I. **Hairesis** Philosophical Schools of Thought in the Greco-Roman era

A. Considerations:

1. By the Common Era, many ideas were held in common by the various schools of thought which originated from the Greek period of the 4th c. BCE.

2. Popularization of philosophical ideas influenced educated laypersons as well as professional philosophers (Ferguson 323).

3. Philosophy appeared to society as a unity with the goal of helping humanity. Purpose of philosophy: to teach people how to live (Ferguson 323). Philosophy was deeper religion of intelligent people (Kelly 14).

4. Assumed virtue was teachable and related to knowledge, and reason was the means for attaining it (Ferguson 324).

5. Goals of all the philosophical schools: Self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*); freedom (*eleutheria*); and happiness (*eudaimonia*) (Ferguson 324). This manifested itself in an emphasis on a life of freedom, discipline, and contemplation.

6. Virtuous life involved:
   a) detachment from concerns of this life
   b) Freedom from passion (*apatheia*) through renunciation.
   c) Lived according to nature. (Ferguson 324)

7. Roman schools of philosophy concerned with ethics (moral formation of the soul (Meeks 41)).
   a) Two questions that schools of moral thought asked:
      1. What is the world of meaning?
      2. What is character of a good person & how are 1 & 2 connected? (Meeks 42).

B. Greek Philosophical Antecedents:

1. Platonism (429-347 BCE) – based on his theory of knowledge.
a) Knowledge based on nonsensible world of Forms or Ideas which had objective existence.

b) Forms arranged in hierarchy – Form of the Good (the One which is cause of all other Forms is highest. (Kelly 15-6)

c) Soul is immaterial, immortal, exists prior to the body, and will exist after body ends. Human soul is tripartite:

(1) Reason – higher rational element that apprehends truth and directs whole life;
(2) Spirit – seat of noble emotions
(3) Appetites – carnal desires (Kelly 16)

d) Soul (Form of the Good) – supreme organizing principle and a World-Soul animated the material universe. Demiurge shaped the world out of pre-existent material according to pattern contemplated in the world of Forms (Kelly 16).

2. Aristotle (384-322 BC) – logic based on ten Categories (ways mind thinks about the external world and the way things exist objectively in the world) (Kelly 16-7).

a) Realist – accepted reality of the material world and criticized Plato's Forms.

b) Body and soul – composite unity body is matter of the soul and soul is the Form of the body (Kelly 17).

c) Eternal Mind – the unmoved Prime Mover of all that exists.

3. Stoicism (300 BC) – system of logic, metaphysics, and ethics.

a) Taught conquest of self, life in accordance with nature (rational principle within), and brotherhood of humanity (Kelly 17).

b) Pantheistic materialism – universe as a whole was material

c) Dynamic Reason (Logos) – forms and organizes universe (God, Providence, Nature).

d) Fate – everything that happens is ordered by Providence to man’s best advantage (Kelly 18).
e) Stoic doctrine of human nature – soul in humans – emanation of divine Fire (Logos).

f) Material survives the body, existing until the world ends. Body – five senses, power of speech, reason (ruling element) (Kelly 18).

C. Philosophy in the Christian Era (2nd–4th c. CE)

1. Middle Platonists (Plutarch, Atticus & Albinus, 2nd c. CE)
   a) Plutarch – we possess no share in genuine being, we are in ceaseless change.
      (1) Goal of Platonic ethics – to be like God through knowledge which is apprehended by reason (Meeks 43).
      (2) Knowledge involves transformation of the will.
      (3) Conversion – struggle, context (agon) in pursuit of virtue and happiness (Meeks 44).
      (4) Virtue – reason conquering emotions (apatheia). Focuses on moral virtue vs. contemplative or intellectual virtue.
      (5) Goal of reason is to cultivate or prune emotions – focusing on Aristotle's mean between extremes (Meeks 45).
      (6) Moral progress requires practice (askesis) (Meeks 45).
      (7) Habit (ethos) – shapes moral character (Meeks 45).
   b) Atticus – more theistic than earlier Platonism. Hierarchy of Forms began with Divine Mind (Nous) and then Forms.
   c) Albinus and Celsus (opponent of Christians) – hierarchy  - First Mind (God Unmoved and utterly transcendant); Second Mind (World Intellect) through which God operates; World-Soul (Kelly 20).

2. Neo-Platonism – Plotinus – reality hierarchical structure descending from what is beyond being to what falls below being (chain of being).
   a) Hierarchy of the Chain of Being – 1st Hypostasis – the One; 2nd hypostasis – Mind (world of the forms); 3rd hypostasis – Soul – higher soul that transcends material order, lower soul or nature is the soul of the phenomenal world. Individual souls are emanations from the World Soul. Lower soul of individual soul connected with body.
   b) What exists is an overflow of the One. There is an ardent longing for union with what is higher (Kelly 22) and with the One itself. Human soul seeks ascent in stages – purification involving freeing
from the body; 2nd stage – concern with philosophy and science; 3rd stage – mystical union with the One.

3. Stoicism – Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Musonius
   a) Musonius – Philosophy is thinking out the duty of man and meditating on it (Meeks 46).
   b) Happiness is goal of a well-lived life. Involves lifelong struggle for rational mastery (Meeks 47).
   c) Root of evil is ignorance and false opinion that can be overcome with careful thought and training (Meeks 48).
   d) Our responses are the only things we can control.
   e) Over-arching virtue is self-control (sophrosyne) exemplified in living a simple life (Meeks 49) Stoic doesn’t choose hardship, but welcomes it as “showing the man” (Epictetus – virtus)
   g) Responsibility for public order (Musonius) – (Meeks 50).

II. Direct and Indirect Influences from Greco-Roman Philosophy on Christianity

A. Christianity originally described as a philosophy because of the ideas and ethical issues and practices it emphasized.

B. Influence of dualism, emphasis on knowledge, and emanations from Neoplatonism on Gnostic thought.

C. Apologists use of aspects of Middle Platonism & Stoicism to defend Christianity:
   1. God ineffable and alone in being might be seen to support idea of monotheism of the Christian God (without equal).
   2. Goal of Christian ethics – to be like God
   3. Stoicism said the Logos was the organizing principle (reason) by which the world was created and Justin Martyr said Christ was the Logos.

D. Influence from Middle Platonism – conversion – to deliberately face/seek the Good (Meeks 43).

E. Christian virtues modeled by martyrs and later ascetics based on ideas shared with Middle Platonism and Stoicism:
   1. Philosophical ideas which undergirded martyrs approach to suffering and the values held by 4th c. Christian ascetics - apatheia – being unmoved by life’s circumstances and enduring hardship; freedom from passion through renunciation (Ferguson 324).
2. The portrayal in Christian martyrologies of the moment of martyrdom as an agonistic struggle which leads to mastery over the body, and the attainment of spiritual perfection, embodied Stoic ideals.

3. Views that habits shape moral character and moral progress requires practice (askesis) from Middle Platonism served as basis for programs of spiritual formation used by Christian ascetics (Meeks 45). Includes idea that soul seeks ascent in stages.

F. Middle Platonism’s views of the immaterial, immortal, and tripartite soul similar to the Christian view of the human soul as being immaterial and immortal, and humans as being body, soul, and spirit.

G. Middle Platonism’s ideas of the relationship of the One to other Forms along the chain of being influenced 4th century arguments about the Trinity, and Platonic understandings of the terms ousias and hypostasis influenced arguments in the Trinitarian and christological controversies of the 4th & 5th centuries.

H. The ineffability of the One will influence eastern orthodox articulations of God’s ineffability (Gregory of Nyssa).

I. The use of pithy anecdotes and unconventional means to challenge people to examine their lives and motives were perspectives shared by the Cynics and Jesus (I am not suggesting that Jesus borrowed these from the Cynics).

J. The negative portrayal of Eunomians (Semi-Arians) by Gregory of Nyssa and Theodore of Mopsuestia in the 4th century build on negative characterizations of the objectionable public behavior of Cynics.

References

