

## **A History of Philosophy**

### **19 Neo-Platonism and the Church Fathers**

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Okay, now, back to Plotinus and Neoplatonism. I hope that this outline, this diagram, refreshes your mind about what we were speaking of last time. Namely, that Plotinus, as a Neoplatonist, is concerned, as was Plato, with the distinction between two realms, one eternal and one temporal.

But, under the influence of that Middle Platonism, of the first two centuries, he develops a three-fold distinction within the eternal realm, a hierarchy, if you like, such that intelligence, or nous, notice an exaggerous term, is an emanation, an outflowing of the divine mind, an emanation from the one, the good, and the world soul that animates and orders the natural order, the natural world, is a further emanation from the nous. So, the thing that informs, if you like, the nous, the thing that informs the nous, is the unity and goodness, which is the nature of the one, the good. Although, nous is not absolute undifferentiable in its unity, because it contains all of the forms, each of which is the principle of unity and goodness for a particular species or kind of thing.

So, what nous provides in the forms is unity and the good for each species or thing. And it is the world soul, as Plato's demiurge intimates, that is the active agent in the ordering and enlivening of the world. Now, when he comes to speaking, however, of the temporal world, the picture gets to be complex.

To begin with, nous is known also as logos, and so what you have in particulars is logoi spermatikoi, that Stoic term, seminal loguses, forms, in particular giving them order, governing bodily existence. And he views the human soul in two ways, much as Plato did. In its preexistence, the soul, in its abode in the world soul, the individual soul in that eternal state, is free from bodily involvement, free from bodily desires, free from bodily concerns, and has a fuller share in intelligence, the eternal nous.

On the other hand, the soul as embodied, incarnated, is feeling constantly threatened, is insecure, by virtue of its bodily existence. And that kind of insecurity manifests itself in giving undue attention to bodily needs and bodily concerns. If there is a threat to human life because of our bodily existence, if there are physical contingencies in our existence, then we tend to set our attention on those bodily things.

And it is that undue attention to things below, which occasions what he calls the fall of the soul into a bodily world. Its love becomes a lower love, appetite, desire. This is where moral evil arises.

Life loses its unity and goodness. Now, those two ways of looking at the soul, the individual soul, he sometimes speaks of as the higher and the lower soul, as if he is not just talking of a higher love, which is forfeited because of a lower love, which was Plato's picture, but as if he's saying there are, as it were, two aspects for the soul. The soul has its feet, insofar as souls have feet, in two worlds, you see.

And so with one half of its being, the soul is drawn to what is above. The other half of its being, it's drawn to what is below. Okay? And it's when that tension, with particular attention to what is below, that the fall of the soul consists.

Now, you begin to see, then, how he's going to handle the problem of evil. How is he going to handle the problem of evil? To begin with, the whole hierarchy of things, by virtue of those degrees of goodness at every level, the hierarchy of things emanating from the One is good.

There's nothing bad, absolutely bad, that has emanated from the One. You cannot exactly say that matter is evil, but evil is a matter of degree. It's relative to the position in the hierarchy.

So bodily involvements are, in that sense, less good than heavenly involvements. He therefore distinguishes between two kinds of evil. There is a primary evil that arises simply in the process of emanation.

Primary evil in the sense that a certain level of being is less good than a higher level of being. And from the standpoint of the higher level of being, being less good is, of course, evil. And you can give all sorts of examples there.

There's nothing morally bad about the fact that an apple falls from the tree and rots. But a rotting apple is a privation of a good apple. It's losing its form, its unity in goodness.

So if you like, what he calls primary evil is a kind of what we would call natural evil. But it's in that being drawn to a lower state, losing form, that the human soul, in particular, acquires a secondary kind of evil. In, as it were, asserting its independence, in setting its affection on things below, in following appetites rather than reason, in irrational behavior.

Now that's the secondary evil. That's moral evil. And that distinction between natural evil, then, the evil involved in simply the contingencies of physical existence, and the distinction between that and moral evil involved from a misdirection of one's affection.

That classic distinction is one that is picked up, for instance, by Augustine, and we'll see what he does with it in the course of time. Now, if evil, then, has to do with

descending, falling, from one's first estate. You get the Platonism in that line from Milton? From the first estate? From the given level on the hierarchy of being? If evil consists, then, of falling below one's appointed place, now, what is the good that we should pursue? What is the good life? And the good life is, of course, this return to the one.

Return to the one. Ascent to the good. If the fall is bad, the ascension to the good is good.

That return. And what Plotinus does is to depict that return in mystic terms. And so you get the development of a mystical path, a mystical path by which one returns to a sort of reunion with that from which we've fallen.

And the mystic path, you can see, is going to be climbing back up the ladder. First of all, contemplating nature so as to see the order, the unity, the good, in nature. Which, in good Platonic fashion, leads one to contemplate form within one's soul.

Turning within to contemplate the forms within one's soul. Innate. Which leads, in the third place, to contemplation of nous.

The cosmic intelligence itself. The form of all forms. Which leads, finally, to an ecstatic reunion with the one.

Now, a little bit of commentary there. I've put them in ascending order, obviously, because it's the ascent. The return.

But the contemplation of nature is not for the enjoyment of particular sense qualities. You see? But in order to pick up the evidence of order, unity, that's there. The contemplation of forms, the next step, sounds very Platonic.

The unity of the forms in the nous, the form of all formness, contemplating the nous, the logos, leading to ecstatic reunion with one. The word ecstatic, literally, ec-sta-o. To step outside oneself.

You see? Because if it is our individuality embodied, and even individuated as a particular soul to embody itself, if it's our individuality which has drawn us away from the one, then there must be a loss of all individual self-awareness in returning to the one. And so that ecstatic culmination means that the sense of unity with the one is devoid of any individual self-consciousness. It's no longer that you say, here am I contemplating the one.

The I is lost. The consciousness of the I has merged into the consciousness of the all-inclusive one, from which the I isn't just an emanation. So it's looking back into the source of being.

And the analogies that are used are analogies of water streaming from a fountainhead, and in the cyclical processes of water evaporating and so forth, going back to the source whence it came, where it's undifferentiable from the rest. Or of light being connected to the source from which the light is streaming and never disconnected. And so it sort of pulls back into the source whence it came.

Which is the impression you get when a distant light goes off, a beam of light, it's as if it's suddenly pulled right back in. Yeah, I suspect what you're thinking of is uniformities, predictabilities. Put these two together in a platonic context.

What does our perception of the natural world contribute to our understanding of forms for Plato? It's not a direct path. Particulars being so variable and perception so relative. The most that contemplation of particulars can do is to stimulate the mind to recollect.

And that's essentially what's going on here. Yeah. Essentially, what's going on here.

Now, this general pattern of the mystic path you find repeated again and again in medieval mystics. You'll find some language echoing this in Augustine. Much stronger in later writers.

Sometimes four steps, sometimes five steps. Depending on the disciplines along the path. You see.

Sometimes with more attention to nature, sometimes with less. The characteristic of the Neoplatonic influence in Christian Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages is the culmination in that ecstatic reunion. You find, for instance, one like Catherine of Genoa who says in one place, My me is no longer me.

I pass over into God. I become God. You know, and with our sharpened distinctions in the 20th century between theism and pantheism, you say, she's a pantheist! Well, she certainly is using pantheistic language.

You see. But I think the point is that without those theological distinctions as clearly drawn then as now, what you get is Christian piety being interpreted in Neoplatonic terms. Christian piety is being interpreted in Neoplatonic terms.

The contemplative enjoyment of God is such that you're not thinking about yourself. You see. And so you find this pantheistic language used.

Well, that's the picture that we get of Neoplatonism. And if you'll take a quick look at the anthology, let me just point to a couple of passages that you can ponder more by yourself. Page 6, take it back, 497.

The initial segment on 497 makes the distinction between the one, intellect, and world soul. So you can trace that out rather readily. It's very straightforward.

You get a note about the descent of the soul at the top of 498. On 498, the new section, 6, is speaking about the one and how we can adapt it to intellectual conception, that problem of having to speak of God as good and yet beyond good in any distinguishable sense, attributive sense. And the mystic path finally comes out on 499 and following, in section 11.

Notice the last column on 500, the language used there, where the nature of the soul will never exceed what's entirely non-being, but proceeding downwards, it'll fall into evil, yet not into that which is perfect non-entity. Running in a contrary direction, however, it'll arrive not at another thing, but at itself. And thus, not being in another thing, it's not on that account in nothing, but is in itself.

To be in itself alone, not in being, is to be in God. For God is something which is not essence, but beyond essence. Hence, the soul associates with him.

And he who perceives himself to associate with God will himself have the similitude of him. And if he passes from himself as an image to the archetype, he'll have the end of his progression. When he falls from the vision of God, if he again excites the virtue that's in himself and perceives himself to be perfectly adorned, he'll again be elevated through virtue and proceed to intellect and wisdom and afterwards to the principle of all things, the one.

This, therefore, is the life of the gods and of divine and happy men, a liberation from all terrine, terrestrial concerns, a life unaccompanied with human pleasures, a flight of the alone to the alone. That's very, very characteristic of Plotinus' language. Very characteristic.

Any questions, comments? We'll see this coming out again and again in other writers, but this has made the transition from Plato to the Neoplatonism that we're going to have to live and work with through the Middle Ages. Okay? It's fairly easy to get a handle on this broad picture. The difficulty comes if you try to read Plotinus simply because it's so terribly repetitious.

Remember, I said there were six Enneads, each with nine essays? So you've got 54 essays without any rhyme or reason to the sequencing of them. And it's quite a task. All right.

Let me pass, then, from Plotinus. And in passing from Plotinus, I'm passing to the beginnings of Christian thought in the Church Fathers. Okay? So, the Church Fathers and Greek philosophy.

That's the topic. The interaction of Christianity with Greek philosophy was inevitable as Christianity spread into the Greek world and the Gospel began to touch some of the intellectuals. One movement which became particularly problematic for early Christianity was Gnosticism, which I mentioned before when we were introducing Middle Platonism.

Gnosticism, with its dualism of good and evil, matter and mind, and with those two sources, you have two parallel chains of emanation. In one form of Gnosticism, represented by Marcion, and what became known as Marcionism as a Christian heresy, Marcion, for instance, identified the duality with the God of the Old Testament as distinct from the God of the New Testament. So that the God of the New Testament is good, but quite unknown until revealed in Christ.

The God of the Old Testament, who formed the material world, because he made the material world, he must be bad. And so, going along with the duality of good and evil is a soul-body duality. Mind or soul, good.

Body, source of evil. For the Gnostics generally, the problem posed was how to know the God whose goodness we must find. The God whose goodness can save us from the grip of this material world.

And the response to that question was generally two-fold. One, practice asceticism. That is to say, denial of bodily desires.

Practice asceticism. And second, you need to be initiated into a secret knowledge, which has to be accepted by faith. A secret gnosis, available to the initiates.

The light that supposedly fills the soul with an awareness of the good. Well, you find echoes of this sort of Gnosticism in the New Testament if you think, for instance, of John's first epistle, where he talks of those who deny that Christ has come in the flesh. He's referring to a kind of Gnostic docetism.

The view that the body of Christ was a mere appearance. The verb *doceo*, meaning simply to seem or to appear. So the incarnation was not a real incarnation, but only an apparent one.

They denied that Christ had come in the flesh. The argument behind it is that if God is good and matter is evil, a good God couldn't take upon himself a material body. So it must be sheer appearance.

Or, again in Colossians, the Colossian epistle, Paul is contrasting that philosophy which is according to the rudiments of this world with that one which is according to Christ. He's speaking in that context of Christianity as a philosophy, a love of wisdom,

literally. You remember the passage, Colossians 2:8, King James translated, Beware of philosophy and vain deceit, and that's been picked up and used, mistranslated out of context.

What it really says is, Beware of that philosophy, that vain deceit, which is according to the tradition of men, rather than that philosophy which is in step with Christ. It's making a contrast between two kinds of worldviews. And the problem there in the Colossi church, what's often referred to as the Colossian heresy, was a kind of proto-Gnosticism, pre-Gnosticism, something of that sort, with a mystic path including the worshipping of angels as intermediary beings, inclining the mystic path.

Asceticism, denial of the body, so on and so forth, refusing to eat, to touch, to handle. And Paul is repudiating that sort of thing. It's in that context that he speaks of Christ as the creator, by whom, for whom, through whom, or our things.

It's the Logos doctrine again, except that he doesn't use the term Logos, which John uses. But it's the same concept. Well, in the New Testament, then, you get the beginnings of interaction with Gnosticism, which was a mixture of Eastern and Greek ideas, beginning interaction with Greek philosophy.

And that interaction with Gnosticism continues in the church fathers, so that when, for instance, you come to Tertullian, and let's clear the deck a little bit, the North African church father Tertullian, he is very critical of attempts at a Christian Platonism, or a Christian Aristotelianism, really because of what he sees in the influence of Gnosticism in regards to Christian theology. It's Tertullian who cries, what has Jerusalem to do with Athens? Wretched Aristotle, who taught him that vain art of dialectic, puffing up and casting down, that sort of thing. It's Tertullian who says, I believe what is absurd.

Credo quia absurdum est. Yet if you check the context for that saying, which is in his work *De Carne Christi*, *The Body of Christ*, it's about the Incarnation, what he's doing in the context is simply saying, They, the Gnostics, say that the idea of a divine incarnation is absurd. Well, I guess I believe what is absurd then.

Then he goes on to argue it's not absurd after all, because their premises are mistaken. Matter is not evil; matter is good. So he counters.

Now he counters in that way, because he has taken to Stoic philosophical ideas. Now you see, the Stoics were materialists. The Stoics did not regard matter as evil.

They regarded matter as good because of their double-aspect theory. One aspect is the material, the elemental, the fiery. The other side of it is the logos.

So if matter has in itself a logos order to it, the material world has a logos order to it, then matter by virtue of that logos side is not bad, is not disorderly, is not chaotic, but is good. And accordingly, he maintains that the goodness of the material world is by virtue of the logos that orders the material world. Now among the church fathers, I think Tertullian is the, he's certainly the one who goes furthest with the Stoics by virtue of taking on much of their metaphysics.

The others tend to be much more favorably inclined towards Plato and Platonism. So that Justin Martyr, Justin Martyr himself, was a Platonic philosopher before he became a Christian. Justin Martyr.

A converted Platonist born in 110 AD. He rejects the Stoic materialistic view of the soul. Logos.

He rejects that. Because the, because the logos order is possible without a material logos. He prefers Plato's view of a transcendent God who, by the divine logos, namely by virtue of the logos disseminating the forms, created and ordered the world directly.

And the human soul, like God, is immaterial. Not a material thing. He has an address to the Greeks in which he develops this.

Justin Martyr plays with the idea, with the question, rather, how come that some of the Greeks, like Plato, seemed to get so close to the truth? And he entertains two possibilities. The first, sort of speculatively, that Plato must somehow or other have read the books of Moses. Of course, that's a purely ad hoc hypothesis.

There's no evidence for it. Wishful thinking. But the other is that they, too, were enlightened by the divine logos, who enlightens everything that comes into the world.

Remember John chapter 1? You see, the logos is the light that enlightens everyone who comes into the world. Now, you get something very similar when you move to Clement of Alexandria. Clement of Alexandria.

The Alexandria label is important because there was a Clement of Rome. Clement of Alexandria was born in 150 A.D. and died, I think, around 220. Clement of Alexandria was very much aware of Middle Platonism and very much appreciated it.

Probably because of the influence of the Jewish Alexandrian Philo. Philo of Alexandria. Philo accepted a theory of emanations, as in the Middle Platonism.

He accepted the notion that in the whole chain of emanations, there are all sorts of intermediary beings between the one and all the way down. All sorts of intermediary

beings. Among those intermediary beings, you have the highest, which is the logos, which, like the Middle Platonists, he called deuterostheos.

This is a Jew, mark him. Deuterostheos. And then the forms, a logoi spermatikoi ordering the natural world.

This one God who thus created the world has given us both Greek philosophy and the Mosaic law. We can speak of this one God in Platonic terms. We can speak of this one God in the language of the Jewish faith.

The creator of all. And Philo does not think of the logos as being a separate conscious being from the one, but as an emanation, strictly in that Platonic sense, an emanation of the divine being, an outflowing, a manifestation of the divine being. So he essentially creates a Jewish version of Neoplatonism, equating the Platonic conception, matching them up with Jewish conceptions.

To do that, he had to adopt a somewhat allegorical mode of interpreting scripture in order to be able to say that some things that the scripture talks about are allegorical ways of saying what Plato talks about. So that, for instance, when Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden and clothed in coats of skins, that was their preexistent souls being evicted and clothed in bodies in a prison house like Plato. The skins are their bodies for preexistent souls falling into the bodily world.

So, allegorical interpretation. Well, Clement seems to have been influenced somewhat by Philo in his use of Neoplatonic resources, as he sought to bring the resources of Greek philosophy to the defense of the gospel against Gnosticism. Against Gnosticism, you see.

And accordingly, he sought to understand the Greek ideas and to bring them to bear. The things he was particularly opposed to in Gnosticism were, one, the idea that through gaining gnosis, knowledge, we find salvation. Salvation is not by knowledge, he insists, but by faith.

The second is the notion that the human soul is an emanation from God. No, we're not parts of God. The soul is not an emanation.

The third thing he's opposed to is any kind of materialism or determinism such as he found in the Stoics. And in the light of that, he moved in the direction of Plato. Well, the same is true if you press on to a fourth church father, also in Alexandria, namely Origen.

Origen. Who is much more explicit in trying to bring Greek metaphysical concepts into some sort of union with Christian belief, with Christian doctrine. The thing that Origen stresses is that God is the one.

Now, you remember the Old Testament Shema. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. And Origen picks that up and develops it in Neoplatonic fashion.

God is the one. Beyond all reason, beyond all thought, beyond all definition and differentiation. Get that Neoplatonic line? You see? Now, this is before Neoplatonism.

This is the influence of Middle Platonism. The creation is a necessary creation. Not a free act of God, but a necessary expression of his being.

He sees it as an eternal creation, dependent on the divine being. The matter of this world order is the same matter that has been used in a whole succession of world orders that God has created. But mediating between God, the one, and the creation is the logos.

But here's the difference between Philo and Origen. The logos is a personal divine being. The logos is the one who became incarnate in Christ.

He's picking up on John chapter 1. The word became flesh. Sometimes he uses the language of emanations. As if the logos is an emanation of a personal being with a further emanation preceding the Holy Spirit.

And so what you get then is this Middle Platonic trinity, or later on the Neoplatonic trinity, being spoken of in terms of the Christian trinity by Origen of Alexandria. And it's the Holy Spirit who then created immaterial human souls who seek to be reunited with the one from whom they sprang. Well, that's the picture that you get, and we'll see more of it in Augustine.

Now, maybe you'd be interested in some of the things these people actually say. So, some quotations. Justin Martyr, let's see.

He says, From every point of view, it must be seen that in no other way than only from the prophets who teach us by divine inspiration is it at all possible to learn anything concerning God and true religion. That is in his address to the Greeks. And yet at the same time, he cites Homer, Pythagoras, and Plato.

When they had been in Egypt and had taken advantage of the history of Moses, they afterwards published doctrines concerning the gods quite contrary to those which formerly they had promulgated. Only gain knowledge of God from the prophets, and they had access to Moses. When Socrates endeavored by true reason to bring these things to light and deliver men from demons, then the demons, by means of men who rejoiced in iniquity, encompassed his death as an atheist and profane person on the charge that he was introducing new divinities.

And in our case, he's writing as a Christian, they display a similar activity, for not only among the Greeks did reason prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the barbarians there condemned by the Logos himself, who took shape, became man, and was called Jesus Christ. Identifying the Logos with Christ. We've been taught that Christ is the firstborn of God.

We've declared that he is the Logos of whom every race of men are partakers. Notice the term partakers, participation. Partakers.

And those who live reasonably, the Greek phrase there is who live with the Logos. Those who live reasonably are Christians, even though they have been atheists. Among the Greeks were Socrates, Heraclitus, and men like them.

It's interesting, isn't it? Do you want that one again? This is Justin Martyr. His argument seems to be something like this. Earlier, he had said, " You can only know the truth about God from the prophets.

Now he's asking, how come these guys knew so much of the truth? Socrates, Heraclitus. He's not playing the Egypt hypothesis here. But somehow or other, the Logos enlightened them.

Now, if Christians are those who are enlightened by the Logos, and these people were enlightened by the Logos, aren't they Christians? Now, if you follow that implicit syllogism, you'll notice an undistributed middle term. Do you notice? All Christians are enlightened by the Logos. Socrates and Heraclitus are enlightened by the Logos.

Therefore, Socrates and Heraclitus are Christians. What you've got is that all Christians are enlightened by the Logos. Why not Greek philosophers, Socrates and Heraclitus, enlightened by the Logos, too? Yeah, but they might be outside of the circle of Christians.

So there's something wrong with his logic in that. The significant thing, though, is that he's groping for an explanation. How come these pagans know so much? You see, that's his question.

And the answer that he's playing with is that it's thanks to the Logos. Well, Clement of Alexandria, Selmas Stiles, says, Truth is one. And all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light, capital L. The barbarian and Hellenic philosophy has torn off a fragment of eternal truth, not from the mythology of Dionysius, but from the theology of the ever-living Logos.

They've managed to get some insight concerning the Logos. It's the Logos that enlivens everyone who comes into the world. So what they're playing with is that prologue of John's Gospel.

If you're not familiar with it, take a close look at it. The first 18 verses of John's Gospel. Crucially important.

And we'll find that this same kind of identification goes on in Augustine, in Aquinas, all through the Middle Ages. It's lost sight of when you get into modern times, that it's part of the medieval conceptual framework. And it's that which underlies what they see as the appropriateness of learning from the Greeks.

Because the source of truth is the same, as long as we can purge the fragments of truth from mistaken contexts. Well, in summary, this is from a book on Platonism, talking about the reactions of the Christian church fathers to Plato. And I think this sums it up rather well.

The chief things which they approve in Plato are, as we have seen, the censure of mythology in the Republic, which they quote verbatim by the page. His ideal morality is, for example, the principle that the good man will not harm his enemy, which he insists on in response to Thrasymachus, the sophist. That it's better to suffer than to do wrong.

His rejection of materialism. His affirmation of the immortality of the soul. The pictures of future rewards and punishments.

His proclamation of one God, father and maker of all, whom it's hard to discover. They appreciated a large part of the cosmogony of creation. Cosmogony has to do with the beginning of the cosmos.

Including especially the goodness of the creator as its cause. And to this might be added many things that are less talked about. The logos, the trinity, the doctrine of demons, or intermediary beings was used to justify belief in angels.

Now, the things which they censured Plato for, they disapproved of. His concessions to popular religion. His belief in the pre-existence and transmigration of souls.

His assumption of a pre-existing chaos, which was reduced to order as if material is eternal, uncreated. Instead of creation out of nothing, so forth. But they frequently quote the Timaeus, where Plato says, the father and maker of this universe is hard to find out and impossible to reveal to all mankind.

And they come back to that again and again. Well, that's the picture that you get in the Church Fathers. Comment? Question? Reaction? You notice it's a discriminating kind of thing.

They don't buy wholesale into any one philosophical view. They prefer Plato to others. Aristotle doesn't seem to have been known.

He's not talked about at all. Plato is. David? Yeah, you know, and some people say, oh, this is a kind of eclecticism.

Culling out a bit there, a bit there, making a patchwork quilt and calling it original. No, that's not what they're doing. It seems to me they're working with some, well, what I call perspective.

They're working with their Christian convictions. This is the starting point. When they find something in Plato that seems to be supportive or to amplify some Christian belief, then they tend to take an interest in it, to use that language, sometimes to adopt the concepts.

But in doing so, they're careful to detach it from connections alien to the Christian faith. You see? So while they value Plato's emphasis on the immateriality of soul and its immortality and actually use some of his arguments for immortality, they do not buy into his notion of preexistence or transmigration. They realize the individual soul is created by God.

So it's not really an eclectic culling of bits and pieces. What they're doing is wrestling with some of the same questions, which, of course, are posed by their Christian theology. And in order to flesh out their thinking, they make use of what resources there are at hand.

Clement, who was more of an apologist than a constructive thinker, talks of using all of the resources of the culture for the defense of the gospel. And I think it's fair to say that others see themselves as using not only the language of the culture but the thinking of the culture in order to articulate their beliefs and contribute in that way to the spread and the rooting of the church. Had they not taken close attention to Plato, I don't think Christian theology would have developed with the comparative rapidity with which it developed.

They didn't have the conceptual tools. Let me make one other footnote there. Whenever you use the language of a culture, you're adopting the ideas.

Now, if there's one thing that political correctness is saying, that's what it's saying. You see? You use the language of racism, and you're adopting the idea, unconsciously, perhaps. Now, it seems to me the genius of the church fathers was

that in using the language, they realized they were adopting the concepts and were extremely cautious in what they did with it.

Now, that's not to say that some of them didn't goof. By 300 AD, I think it was fairly clearly seen that Clement and Origen were mistaken in certain matters that are pretty crucial. But not in their use of Greek concepts.

They're mistaken in how they use them, but not in using them. And that process of self-criticism and refinement goes on and on. It's hard to find any developed theology that isn't dependent on some philosophical scheme.

You name it, and I'll name the philosophical scheme. Luther, Occam's nominalism. Calvin, Seneca, Cicero, Stoicism.

Charles Hodge, Presbyterian theologian, Scottish realism. Augustus Hopkins Strong, Baptist theologian, personal idealism, 19th century. So on and so forth.

Because theology is using language and concepts that are drawn from comparable philosophical positions.