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