move aside and not block the sun
 - d. Original Greek word, *kynikos*, meant “like a dog” or “canine”
- III. The Stoics
 - a. Founded in Athens around 300 BCE by Zeno
 - b. Believed in natural law, the unity of which they called *logos*, meaning, in Greek, word, speech, or reason
 - i. Cf: The Gospel of John’s identification of Christ with *logos*, “In the beginning was the word...” is generally understood to show the influence of Greek, particularly Platonic and Stoic, thought on Christianity
 - c. Considered voluntary adherence to natural law virtue
 - d. Were uninterested in doubting the senses or Plato’s distinction between soul and body
 - e. Their hero was Socrates, for his unflinching stand in the face of unjust death and his indifference to physical comfort, as well as his belief in a natural and thus universally consistent morality
 - f. Very influential in Roman civilization as well—Seneca was a stoic
- IV. The Epicureans
 - a. Founded in Athens around 300 BCE by Epicurus
 - b. Believed pleasure is the highest good
 - c. Retreated from society
 - d. Didn’t believe in immortality of the soul, unconcerned with death, as they believed no one will exist to regret dying
- V. Neoplatonism
 - a. Most important figure was Plotinus (205 to 270 CE)

- i. Born in Alexandria, Egypt, where he studied philosophy
 - ii. Moved to Rome
- b. In place of Plato's dualism, Plotinus suggests that God is light and evil is the absence of light
- c. Matter has little or no light
- d. As our souls are illuminated by the light, it is through internal means that we can know "the one"

VI. Mysticism

- a. An experience of "oneness" with the universe
- b. Occurs with a consistency of form across all cultural and religious boundaries