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Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Representations as Humanly Enacted Realities: Lucian (circa 120-200) Addresses Sacrifices, Death, Divinity, and Fate

Abstract Lucian of Samosata (circa 120-200) may be primarily envisioned as a poet-philosopher from the classical Roman era. However, the material he develops on religion not only anticipates important aspects of contemporary pragmatist/constructionist approaches to the sociology of religion but also provides some particularly compelling insights into religion as a humanly engaged realm of reality. Following an introduction to a pragmatist approach to the study of religion, this paper presents a synoptic overview of several of Lucian's texts on religion. In addition to the significance of Lucian's materials for comprehending an era of Roman and Greek civilization, as well as their more general sources of intellectual and aesthetic stimulation, these texts also provide an array of valuable transhistorical reference points and alert scholars in the field of religion to some ways in which the study of religion could be more authentically approached within the social sciences. The paper concludes with a consideration of the affinities of Lucian's depictions of religion with pragmatist, interactionist, and associated approaches as this pertains to the study of religion as a realm of human involvement.

Keywords Religion; Pragmatism; Symbolic Interactionism; Social Constructionism; Sociology of Religion; Lucian of Samosata; Fate and Agency; Greek Olympian Gods

Although virtually unknown among social scientists, a number of texts that Lucian of Samosata (circa 120-200) developed on people's religious beliefs, practices, and representations have a particular relevance for pragmatist (especially interactionist, constructionist) approaches to the study of religion.²

² This paper, along some other material on Lucian (e.g., Prus 2008a; 2008b), was developed as part of a much broader ethno-historical examination of the development of pragmatist social

In addition to (a) the more situated, descriptive materials Lucian provides on a particular era of the Roman Empire, his texts are valuable for (b) a sense of continuity of the development of Western social thought. Still, they assume a substantially enhanced

thought from the classical Greek era (circa 700-300 BCE) to the present time. Some materials derived from this larger project can be found in Prus (2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2008c; 2008d; 2009; 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2015), Prus and Burk (2010), and Prus and Camara (2010).

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tist sociology and philosophy of knowing." Working with some substantial, but much overlooked texts developed by Emile Durkheim, this statement addresses the more thorough going pragmatist features of Durkheim's later works on morality, education, religion, and philosophy. It indicates the conceptual affinities of Durkheim's work with Aristotle's foundational emphasis on the nature of human knowing and acting, as well as Blumerian symbolic interactionism. Still, no less importantly, it also considers the contributions of Durkheim's scholarship to the broader pragmatist emphasis on the study of community life as this takes place in interactively accomplished process terms.

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relevance because of (c) the resources they provide for transhistorical and transcultural analyses of people's involvements in religion and (d) the more particular insights Lucian offers on the ways in which people experience (i.e., practice, maintain, promote, and defend) their notions of divinity.

Lucian may write as a philosopher-poet, and at times he is openly depreciative of those who adopt religious standpoints. However, Lucian also is a remarkably astute student of the human condition and, in important respects, anticipates what presently may be defined as a pragmatist, interactionist, or constructionist approach to the study of religion.²

² Like Durkheim (1915 [1912]), I begin with the premise that religion not only is a group phenomenon, but that religion also has its origins in and is maintained through group interchange (individualized notions of religion are extensions or variants of group-based religious thought and practices). Like Durkheim,

Further, because Lucian discusses religion as a *field of activity*, he draws attention to the reality of

as well, I define religious beliefs in reference to people's conceptions of "the sacred." Whereas notions of the sacred imply a division or separation between exceptional and mundane (profane) things, people's conceptions of the sacred also imply intense emotional sensations (as in awe, joy, sadness, fear, and anger) in conjunction with some phenomenon (potentially anything to which people collectively might attend). Moreover, the excitation associated with the sacred (including things considered exceptionally good, as well as evil) is linked to human experiences and activities. Thus, the sacred also is accompanied by a sense of force or agency that not only seems considerably greater than oneself and other mortal beings but that also can dramatically shape the things people experience. Although not fully understood, and certainly not fully controllable, this "greater than life force" is something with which humans in their comparative (group-based) states of dependency—with respect to this force—must contend. Still, while acknowledging the centrality of notions of the sacred for people's religious beliefs, I (like Durkheim 1915 [1912]) adopt the viewpoint that religion has no existence apart from the particular groups or communities of people who, through ongoing collective interchange, are/have been actively involved in developing and maintaining this belief system. From this standpoint, religion achieves a collectively experienced, behaviorally engaged, and emotionally involved realism.

religion as a humanly engaged process, something that is overlooked in many contemporary (especially structuralist, factors-oriented) considerations of the sociology of religion.

In what follows, I (1) briefly address the nature of a pragmatist approach to religion, focusing somewhat more particularly on symbolic interaction both as a sociological extension of American pragmatist philosophy and mindful of its affinities with social constructionist approaches. Then, after (2) quickly acknowledging some scholars from the classical Greek and Latin eras whose works on religion predate those of Lucian, but who nevertheless address some related matters, I (3) provide a more sustained synoptic overview of some of Lucian's texts that deal more directly with religion.³ The paper concludes with (4) a broader consideration of the sociology of religion and the ways in which texts such as those developed by Lucian may be used to inform or sustain inquiries into the nature and realism of religious life.

Pragmatist Motifs and the Sociology of Religion

As with the contemporary social sciences more generally, the predominant emphasis in the sociology of religion is that of striving to uncover the factors or variables associated with particular conditions or

outcomes. Thus, whereas some consideration may be given to (a) things (e.g., divorce, crime, delinquency) thought to be associated with diverse aspects of religion (e.g., particular denominations, church attendance) and (b) other factors (e.g., social class, race) often are introduced to account for people's religious involvements (e.g., denominational preferences, church attendance), much less attention in the social sciences has been given to (c) the ways that people actually engage and experience religion. Further, of this last emphasis, comparatively little "qualitative" research is (d) informed by a theoretical paradigm or seems concerned about developing comparative analyses of more sustained conceptual sorts.

From a pragmatist viewpoint, especially the sort associated with George Herbert Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1969), quantitative approaches to the study of human group life have severely limited viability. If the world can be known only through human experience (activities, analyses, knowledge, technologies, and adjustments), then the emphases in the social sciences should be on attending to the nature of human lived experience rather than striving to reduce the complexities of group life to highly abstracted sets of factors or notions of independent and dependent variables.

Those adopting a pragmatist viewpoint, thus, consider the ways and instances that people (as agents) enter into the processes of community life within the prevailing practices and notions of reality that exist within their particular "theatres of operation."

From this viewpoint, nothing is inherently good or bad, religious or profane, but all aspects of human

awareness acquire meanings as people attend to, act towards, and define [these things] to be. In these respects, pragmatist notions of reality very much resonate with what (following Berger and Luckmann 1966) has become known as a "social constructionist" approach. However, from a pragmatist viewpoint, even more than a constructionist standpoint, reality is not just a socially accomplished phenomenon; it is to be envisioned as a *situationally located, mindedly engaged, and sensate-emotionally experienced field of activity*.

Still, as an approach to the study of human group life, pragmatism only realizes its fuller potential when combined with extended examinations of instances of human knowing and acting through *ethnographic inquiry* and a more sustained *quest for the articulation of concepts* derived from the comparisons (similarities and differences both within and across particular settings) of instances of human knowing and acting.

Without addressing the theory and methodology of symbolic interaction in detail (see: Blumer 1969; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; Prus and Grills 2003), a summary listing of the assumptions that undergird Chicago-style or Blumerian symbolic interactionism may help establish a more mutual frame of reference.

Briefly expressed, symbolic interactionism theory may be characterized by the following premises: *Human group life is* (1) *intersubjective* (is contingent on community-based, linguistic interchange); (2) *knowingly problematic* (with respect to "the known" and "the unknown"); (3) *object-oriented* (wherein things

constitute the contextual and operational essence of the humanly known environment); (4) *multiperspectival* (as in viewpoints, conceptual frameworks, or notions of reality); (5) *reflective* (minded, purposive, deliberative); (6) *sensory/embodied and (knowingly) materialized* (acknowledging human capacities for stimulation and activity, as well as practical [enacted, embodied] human limitations and fragilities); (7) *activity-based* (as implied in the formulative [engaging] process of people doing things with respect to objects); (8) *negotiable* (whereby people may anticipate, influence, and resist others); (9) *relational* (denoting particular bonds or affiliations); (10) *processual* (as in emergent, ongoing, or temporally developed terms); (11) *realized in instances* (attending to the specific "here and now" occasions in which people "do things"), and (12) *historically enabled* (being mindful of the ways that people build on, use, resist, and reconfigure aspects of the "whatness" that they have inherited from their predecessors and learned through their associates). These emphases have been most extensively pursued in Blumerian or Chicago-style symbolic interactionism with scholars in this tradition embarking on research and analysis of human group life across a seemingly unlimited range of subject matters (for overviews see: Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; Prus and Grills 2003).

However, despite the extensive potential this approach offers for the study of religion, as well as the comprehension of human group life more generally, religion as a field of study very much *remains understudied* both in sustained interactionist-informed ethnographic inquiry and in comparative analytic terms. Indeed, comparatively little work on religion has been developed mindfully of

³ Lucian's texts are apt to be more familiar to those in classical studies, but I have presented these in summary terms, with "chapter and verse" references so that readers who are less familiar with these materials not only may be informed of their basic contents but also would more readily be able to assess the claims I have made for Lucian. Still, since I have condensed these materials as much as I reasonably could, there is no substitute for examining the richer, fuller, more engaging texts that Lucian develops.

pragmatist, interactionist, and constructionist approaches to the study of religion.

Thus, although both Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the authors of *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), have written on religion, neither Luckmann's *The Invisible Religion* (1967) nor Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (1969) offer much in the way of a sustained constructionist analysis of religion. Whereas both Luckmann and Berger (1966) assume pluralist, constructionist viewpoints in a more general sense, their subsequent, individually authored texts on religion assume more abstract, functionalist qualities. Indeed, when writing alone, both Luckmann and Berger focus on the institutionalization of religion to the relative neglect of religion as a humanly experienced, humanly engaged process. They also seem relatively oblivious of the particular relevance of ethnographic inquiry for comprehending the ways that religion is accomplished (or experienced) in the instances in which "religion is given life" through the activities of members of the group. Like most social scientists, neither Berger nor Luckmann show familiarity with the resources of classical Greek and Latin scholarship.

The American pragmatists do not fare much better. Thus, whereas Charles Sanders Peirce and George Herbert Mead have written little about religion, William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) may be better characterized as more psychological, individualistic, and spiritual than pragmatist in emphasis.⁴ John Dewey's *The Common Faith* (1934) engages a number of issues pertinent to a sociological

⁴ Readers also will find a fairly sustained (but still somewhat general) pragmatist statement on religion in George Santayana's *The Life of Reason* (1998 [1905-1906]).

pragmatist viewpoint, but seems more intent on establishing a general pluralist, humanist approach to religion than attending to the ways in which people engage and experience religion in practice.⁵

Further, while some instructive research on religion has been conducted within the interactionist tradition (e.g., Simmons 1964; Lofland 1966; Shaffir 1974; 1978a; 1978b; 1991; 1993; 1995; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2002; 2004; 2006; 2007; Heilman 1976; 1983; Prus 1976; 2011c; 2011d; 2013; Kleinman 1984; Shepherd 1987; Jorgensen 1992; McLuhan 2014), as well as in some studies that display strong affinities with the interactionist tradition (e.g., Mauss and Hubert 1898; 1902; Durkheim 1915 [1912]; Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 1956; Van Zandt 1991), more work along these lines is required in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of religion as a humanly engaged realm of activity.

One finds considerably more materials of an experiential sort on religion if one extends the qualitative frame, but this broader corpus of literature generally is not well informed conceptually (where it is not more diffuse or conceptually mixed) and is highly idiographic in development. Thus, anthropological and ethnohistorical works aside, these materials offer little basis for sustained analytic comparisons.

Although seldom envisioned in pragmatist terms and only vaguely known to most pragmatists, interactionists, and constructionists, as well as the

⁵ Although John Dewey's central emphases in *The Common Faith* (1934) correspond with some basic (pragmatist) features of Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915 [1912]), it is not apparent that Dewey is familiar with Durkheim's much more conceptually detailed, ethnographically informed text.

sociological community more generally, it is Emile Durkheim's (1915 [1912]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* that not only provides one of the most consequential pragmatist statements on religion in the literature but that also offers particular promise for developing a more sustained, process-oriented study of religion.⁶

Moreover, although it is not apparent that Durkheim has read the statements on religion developed by Lucian or discussions of religion written by other scholars (e.g., Plato, Cicero, Dio Chrysostom) from the classical Greek and Latin eras, the parallels are notably striking. As Durkheim in *The Evolution Of Educational Thought* (1977 [1904-1905]) would contend, this reflects the residues, continuities, and occasional revitalizations of these materials in the notably fragmented collective consciousness of the academic community.

To summarize, it may be said that if we are to achieve more adequately informed notions of group life as scholars, it not only will be necessary (a) to examine human group life in the instances in which group

⁶ To be sure, Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* is among the most frequently cited of all sociological texts. Nevertheless, few sociologists, including those squarely in the "sociology of religion," have a comprehensive familiarity with this text. Most will have read "snippets" and the more conscientious scholars may have read the introductory and concluding chapters. However, very few appear to have read this book in its entirety. Still, Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* provides the most sustained pragmatist analysis of religion developed in the last century.

It is ironic, thus, that most of the research conducted in the sociology of religion has almost completely disregarded the central emphases of Durkheim's work on religion and, instead, has approached the study of religion in structuralist, quantitative terms (i.e., abstract variable analysis)—seemingly oblivious not only to the actively engaged features of people's experiences with religion but also to the ways that people's involvements in religion become one with their notions of reality. By contrast (as will become evident later), Lucian of Samosata is much more attentive to religion as a humanly engaged phenomenon.

life takes place as these are experienced by those in the settings at hand but also to do so (b) in more sustained comparative terms and (c) to invoke all related resources of our collective memories in order to do so more effectively.

Somewhat ironically, given the notably extensive disregard of the literature of the more distant past on the part of social scientists, some materials developed many centuries ago are consequential not only for the transhistorical comparisons that they offer contemporary social sciences but also for the more direct and enabling insights they provide on religion as a realm of human lived experience. It is with these notions in mind that we return to the scholarship of antiquity.

Analytic Precursors in the Classical Greek and Latin Eras

Without addressing the classical Greek literature in detail, it is important to acknowledge that Lucian is by no means the first to discuss religion as a realm of human lived experience.

Thus, even if one excludes the materials developed by Homer (circa 700 BCE), Hesiod (circa 700 BCE), and other poets (producers of fiction) of the classical Greek era who contributed to people's notions of divinity, we find that some other Greek authors were attentive to the pragmatist or constructionist features of religion—that is, as something that developed and was maintained as *a feature of community life*.

In addition to Protagoras (circa 490-420 BCE) who insisted that, "man is the measure of all things" and Herodotus (circa 485-425 BCE) who explicitly

describes the Olympian gods as the social fabrications of Homer and Hesiod, Plato (see: *Republic* [1997] and *Laws* [1997]) clearly recognizes the problematic nature of claims about divinity, as well as the mutual interdependence of religion and law in generating a functional/operational cohesiveness of the community.⁷ Further, it seems most unlikely that Aristotle who insists on humanly known reality as *the* paramount reality would have taken particular exception to Protagoras' views of religion.⁸

As well as others who may be referenced from the Greek or Roman classical eras, it may be appropriate to cite Cicero's (106-43 BCE) *On the Nature of the Gods* (1951; see: Prus 2011d) and the Greek author Dio Chrysostom's (circa 40-120) *The Twelfth or Olympic Discourse: or, On Man's First Conception of the Gods* (1932; see: Prus 2011c) as other noteworthy precursors to the materials that Lucian develops.

Although Lucian's references are not sufficiently precise to establish more definite lines of influence with earlier authors, it is apparent that he has had considerable exposure to Greek philosophy, rhetoric, and poetics. Nevertheless, and despite the overtly skeptical, often sarcastic manner in which he approaches the validity of people's religious beliefs, Lucian brings "to life" a number of features of religious views and practices in ways not encountered elsewhere in the classical literature.

⁷ For an extended consideration of Plato's pragmatist scholarship as this pertains to "representing, defending, and questioning religion," see: Prus (2013).

⁸ Although Aristotle (often referenced as a pagan philosopher in early Christian texts) is reputed to have written on religion or aspects thereof, these texts appear to have been lost and/or destroyed.

Lucian on Religion

A Greek educated Syrian, Lucian of Samosata, may be envisioned as a philosopher-poet or poet-philosopher, depending on one's emphasis.⁹ The eight volumes in the Loeb edition of Lucian's works contain about 80 articles. While many of these texts deal with matters involving theology, philosophy, rhetoric, and education, Lucian's other statements are considerably more diverse in their coverage.

As the present statement indicates, Lucian has written a number of dialogues that focus on the ways in which people engage aspects of religion. Lucian's texts may have been developed in more poetic (and frequently satirical) prose, but many of these are remarkably attentive to the socially constituted features of people's religious beliefs and practices (also see: Prus forthcoming).

Relatedly, while Lucian's texts lack the empirical depth that can be achieved through more sustained

⁹ While some philosophers may be quick to denounce Lucian as a philosopher (making references to Lucian's more poetic, satirical style), it is apparent that Lucian engages religion in notably philosophic (i.e., relativist, comparative, pragmatist, constructionist) terms. As well, although Lucian is openly skeptical of much of the philosophic enterprise, he also engages philosophy in more direct ways.

In the process of highlighting some of the more pretentious, cultic, and religious features of philosophy (e.g., *Philosophies for Sale*, *The Dead Come to Life*, *Double Indictment*, and *Hermotimus*), Lucian not only draws attention to the contradictory and irreconcilable nature of some major philosophic claims but also provides thoughtful considerations of philosophic life styles. Thus, whereas Lucian is dubious of the value of much of what passes as philosophic (and virtuous) scholarship, he may be seen to provide a "philosophy of philosophy" that is much more attentive to *the lived experiences of philosophers* than are most philosophic approaches to philosophy. I mention this, in part, because Lucian's approach to philosophy very much parallels his considerations of religion where the two do not more directly overlap (as in Lucian's commentaries on the philosophies of Plato and the Academicians, the Stoics, and the Epicureans).

instances of ethnographic inquiry, many of his depictions of people's activities have a quasi-ethnographic, as well as a cross-cultural character. Further, his analyses often assume instructive comparative qualities.¹⁰

Accordingly, whereas Lucian's texts on religion have been developed mindfully of people who subscribe to polytheistic notions of divinity on the one hand, and those who are openly skeptical of the existence of divine essences of any sort on the other, it would be mistaken to overlook the relevance of Lucian's materials for comprehending religious viewpoints that are more pointedly monotheistic in emphasis.¹¹

Indeed, Lucian not only is attentive to a wide range of viewpoints on divinity (Greek and barbarian) but also recognizes the competitive, comparative, and shared qualities of differing religious standpoints. Lucian's "anthropology of religion," thus, is strikingly pluralist and generic.

While other of Lucian's statements also engage aspects of religion, the present paper focuses on: *On Sacrifices*, *On Funerals*, *Icaromenippus*, *Menippus*, *The Parliament of the Gods*, *Zeus Rants*, *Zeus Catechized*, and

¹⁰ Although I have not found specific reference to Herodotus (circa 485-425 BCE) who provides ethnohistorical accounts of a series of Eastern Mediterranean life worlds in Lucian's texts, Lucian seems quite aware of what now is often termed "cultural relativism."

¹¹ Still, as Augustine (circa 354-430; *City of God* [1984]) observes, Judaic-Christian theology is not as singularly "monotheistic" as is often assumed. Indeed, any claims about evil agents and/or other interventional essences that possess supernatural abilities introduce notions of multiple "gods" even if there is alleged to be a single overarching divine source or creator. For a somewhat parallel Greek version of the Judaic-Christian creation story (and possibly a common source), see: Plato's (circa 420-348 BCE) *Timaeus* (1937). Notably, variants of the creation story can be found in Mesopotamian texts dating back to about 2000 BCE (see: Daley 1989).

A Conversation With Hesiod.¹²

The present paper can provide only limited coverage of these statements, but readers are reminded that, as a poet, Lucian is not bound by the scholarly openness of a social scientist. As well, readers should not expect his texts to fit into a coherent package or to display a singular pragmatist emphasis.

In generating these statements on religion, Lucian deals with a wide, somewhat overlapping assortment of issues. Among the more central themes he considers are people's (a) sacrifices and other attempts to influence divine essences, (b) notions of fatalism or predestination, (c) debates about the existence of divine beings, (d) ways of legitimating divine beings, (e) images of and preparations for the afterlife, and (f) intrigues with the supernatural.

Because of the diversity of Lucian's poetic, philosophic, and theological emphases, people may engage (approach, experience, discuss, analyze) this selection of texts in many different ways. The material following has been given an order for presentational purposes, but Lucian's texts have not been developed as a systematic series and could be read in various sequences.

Notably, too, while it would have been instructive to limit this discussion to one or two of Lucian's

¹² Because my discussions of Lucian's texts build so extensively on his work, I am much indebted to A. M. Harmon who translated volumes I-V of Lucian's works. In referencing the materials within specific articles, I have used the standardized notation references that accompany the Greek text in the (Greek-English) Loeb edition of these works. When quotations are used, these will contain references to the page numbers in the particular Loeb edition volumes, as well as the standardized Greek text notations.

statements, the broader set of materials introduced here provides a more adequate sense of the scope and context of his texts than could be achieved by presenting one or two of those works. Thus, while concentrating on the more central sociological (as in human knowing and acting) features of Lucian's productions, I use the broader discussion to help portray the pragmatist or constructionist features of Lucian's work.

In developing the present statement, Lucian's *On Sacrifices* is used as a convenient departure point. Although it is not apparent that Lucian read Dio Chrysostom's (circa 40-120) text *The Twelfth or Olympic Discourse: or, On Man's First Conception of the Gods* (1932; see: Prus 2011c), Lucian's statement on sacrifices not only maintains considerable conceptual continuity with some material developed by Dio Chrysostom but also introduces several topics that are developed more fully in Lucian's other statements.

On Sacrifices¹³

In view of what the dolts do at their sacrifices and their feasts and processions in honor of the gods, what they pray for and vow, and what opinions they hold about the gods, I doubt if anyone is so gloomy and woe-begone that he will not laugh to see the idiocy of their action. Indeed, long before he laughs, I think, he will ask himself whether he should call them devout or, on the contrary, irreligious and pestilent, inasmuch as they have taken it for granted that the gods are so low and mean as to stand in need of men and to enjoy be-

ing flattered and to get angry when they are slighted. (Lucian, *On Sacrifices*:1 [Vol. III:155; Harmon trans.])

Lucian's *On Sacrifices* (*OS*) is a short satire that focuses on people's attempts to communicate with, please, and influence the gods. Writing as a skeptic, Lucian is inclined to dismiss these practices as folly on the one hand, and as an occasion for pity on the other. Still, in developing this statement, Lucian displays considerable insight into the ways in which people might engage "divine essences."

Following his introductory note (see the preceding quotation), Lucian (*OS*:1-4) briefly considers some of the differing ways that Greeks and barbarians define, envision, and act towards their gods.

Pursuing this theme, Lucian (*OS*:5-7) quickly acknowledges Hesiod's *Theogony* or genealogy of the Olympian Greek gods. While emphasizing the absurdities of the origins of these characters, as well as the apparent impropriety of their conduct, Lucian is aware that the general public seems untroubled by these (fictional) accounts and remains oblivious to the many contradictions Hesiod's account entails.

Still, continuing with popular conceptions of the Greek gods, Lucian (*OS*:8-9) next articulates a series of images suggesting how things might be arranged in a world inhabited by the Olympian divinities. Lucian, thus, presents Zeus as the patriarch with an array of other gods in his midst. While communing with one another, the gods are depicted as intensively focused on earthly matters. Thus, despite any other things that these divine essences might do, they seem particularly attentive to the things that people

do. This presumably is with the hope that some humans might acknowledge them, possibly offering sacrifices in which the gods might take great delight.

Noting that people have dedicated and consecrated objects such as mountains, birds, and plants to their gods, Lucian (*OS*:10) also observes that different peoples not only have claimed certain gods as their own but also have generated accounts of their origins and developed other histories for these deities.

As well, Lucian (*OS*:11-13) states, people not only construct temples, altars, and material embodiments of their gods but they also have developed elaborate formulae and rites that honor their divinities. Relatedly, Lucian is attentive to the public nature (display) of the sacrifices that people make and the roles that priests or other holy agents play in dramatizing these events for onlookers.

After commenting further on the diverse ways in which people approach sacrifices (and select items to be offered to the gods) and referencing the many faces and forms (as with the Egyptians) that people may assign to the gods, Lucian (*OS*:13-15) points to the importance of tradition and written records for perpetuating people's religious beliefs. In concluding this text, Lucian says that he is not proposing censorship, but instead is inclined to laugh, as well as cry over such human folly.

Whereas Lucian (a) questions the wisdom of people making sacrifices to the gods, he also (b) considers people's practices and motives with respect to their sacrifices, and (c) points to the variations one encounters in people's sacrifices to the gods across

both Greek and barbarian states. Relatedly, Lucian also (d) acknowledges people's tendencies to develop (as in identifying, naming, honoring, affirming, and owning) regionalized gods, and (e) is attentive to the presumptions people make in thinking that divine essences would respond to human displays of devotion.

Although Lucian's skepticism is clearly evident in *On Sacrifices*, sociologists, classicists, religious studies scholars, and other students of the human condition may well acknowledge Lucian's attentiveness to the ways in which people perpetuate, institute, or "objectify" particular aspects of religion (Durkheim 1915 [1912]; Berger and Luckmann 1966) through (a) the creation of forums (temples and their contents) for the gods, (b) the development of images of the divine (poetic accounts, genealogies of the gods, material representations), (c) the institution and activities of human agents (priests who purport to communicate with the gods), (d) people's involvements in ritual occasions, practices, and sacrifices, and (e) people's attempts to control or help determine their own futures through the patronage of those essences to whom they have attributed supernatural capacities.¹⁴

Despite his satirical manner, scholars also may appreciate Lucian's attentiveness to (f) the anthropomorphic qualities that people associate with the gods through Lucian's willingness to (g) "take the

¹³ I am grateful to A. M. Harmon for his translation of *On Sacrifices* in *Lucian* (1921 [Vol. III:153-171]).

¹⁴ Readers are referred to Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert (1898) for another highly insightful, but more distinctively sociological account of "sacrifice" that builds more explicitly on cross-cultural ethnohistorical sources. Mauss and Hubert (1902) also provide an exceptionally instructive analysis of "spiritually-enabled magic." Here as well, readers will encounter many parallels with Lucian's portrayal of sacrifices.

role" (Mead 1934) of the essences to which these sacrifices are directed. Building on the images generated by the poets, theologians, and others, Lucian considers how the gods to whom people direct sacrifices might make sense of and appreciate these (seemingly shallow) human endeavors.

Even though Lucian deals with these topics in more fleeting terms in *On Sacrifices*, he pointedly comments on these aspects of religious endeavor. Still, these and other emphases of Lucian's work will become more evident as readers consider his other texts.

On Funerals¹⁵

Funerals may be seen as ways in which the surviving members of a group collectively acknowledge the loss of one or more of their associates. Still, funerals also represent occasions in which people may invoke notions of divinity and afterlife experiences. When engaged thusly, Lucian's *On Funerals* (*OF*) may be seen to convey instances of people's emotional expressivity and religious devotion amidst their more situated involvements in these collective assemblies:

Truly, it is well worth while to observe what most people do and say at funerals, and on the other hand what their would-be comforters say; to observe also how unbearable the mourners consider what is happening, not only for themselves but for those whom they mourn. Yet, I swear by Pluto and Persephone, they have not one whit of definite knowledge as to whether this experience is unpleasant and worth

¹⁵ This statement has been developed from A. M. Harmon's translation of *On Funerals* in *Lucian* (1925a [Vol. IV:111-131]).

grieving about, or on the contrary delightful and better for those who undergo it. No, they simply commit their grief into the charge of custom and habit. When someone dies, then, this is what they do—but stay! First I wish to tell you what beliefs they hold about death itself, for then it will become clear why they engage in these superfluous practices. (Lucian, *On Funerals*:1 [Vol. IV:113; Harmon trans.])

Referencing the contributions of the Greek poets, Homer and Hesiod, to people's notions of the afterlife, Lucian (*OF*:2-10) distinguishes three realms of the afterlife. First, there is a heavenly place where the souls of good people live the best life; secondly, a sunless place where the souls of wicked people are severely punished for their wrongdoings; and, thirdly, a middle area where people's spiritual essences are dependent on the activities of living others (through prayers, sacrifices, deeds) to shape their eventual afterlife fates.

Acknowledging the great distress that people typically exhibit following the death of a loved one and (prototypically) portraying the intense emotion expressed by a father whose son has died, Lucian observes:

But as to the old man who mourns after this fashion, it is not, in all probability, on account of his son that he does all this melodramatic ranting that I have mentioned, and more than I have mentioned; for he knows that his son will not hear him even if he shouts louder than Stentor. Nor yet is it on his own account; for it would have been enough to think this and have it in mind, without his shouting—nobody needs to shout at himself. Consequently it is on account of the oth-

ers present that he talks this nonsense, when he does not know what has happened to his son nor where he has gone; in fact he has not even considered what life itself is, or else he would not take on so about the leaving of it, as if that were something dreadful. (Lucian, *On Funerals*:15 [Vol. IV:121-123; Harmon trans.])

In developing this satire, Lucian (*OF*:16-20) also asks what funerals might look like from the viewpoint of the (hypothetically) departed soul. Thus, Lucian considers the viability (and absurdity) of the parent's commentaries from this other set of viewpoints.

Then, noting that all peoples seem to experience a sense of loss and grief after the death of a close associate, Lucian (*OF*:21-24) subsequently observes that those in different areas deal with human corpses in highly diverse manners (as in burning, burying, encasing, consuming, and preserving human remains). Likewise, Lucian states, one finds great variation in the ways in which those most centrally affected by the death act afterwards (as in eulogies, pleading for the deceased, fasting and feasting). While Lucian (as a poet) considers these practices (along with other religious sacrifices) foolish, if not ridiculous, sociologists may recognize Lucian's comparatively early account of death-related practices as enacted instances of community constructions.¹⁶

As well, much like Dio Chrysostom (see: Prus 2011c), Lucian is attentive to the collectively sustained prac-

¹⁶ As Harmon (1925 [Vol. IV:127]) notes, Lucian may be drawing on Herodotus' (circa 485-425 BCE) *The Histories* (1996) in referencing these and other cross-cultural variants. Minimally, however, Lucian is clearly attentive to notions of cultural relativism.

tices that foster continuity, as well as conviction in people's religious beliefs. Still, Lucian also is mindful of the ways in which people's notions of religion become synthesized with certain physical sensations (as in sights, sounds, and aromas) and the particular (often intense) modes of emotional expression that people invoke as they engage aspects of their religion in more situated and enacted terms.

Lucian is clearly cynical about people's afterlife existences, particularly as these are portrayed in theological circles. Nevertheless, he is still attentive to people's images of the hereafter. Thus, in what may be seen as a sequel of sorts to Plato's (420-348 BCE) "vision of Er" (*Republic*, IX [1997]), Lucian more directly addresses people's images of the afterlife in two other texts, *Icaromenippus* and *Menippus*.

While these satires are partially directed against philosophic pretensions, as well as Stoic notions of divine determinism, justice, and accountability somewhat more specifically, many of the afterlife images that Lucian addresses also are consistent with Judaic-Christian theology.¹⁷

Icaromenippus¹⁸

Icaromenippus (*ICM*) is an account of Menippus' voyage to the heavens. Still, rather than describing the souls of the departed, this satire on religion has

¹⁷ It might be appreciated that Stoic theology (after Zeno of Citium [circa 334-263 BCE]), as well as Judaic and Christian theology, displays many affinities with the positions adopted by Plato (circa 420-348 BCE) (see: *Phaedo* [1997], *Timaeus* [1997]) and Socrates (circa 469-399 BCE) from whom Plato appears to have drawn central inspiration (see: Prus 2013).

¹⁸ This discussion builds directly on A. M. Harmon's translation of *Icaromenippus* or *The Sky-Man* in *Lucian* (1915a [Vol. II:267-323]).

a more pronounced philosophic emphasis. Although Lucian does not portray the afterlife existences of the departed in *ICM*, this statement is instructive for indicating the problematic linkages of philosophy, knowledge, virtue, and religion.

After attempting to learn about the nature of life and the universe from the philosophers, Menippus (*ICM*:4-7) found himself deeply disappointed. Indeed, despite his eagerness to learn and his willingness to pay for this education, Menippus found himself perplexed not only by the contradictory positions of the philosophers but also by their presumptuous, pompous manners. Elaborating on some of the discrepancies he has encountered, Menippus says:

As for the contradictory nature of their theories, that is easy to appreciate. Just see for yourself, in Heaven's name, whether their doctrines are akin and not widely divergent. First of all, there is their difference of opinion about the universe. Some think it is without beginning and without end, but others have even ventured to tell who made it and how it was constructed; and these latter surprised me most, for they made some god or other the creator of the universe, but did not tell where he came from or where he stood when he created it all; and yet it is impossible to conceive of time and space before the genesis of the universe. (Lucian, *Icaromenippus*:8 [Vol. II:279-281; Harmon trans.])

Related philosophic disputes, Menippus (*ICM*:8) notes, revolve around matters of ideas and incorporeal essences, notions of the finite and infinite, arguments about limited versus unlimited universes, and claims whether there is one world or many.

Further, Menippus (*ICM*:9) states, he not only has encountered wide ranges of objects (spiritual, animate, and inanimate) to which divine status is assigned but also people who insist on one god, as well as those who claim multiple gods and even give them orders of prominence. Similarly, whereas some claim that the divine essences have no form or substance, others attribute material qualities of various sorts to divinity. As well, while some contend that the gods control and direct all matters, human and otherwise, in the universe, some philosophers claim that there are no gods and that the world has always been on its own.

It was a consequence of this agonizing bewilderment that Menippus (*ICM*:10-22) journeyed to the heavens in hopes of finding some answers to questions of these sorts. Having there encountered Zeus, Menippus (*ICM*:23-28) comments on the stereotypical and sometimes contradictory messages that Zeus (*ICM*:29-31) receives from people's prayers, sacrifices, and demands. Menippus then focuses more directly on the problems that Zeus (as a religious spokesperson) has dealing with the disbelief and scorn of the philosophers.

While particularly displeased with the Epicureans who deny that the gods intervene in human matters or even care what happens to people, Zeus (*ICM*:32) defines the philosophers as a rather pretentious and argumentative lot. He says that they are more caught up in word-mazes and superficiality than honest virtues.

Indeed, Menippus observes, the entire assembly of the gods (*ICM*:33) is incensed with philosophic pre-

tensions and is eager to dispose of all philosophers. Righteously indignant, Zeus insists that if they were not in the midst of a (four month) festive season, the philosophers would be annihilated immediately.¹⁹ Next year, however, Zeus proclaims, the gods can be assured that the philosophers will be eliminated.

Menippus²⁰

Whereas *Icaromenippus* portrays a journey that Menippus made to the heavens, *Menippus* (*MN*) is Lucian's account of the same cynic's trip into Hades. Although the two afterlife satires share some related emphases, they seem to have been developed rather independently of one another. Notably, too, while Lucian remains critical of philosophic contradictions and pretensions, *Menippus* also is used to denounce those who have used positions of wealth and influence in less virtuous terms (readers may recall Lucian's skepticism of any afterlife existence).

Noting that he had developed a youthful intrigue with the gods and their activities from the poets Homer and Hesiod, Menippus (*MN*:3) says that he was later puzzled by laws that not only contradict the claims of the poets but outlawed many activities in which the gods participated.

While hoping that the philosophers might help him resolve these issues, Menippus (*MN*:4-5) found the philosophers themselves not only were perplexed by these and other matters but also argued effective-

¹⁹ It might be appreciated that Socrates' death sentence (see: Plato's *Phaedo* [1997]) was postponed because of a religious season.

²⁰ This statement is derived from A. M. Harmon's translation of *Menippus* or *The Descent Into Hades* in *Lucian* (1925b [Vol. IV:71-109]).

ly for an assortment of contradictory positions. Even more unsettling to Menippus, however, was the failure of the philosophers to practice the very virtues they themselves had promoted.

Thusly disillusioned in his quest for the truth, Menippus (*MN*:6) went to Babylon in search of a sorcerer whom he had heard could safely take him into Hades and back.²¹ With his guide's assistance, Menippus gained access to Hades. Eventually finding himself in the presence of evildoers and their overseers, Menippus (*MN*:11-12) provides an account of the judgments leveled against the diversified collection of undesirables who found themselves in Hades.²²

After witnessing Minos holding court for the wicked and assigning punishments befitting their crimes, Menippus (*MN*:13-14) and his guide visited the place of punishment. Here, Menippus describes the gruesome treatments to which the evildoers were subjected. Still, he notes that those who had been wealthier in human life were punished much more severely for their misdeeds than those from lower stations in life:

Leaving the court reluctantly, we came to the place of punishment, where in all truth, my friend, there were many pitiful things to hear and to see. The sound of

²¹ Lucian's tale is somewhat reminiscent of Plato's "vision of Er" (*Republic* [1997]).

²² Although Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *Divine Comedy*, organized around his journey into Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise with the Roman poet Virgil (70-19 BCE) as his guide (see: Prus 2014b), was developed in much more extended detail and presented within a distinctively Christian context, there are noteworthy parallels in the treatment that the rich, powerful, and especially evil, pretentious individuals receive in these two settings.

scourges could be heard, and therewithal the wails of those roasting on the fire; there were racks and pillories and wheels; Chimera tore and Cerberus ravened. They were being punished all together, kings, slaves, satraps, poor, rich, and beggars, and all were sorry for their excesses. Some of them we even recognized when we saw them, all that were recently dead. But they covered their faces and turned away, and if they so much as cast a glance at us, it was thoroughly servile and obsequious, even though they had been unimaginably oppressive and haughty in life. Poor people, however, were getting only half as much torture and resting at intervals before being punished again. (Lucian, *Menippus*:14 [Vol. IV:95-97; Harmon trans.])

Next, Menippus (*MN*:15-16) describes the Archersian Plain wherein the bones of the wicked (souls) sentenced to Hades had been piled up in indistinguishable, decomposing piles. Reflecting on this sight, Menippus comments on the role of Fortune as a pageant co-coordinator. Thus, Fortune ushers people through a variety of life styles and shifting circumstances, only in the end to return the remains of the participants to a common pile of decaying rubble.

When asked if people who had had more prominent monuments, statues, and other worldly markers were better honored in the afterlife, Menippus (*MN*:17) quickly dismisses this supposition and observes that the formerly wealthy are reduced to the most extreme levels of poverty and despair.

Also queried about the fates of the philosophers, Menippus (*MN*:18) says that they have not fared much better than the wealthy, but they still insist on

talking to any that will listen. However, Menippus (*MN*:19-20) observes, the most severe treatments were reserved for those who, as rich and powerful individuals, had treated others badly.

Just before leaving Hades, Menippus (*MN*:21) seeks direction about Menippus' own intellectual plight from one of the residents. Menippus is informed that the life of the common man is best and to forget about questing for knowledge of the universe and other philosophic nonsense. Instead, Menippus is advised to make the best of his present circumstances, to enjoy life, and to not take things too seriously.

The Parliament of the Gods²³

In *The Parliament of the Gods* (*PGs*), Lucian presents a dialogue between Zeus, Hermes, and another god, Momus (who is known for honesty and the comparative absence of tact). Although presented in an entertaining fashion, this statement not only (a) recognizes the many characters that people (Greek and barbarian) have identified and acted towards as "godly essences," and (b) attends to the notions of comparison, competition, and resentment that exist among these humanly contrived "instances of divinity," but also (c) deals with the matter of establishing the authenticity of any essences for whom divine status is claimed.

Zeus (*PGs*:1) opens this dialogue with the observation that there have been rumblings among the gods. Some have become disgruntled, saying that

²³ This portrayal of *The Parliament of the Gods* is based on A. M. Harmon's translation in *Lucian* (1936 [Vol. V:417-441]).

others who share the status of gods are unworthy of the honor. Zeus has called a meeting of the gods (i.e., godly essences) to discuss this matter.

Momus (*PGs*:2-5) says that the discontent among the gods is both genuine and extensive. Many of the gods are concerned that the pretenders reap the same benefits as those who are legitimate gods. Elaborating on this position, Momus references an assortment of essences who not only do not qualify as full-fledged gods but who also bring ridicule to the gods more generally as a consequence of their appearances, activities, and backgrounds.

While Zeus quickly defends certain Greek characters (e.g., Asclepius, Hercules) against Momus' charges, Momus persists. Indeed, Momus (*PGs*:6-8) asserts that Zeus, himself, is somewhat to blame for the situation. Because Zeus cohabited with an assortment of mortal women, and did so in different forms, Zeus has opened the heavens to a variety of demi-gods. Some other gods have confounded the matter by copying Zeus.

Continuing his criticism, Momus (*PGs*:9-10) observes that some of those claiming godly status include barbarian representatives that do not even speak Greek, as well as some exceptionally strange creatures from Egypt. Quickly averting further discussion about the Egyptian gods, Zeus asks Momus (*PGs*:12-13) to name others.

After identifying a series of dubious essences honored as gods in Greek and barbarian territories, Momus continues, noting that the spiritual gods also are in competition with the non-spiritual (i.e., secu-

lar) gods of Virtue, Nature, Destiny, and Chance that have been created by the philosophers. Even though these latter essences lack intelligence, Momus protests, those who acknowledge these philosophic notions typically avoid making sacrifices to the gods.

While observing that much more could be said, Momus (*PGs*:14-18) introduces a motion to deal with the problem of godly imposters. Momus' proposal includes the selection of seven gods of full standing, including Zeus, to serve as a deputy counsel that will screen and evaluate the birth rights and qualifications of all those for whom godly status is claimed. The committee will either acknowledge particular essences as gods or return them to their origins. Relatedly, the philosophers are to be deterred from developing constructs that rival the gods. Pursuing the purification process still further, Momus proposes that the temples, statues, and other images of false gods are destroyed and replaced by those of Zeus, Apollo, or other bona fide gods.

Although initially inclined to take Momus' motion to a vote, Zeus (*PGs*:19) quickly realizes that the pretenders would outnumber the legitimate gods and promptly declares the motion carried. Lucian closes the dialogue with Zeus threatening to eliminate the primary criterion by which all of the gods achieve an existence:

[W]hen Hermes makes the proclamation, present yourselves, and let each of you bring unmistakable means of identification and clear proofs—his father's name and his mother's, why and how he became a god, and his tribe and clan. For if anyone shall fail to put all this evidence, it will make no difference to the

deputies that he has a huge temple on earth and that men believe him to be a god. (Lucian, *Parliament of the Gods*:19 [Vol. V:441; Harmon trans.])

Zeus Rants²⁴

Although scholars at least since the time of Protagoras (circa 490-420 BCE) and Plato (circa 420-348 BCE) have been attentive to the debates that people have had regarding the existence and quality of the gods, and Cicero (circa 106-43 BCE) in *On the Nature of the Gods* (1951) has engaged these debates in a particularly articulate manner,²⁵ few scholars have considered the ways in which these debates might be envisioned by the divine essences who are the objects of these debates.

As with Lucian's other satires on religion, it is instructive to envision Zeus as a representative of religious leaders rather than merely a (mythical) cultural artifact of a particular era. The problem that Zeus faces in dealing with atheists and other skeptics, likewise, is one that endures and continues to perplex religious leaders.

Zeus Rants also is instructive in the arguments that the speakers develop for and against the existence of divine, regulatory essences. Although Lucian develops these positions rather quickly and in an entertaining fashion, the foundational features of these claims and counterclaims have persisted in

²⁴ This statement has been enabled by A. M. Harmon's translation of *Zeus Rants* in *Lucian* (1915b [Vol. II:89-169]).

²⁵ It is not apparent that Lucian, a Greek speaking Syrian, has access to Cicero's (Latin) texts on religion (see: Prus 2011d). However, both share somewhat common Greek educations in rhetoric, as well as philosophy (encompassing theology).

Western theology and philosophy (e.g., Augustine, *City of God* [1984]; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* [1981]; Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* [1990]; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1999]). Thus, whereas Lucian's statement reflects a broader Sophist skepticism about the gods, positions of these sorts represent additional challenges that those insisting on divine essences may encounter in proclaiming particular theological viewpoints.

While developing *Zeus Rants* (ZR) as a satire directed at the Stoics and others who argue for the existence of divine essences, Lucian also generates some insight into (a) theological protocol, (b) the practical limitations of fatalism, and (c) the reliance of existence of divine essences on people for the development and maintenance of theological standpoints.

Zeus Rants (ZR:1)²⁶ begins with Zeus' offspring Hermes and Athena inquiring into Zeus' apparent distraught condition. Hera, Zeus' spouse, quickly attributes Zeus' troubles to another of Zeus' love affairs. Quickly assuring Hera and the others that his concerns are of an entirely different sort, Zeus (ZR:3) insists the matter at hand is of paramount importance to the gods. At stake is the very issue of whether the gods will be recognized and honored or will be ignored and treated as non-existent.

Asked how this could happen, Zeus (ZR:4) explains that Timocles, a Stoic, and Damis, an Epicurean, have been involved in a dispute about fate. In the midst of the argument, Damis asserted that the gods do not exist. Likewise, Damis refused to acknowledge that

²⁶ The text numbers cited here correspond with the Greek text of *Zeus Rants* in the Loeb (Greek-English) edition.

the gods guide or direct anything. While the two speakers attracted a large crowd of people, nothing was settled and the dispute on which the future of the gods hinges is to continue another day. Zeus is highly distressed, recognizing the fate of the gods rests with a single speaker, Timocles.

While Hermes and Hera suggest that Zeus call a meeting of the gods to consider the matter, Athena proposes that Zeus handle things more discretely and simply insure that Timocles will win the debate. Hermes, however, points out that everyone will know the debate was fixed and that the other gods will view Zeus as a tyrant if he does not seek their counsel on such an important matter.

Concurring with Hermes, Zeus (ZR:6) instructs Hermes to call a meeting of the gods. In what immediately follows, Zeus and Hermes (ZR:6-13) consider the problematics of assembling, arranging, and communicating with the gods (not all of whom [barbarian representatives] can even speak Greek). In addition to discerning the best way of announcing a meeting, Hermes and Zeus also assume the task assessing the centrality and merits of the particular gods so that they might be more appropriately arranged and acknowledged at the meeting. Finding themselves frustrated in matters of protocol (as in recognizing, positioning, and assessing the composition of various godly essences), Zeus and Hermes eventually decide to let each deity find his or her own place amidst the other godly essences.

Then, after puzzling about how he (ZR:13-15) should present his concerns to the other gods, Zeus (ZR:16-18) provides a fuller account of the humans' debate

to the gods. He explains why he is so alarmed. After restating the position of Damis, the Epicurean, that the gods do not exist and therefore cannot be expected to care for people or do other things, Zeus notes that Timocles took the position of the gods in every way. However, while Timocles had some supporters, he failed to sustain his claims and the crowd clearly began favoring Damis. The disputants agreed to conclude the argument another day. Continuing, Zeus says:

That is why I called you together, gods, and it is no trivial reason if you consider that all our honor and glory and revenue comes from men, and if they are convinced either that there are no gods at all or that if there are they have no thought of men, we shall be without sacrifices, without presents, and without honors on earth and shall sit idle in Heaven in the grip of famine, choused out of our old-time feasts and celebrations and games and sacrifices and vigils and processions. (Lucian, *Zeus Rants*:18 [Vol. II:117; Harmon trans.])

When Zeus had concluded his speech, Hermes requested advice from the gods of full standing. With no one else responding, even after some prodding, Momus began to speak.

However, instead of providing the helpful suggestions that Zeus and Hermes had anticipated, Momus (ZR:19-22) states that the current problem is no more than what Momus had expected and he began to criticize the gods more generally. Saying that they should not blame Damis and others adopting skepticist standpoints, thus, Momus emphasizes the longstanding failings of the gods:

I vow by Themis that it is not right to be angry either at Epicurus or at his associates and successors in doctrine if they have formed such an idea of us. Why, what could one expect them to think when they see so much confusion in life, and see that the good men among them are neglected and waste away in poverty and illness and bondage while scoundrelly, pestilential fellows are highly honored and have enormous wealth and lord it over their betters, and that temple-robbers are not punished but escape, while men who are guiltless of all wrong-doing sometimes die by the cross or the scourge?

It is natural, then, that on seeing this they think of us as if we were nothing at all ... We, however, are vexed if any humans not wholly without wits criticize all this and reject our providence, when we ought to be glad if any of them continue to sacrifice to us, offending as we do. (Lucian, *Zeus Rants*:19-20 [Vol. II:119-121; Harmon trans.])

In concluding his statement, Momus insists that the gods are getting only what they deserve when people eventually realize that it is pointless to make sacrifices or hold religious processions. In any event, Momus adds, as a god who never had received much honor from humans, there is not much he will miss.

After Zeus (ZR:23) instructs the other gods to ignore Momus, Poseidon proposes that Zeus strike Damis dead with a thunderbolt. This will show people that the gods are not to be treated thusly. Zeus (ZR:25) quickly chastises Poseidon, asking if Poseidon has forgotten that Zeus, as well as Poseidon and the other gods, is powerless to oppose that which has been fated for Damis or anyone else.

Identifying himself as one of the younger (less established) gods, Apollo (ZR:26-29) tentatively enters into the discussion. Observing that Timocles, the Stoic, tends to obscure his arguments with propositions and discussions that are rather unintelligible, Apollo suggests that Zeus find someone who is more clear, direct, and eloquent to speak for Timocles.

While concurring with Apollo's assessment of Timocles, Momus (ZR:28) abruptly points out the folly of bringing a spokesman in to represent one of the philosophers in a debate.

Undeterred, Apollo (ZR:30-31) next suggests that he might be able to resolve the issue if Zeus could arrange for Apollo to present an oracle for the speakers. Intervening again, Momus quickly dismisses Apollo's oracles as absurd, as well as obscure.

Hercules (ZR:32), another of Zeus' offspring, then offers to destroy the building in which Damis will be debating. However, after cautioning Hercules about the resultant injuries to other people, as well as the extensive damage of the building itself, Zeus reminds Hercules that he, too, is subject to the fates and is helpless to act in this manner.

Then, recognizing that the gods are quite unable to deal with the matter at hand, Zeus (ZR:34-35) suggests that they at least might listen to the debate. Still, he laments at the outset, Timocles (who is championing their position) seems apprehensive and confused. However, Zeus also notes that Timocles is openly abusive of his opponent and suggests this may be Timocles' one advantage.

As the debate unfolds, Timocles (ZR:36) establishes that Damis rejects the idea that the gods have control over the future, as well as the notion that the universe is not under the administration of any god, but instead is a random process. Becoming incensed, Timocles demands that the people witnessing the debate stone Damis for his villainous claims. In response, Damis asks why Timocles attempts to arouse anger on the part of the others when the gods have not directed any harm at him, if indeed there are gods to listen.

When Timocles asserts that Damis will pay for his insolence in the afterlife, Damis asks when the gods might have time for him given all of the other things they are trying to do. Damis also notes that Timocles, who has been less virtuous than ideal, has not been punished for his misdeeds.

Continuing, Damis (ZR:38) asks why Timocles believes that the gods exercise providence or dominion and foresight over all things, Timocles refers to the order of the universe, to the presence and nature of all of the creatures, to motion, and other objects and regularities in the universe. Damis says that Timocles is merely begging the question; that orderly or recurrent patterns do not prove providence or godly control, but could be explained as random events that have become routinized over time.

When Damis asks him to try again, Timocles (ZR:39) invokes the authority of Homer, the best of all poets. It was Homer, Timocles states, who convinced him of the providence of the gods. Replying, Damis (ZR:39-40) says that Homer may be the best poet, but, as a poet, Homer is not to be considered

a viable source on such matters. Continuing, Damis then asks which of various (absurd or contradictory) passages from Homer Timocles had found most convincing.

With the crowd applauding Damis, Zeus (ZR:41) observes that their representative is faring badly. Not yet finished, however, Timocles asks Damis if Euripides also is inauthentic in his stage portrayals of the gods saving heroes and destroying villains? Accusing Timocles of extreme gullibility, Damis states that Euripides not only created these images on his own but also notes that Euripides (in one of his own plays) states that he only knows the gods through hearsay.

Timocles (ZR:42) next asks if the peoples of all nations can be mistaken in believing in the gods and celebrating their existence? While acknowledging the religious practices of the various nations, Damis points out that there is great diversity in people's beliefs, as well as an extremely wide range of particular (spiritual, human, animate, and inanimate) things that people define as divine essences. Focusing on this contradictory and incoherent state of affairs, Damis asks if the whole matter is not rather amusing when viewed thusly.

Also monitoring these human interchanges, Momus reminds the other gods that he had said this would happen. Zeus agrees that Momus was correct and states that he intends to make amends if the gods can overcome the present threat.

Still championing the gods, Timocles (ZR:43) next references the oracles, insisting that these (prophecies)

can be nothing other than the works of the gods. In reply, Damis points to the selective nature of Timocles' evidence for the oracles and proposes that they also consider the many well-known instances of the failure of the prophecies signified by the oracles.

Again cautioning Damis that he is inviting the wrath of the gods, Timocles (ZR:44-46) next asks Damis how he could account for all motions and movements in the world if not for the gods. Timocles likens god to the captain of the ship and asks what keeps the universe in motion if not for this guide. In developing his response, Damis (ZR:47-49) embarks on a discussion of the responsibilities of the captain of a vessel, concluding that Timocles' captain of the universe has not been doing a very good job, particularly in overseeing the ordering (and justice) of human affairs.

In another attempt to affirm divinity, Timocles (ZR:51) resorts to a syllogistic proof whereby he states that, "If there are altars [or other human artifacts and practices], there also are gods, but there are alters, ergo there are also gods." Mocking Timocles' syllogism, Damis (ZR:52) says that if Timocles can do no better than to take refuge in the existence of altars, it is time to conclude the discussion.

As Timocles continues to heap hostilities on the departing Damis, Zeus (ZR:53) reconciles himself to Timocles' defeat. Zeus meekly asks about the future of the gods and what they might now do.

Seemingly having reflected on the matter at hand, Hermes at this point assures Zeus that all is not lost.

Referencing the Greek comic poet (Menander) who stated that no harm has been done if no harm is acknowledged, Hermes (ZR:53) asks if much damage can be done if only a few people remain convinced that the gods do not exist. Most Greeks, Hermes insists, still believe in the gods, as do virtually all the barbarians. While appreciating the value of Hermes' insight, Zeus concludes the dialogue saying he still would have one Damis on his side than a thousand others.

Zeus Catechized²⁷

In *Zeus Catechized* (i.e., instructed; hereafter ZC), a human speaker, Cyniscus, engages (and instructs) Zeus on the matters of predestination and agency.²⁸

Adopting a cynicist or skepticist viewpoint, Cyniscus encourages Zeus to provide an explanation of Stoic thought. However, while Cyniscus is interested in exploring the place of human agency in a schema in which all is fated, Cyniscus also uses his encounter with Zeus as an occasion to consider godly agency and responsibility in a universe in which all is fated.

Although Lucian directs this satire at Zeus and the Stoics, the materials developed herein pose philosophic problems for all who insist on the presence of an active, benevolent divinity who knows all and

²⁷ This statement is developed from A. M. Harmon's translation of *Zeus Catechized* in *Lucian* (1915c [Vol. II:59-87]).

²⁸ Although Cicero (circa 106-43 BCE) has addressed a variety of related matters in *On the Nature of the Gods* (1951) and *On Fate* (1942), it is not apparent that Lucian (a Greek speaking Syrian) has had access to Cicero's (Latin) texts. In this sense, the writings of Cicero and Lucian attest to more enduring Greek (see: Prus 2011c philosophic debates on the nature of the gods [and predestination]). For a fuller consideration of Cicero's highly instructive analyses of religion, see: Prus 2011d.

oversees all matters (human and otherwise in the universe).²⁹

Opening the dialogue, Cyniscus (ZC:1) asks Zeus if it is true, as Homer and Hesiod have said, that each person's fate is determined at birth. Zeus indicates that it is true indeed and that there is no prospect of changing any aspect of one's destiny.

Cyniscus (ZC:2) then asks Zeus if Homer is speaking nonsense when he tells people to mind their conduct lest they end up in the tortuous depths of Hades. Maintaining his position on predestination, Zeus says that Homer is mistaken in this latter regard. Zeus explains that when poets compose under the spirit of the Muses, they represent the truth. However, when left to their own human devices, mistakes of this sort are to be expected.

In response to another question from Cyniscus, Zeus acknowledges that there are only three Fates (Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos), whereafter Cyniscus (ZC:3) asks about those named Destiny and Fortune. After Zeus evades the question, Cyniscus (ZC:4) next asks Zeus if the gods also are under the rule of the Fates. Zeus affirms that this also is the case. Reflecting on Zeus' answer, Cyniscus com-

²⁹ The most sustained conceptual theological analyses of these and related matters are those developed by Augustine (circa 354-430) in *Confessions* (1961) and *City of God* (1984), and (especially) Thomas Aquinas (circa 1225-1274) in *Summa Theologica* (1981). On matters of divinity, both Augustine and Aquinas adopt positions that largely parallel to those of Plato (see: *Timaeus* [1997], *Phaedo* [1997]). Although Augustine may be aware of Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods* (1951), he gives it little explicit attention. Aquinas knows some of Cicero's work, but likely not this text. Neither Augustine nor Aquinas seem likely to have known about Dio Chrysostom's (see: Prus 2011c) or Lucian's (Greek) critical appraisals of religion, or Lucian's related considerations of human good and evil, afterlife justice, and human accountability.

ments that he formerly had thought the gods to be wonderfully powerful. Now, however, he has begun to realize that even Zeus, the greatest of the gods, also is under the control of the Fates.

Asked to elaborate, Cyniscus (ZC:5) says that if all is indeed fated, it seems pointless for people to make sacrifices to the gods and pray to the gods for benefits when the gods themselves are in no position to act on people's behalf.

Becoming more exasperated with Cyniscus' questions and commentary, Zeus (ZC:6) says that Cyniscus has been prompted to ask these questions by the Sophists. It is the Sophists, Zeus adds, who have generated skepticism of this sort and who have dissuaded others from sacrificing to the gods by claiming that the gods have no concern for the people and no abilities to influence the affairs of people.

After stating that his questions only followed from their earlier conversation, Cyniscus asks for Zeus' indulgence in explaining things as best as Zeus can. Continuing thusly, Cyniscus (ZC:7) and Zeus return to the matter of people making sacrifices to the gods. Acknowledging that the gods can do nothing in return, Zeus says that people make sacrifices to honor the gods for their superiority.

Now, Cyniscus observes, a Sophist would ask if the gods really are superior to humans, since both the gods and humans are subject to fate. Indeed, Cyniscus suggests, the immortality of the gods makes their position inferior, since people can at least escape control through death. By contrast, the slavery of the gods is eternal.

When Zeus (ZC:8) counters, saying that the lives of the gods are blissful and harmonious, Cyniscus points to the imbalance of affairs among the gods, their misadventures involving one another, their troubles relating to humans, and the mistreatments to which the gods are subjected by temple robbers and others who exhibit disrespect for these deities. Still, Cyniscus comments, this, too, has been fated.

After Zeus (ZC:9) cautions Cyniscus that he will regret his insolence, Cyniscus reminds Zeus that nothing can happen to him that has not already been decreed by fate. Cyniscus adds that even most of the temple robbers appear fated to escape punishment for their misdeeds.

Amidst Zeus' protests, Cyniscus (ZC:10) persists with his questions. Most especially, Cyniscus wishes to know about the nature of Providence that, in Zeus' terms, seems to control all. While Zeus says that Cyniscus' intention is to establish the absence of godly providence in human affairs, Cyniscus says that he can take no responsibility for that which is fated, that is, unless Zeus has changed his position on fate.

When Zeus reaffirms that, indeed, fate controls everything, Cyniscus (ZC:11) suggests that the gods are only the instruments or tools of the Fates. Instead of sacrificing to the gods, people might do better to sacrifice to Destiny. Likewise, it would be of no help to honor any of the (three Greek) Fates, since even the Fates seem unable to change any of the destinies of anyone.

Acknowledging the viability of Cyniscus' inferences, Zeus (ZC:12) says that people might still honor

the gods for their abilities to foretell the futures that the Fates have decreed.

Responding to Zeus' claim, Cyniscus (ZC:12-14) points out that an awareness of future events would be of value only if this information would enable people to act in ways that would benefit their circumstances. However, since all is fated, foreknowledge is of no value. Further, Cyniscus notes, most oracles and other signs are so ambiguous that people cannot even be sure of what they are being told. Still, Cyniscus adds, perhaps that obscurity also is fated.

Observing that he is being ridiculed with reason, Zeus (ZC:15) points out that he has a thunderbolt he could unleash against Cyniscus. Replying to Zeus, Cyniscus says that if he is fated to die thusly, he cannot blame Zeus, but only the fate that controls Zeus. In the interim, though, Cyniscus has another question.

Why is it, Cyniscus (ZC:16-17) asks, that temple robbers and other wrongdoers are allowed to escape justice and yet innocent, virtuous people suffer calamities? Why is it that evildoers end up wealthy and happy, while good people experience poverty, disease, and even death at the hands of others?

These seeming injustices, Zeus (ZC:17) explains, will be restored in the afterlife, wherein evildoers will be punished severely and the good will be greatly rewarded.

After Cyniscus (ZC:17) says that he would prefer justice and happiness in mortal life, regardless of

how long or short this may be, than to suffer as some people have done, Cyniscus pursues Zeus' notions of the afterlife.

Cyniscus (ZC:18) says that he has heard that afterlife punishments await those who have behaved badly, while those who have been good and virtuous are allowed to join the souls of (human) heroes. After Zeus concurs, Cyniscus asks Zeus if people should be punished for the things they do unintentionally or conversely, if they ought to be rewarded for the good things they have done unintentionally?

After Zeus says that these things should not be done, Cyniscus states that no one should be rewarded or punished. When Zeus questions Cyniscus on this, Cyniscus explains that if everything people do is in keeping with the inevitable necessity of fate, then only Fate or Destiny should be punished.

Refusing to answer any more questions, Zeus (ZC:19) says he will depart. Even as their dialogue concludes, Cyniscus has yet more to consider. Where do the Fates reside, he wonders, and how do they manage things in such precise detail? Relatedly, given all of the things they manage and all the cares they must have, it appears that they have no freedom whatsoever.

Viewing things thusly, Cyniscus says that he would not trade a poor human existence for the life of the Fates or Destiny. In closing, Cyniscus expresses gratitude for the insight Zeus has provided on Providence and related matters, adding that that may be all Cyniscus was fated to hear.

A Conversation With Hesiod (CH)³⁰

Although Hesiod (circa 700 BCE) may seem a vague, distant figure of little or no consequence to most contemporary readers, those familiar with classical Greek scholarship are aware that Hesiod (with Homer as a major literary accomplice) played a major role in establishing the existence of the Greek gods.³¹

The Greek Olympian gods that Hesiod (*Theogony* [1988]) describes appear to have had their origins in the representations of divinity developed by the Egyptians and other Mediterranean peoples. As well, various classical Greek scholars (e.g., Protagoras [circa 490-420 BCE], Herodotus [circa 485-420 BCE], Plato [circa 420-348 BCE], and Aristotle [circa 384-322 BCE]) envisioned these divinities as mythical long before Lucian's time. Nevertheless, this does not deny the more general fascinations that the Greeks, Romans, and other people who had contact with Greek religion over the millennia to the present time have had with the Olympic gods. In developing his commentary, Lucian goes back to Hesiod as a root source.

In this brief set of fictionalized interchanges, Lycinus (CH:1) begins by commending Hesiod's poetic abilities in depicting a genealogy of the gods (*Theogony* [1988]), as well as providing advice to farmers (*Works and Days* [1988]). Still, Lycinus observes,

³⁰ I am grateful to K. Kilburn for his translation of *A Conversation With Hesiod* in *Lucian* (1959 [Vol. VI:227-237]). The reference numbers are to the Greek text in the (Greek-English) Loeb edition.

³¹ Homer (also circa 700 BCE) is the author assigned to *Iliad* (1990) and *Odyssey* (1991), two of the earliest and best known texts of antiquity. Although the gods are given much less focused attention in Homer's texts than in Hesiod's *Theogony* (1988), the gods assume notable roles in Homer's two extended epic (heroic/adventure) poems.

Hesiod has failed to deliver on his promise to provide something yet more important to people, as well as something that more uniquely would reflect divine inspiration. Lycinus refers here to Hesiod's claim to provide a prophecy of the future.

Continuing, Lycinus (CH:2-3) says that Hesiod is liable to one of three charges: Hesiod lied when he said that the Muses promised him the gift of prophecy; the Muses kept their promise, but Hesiod, out of spite, has kept this to himself; or Hesiod has not yet released the things he has written on this matter. It seems inappropriate, Lucian adds, to suppose that the Muses failed to deliver on their (divinely-enabled) promise.

Responding to Lycinus, Hesiod (CH:4) says that he wrote only what the Muses had given him and Lycinus should ask the Muses about the matter. Noting that he can be held accountable only for the things that he knew himself, Hesiod references his work on farming and shepherding as a case in point. The goddesses, Hesiod assures Lycinus, share their gifts with others as they choose.

Still, Hesiod (CH:5) states, he will defend his poetry. He begins by asserting that it is inappropriate for people to examine poetry in exacting detail, as well as to criticize seeming oversights. To do so would be to rob poets of freedom and poetic expression, the greatest of the resources. Hesiod adds that the poets, including Homer, have been unduly criticized in these ways.

Then, facing the matter of prophecy more directly, Hesiod (CH:6) says that an examination of his *Works and Days*, wherein he gives timely advice to farming

and promises rewards for conscious effort, will provide ample indication of his value as a prophet.

Although appreciating the relevance of Hesiod's *Works and Days* for farmers, Lycinus (CH:7-9) says that advice on farming is not the sort of thing that one might expect from the Muses and divinely inspired poets. Lycinus also states that the farmers are much better prophets on these matters than are the poets. Noting that he, too, can make predictions that attest to the practical wisdoms of people, Lycinus says that if (divinely-inspired) poets are to be of any value in these regards, their prophecies need to be of a more compelling nature. Expressed truthfully, Lycinus concludes, Hesiod knows nothing of prophecies, and if Hesiod has had divine inspiration, it certainly is not very reliable.

Lucian in Context

Mindful of the more immediate practical limitations of space, I have deliberately excluded Lucian's *The False Prophet* (in which Lucian debunks a then thriving religious venture), as well as *The Lover of Lies* (wherein Lucian attends to the tendencies of notably responsible people to become caught up in extraordinary claims about the supernatural [Prus forthcoming]), as well as some other statements Lucian has developed on aspects of religion. I also have omitted some related materials on philosophy (most notably *Philosophies for Sale*, *The Dead Come to Life*, *Double Indictment*, and *Hermotimus*) in which Lucian considers various contradictions, pretensions, and cultic, quasi-religious involvements of philosophers.

Nevertheless, the materials introduced here provide considerable evidence of Lucian's attentiveness to

pragmatist (also interactionist and constructionist) motifs. Lucian's conceptual frame is much less explicit than that developed by Mead (1934), Schütz (1962; 1964), Berger and Luckmann (1966), or Blumer (1969). Nonetheless, Lucian provides a remarkably wide array of materials and observations that pointedly attest to the humanly articulated nature of people's religious experiences. Lucian may be openly skeptical about the viability of people's religious beliefs and practices, but he provides considerable insight into people's encounters with religion, as well as the ways in which these notions become objectified and sustained within a community context.

In Perspective

Symbolization constitutes objects not constituted before, objects that would not exist except for the context of social relationships wherein symbolization occurs. Language does not simply symbolize a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object, for it is a part of the mechanism whereby that situation or object is created. (Mead 1934:78)

Lucian of Samosata may be almost entirely unknown to sociologists of religion, as well as many others in the broader field of religious studies. Likewise, although Lucian may have approached aspects of people's religious beliefs and practices in skeptical, as well as openly depreciative terms, he lays bare the problematic quality of a great many consequential assumptions, claims, and practices regarding people's representations of divinity and their relations with these essences. Moreover, the materials that Lucian has presented, along with other texts developed by various authors

in the classical Greek and Roman eras, represent noteworthy comparative cross-contextual and transhistorical resources for considering and analyzing the many viewpoints and practices that people may invoke as they experience, express, and endeavor to comprehend [religion] as a realm of human knowing and acting.³²

Thus, whereas some may be inclined to envision Lucian's texts as the quaint productions of an author from a distant time, this paper locates these quasi-ethnographic materials from the past within a conceptual scheme that addresses people's experiences with religion in broader processual terms. In this way, by giving more focused attention to the ways in which people engage notions of divinity, we should be able to arrive at a more adequate appreciation of "the realism of religion."

As noted at the outset, there is much in Lucian's considerations of religion that resonates with a pragmatist approach. Indeed, Lucian not only seems remarkably attentive to (a) the idea that religion is a deeply entrenched community-based phenomenon that is maintained through people's images, practices, and emphases but also (b) the notion that religion is a humanly enacted, humanly engaged experiential process.

Relatedly, despite the apparent conceptual and methodological discrepancies that can be found in people's beliefs and practices, *religion takes on a realism* because of the ways that people act towards the objects of their

³² Although some believers may be offended by Lucian's depreciation of religion, it might be noted that some of the most hostile literary criticisms of record are those directed at other religious viewpoints and practices by representatives of particular religions. Indeed, an important part of "the realism of religion" may be seen to revolve around "jealous gods, their detractors, and their fervent supporters."

religion. This includes their viewpoints, practices, and acknowledgments of one another, as well as other matters that involve a great many aspects of their day-to-day lives (especially see: Durkheim 1915 [1912]). Thus, despite the deficiencies one may attribute to religion, there is a resilience (perseverance and resistance) to people's religious beliefs and practices that (externally considered) reasoned challenges generally are unable to overcome.

Expressed differently, the pragmatist standpoint is that reality does not inhere in something external to people, but takes shape only as people act toward things and adjustively assign meanings to the things to which they attend. Still, it is only in the context of group interchange that people (in the process of attending to and making indications toward particular phenomena in the midst of others) may achieve shared, more enduring, and more consequential terms of reference.

Lucian does not address the symbolizing process as explicitly as does Emile Durkheim (1915 [1912]) or George Herbert Mead (1934), but Lucian is highly attentive to the instructed, displayed, enacted, and emotionally experienced features of group life for maintaining the relevance of localized traditions for the ways that people approach and engage matters of religion.

Pursuing the study of religion as human lived experience requires that scholars examine religion mindfully of the sensations, concerns, activities, and relationships to which people attend in these realms of endeavor. It also means focusing on the things that people do to maintain (articulate, protect, preserve, and promote) their notions of religion with respect to the uncertainties, fears, hopes, aspirations, and resources that they

associate with both the present and the future—as well as their attentiveness to lessons from the past.

Whereas those who attempt to explain religion in more structuralist sociological and psychological terms generally overlook these aspects of people's religious involvements, these experiential features are of great importance for those who actually maintain the realism of religion—the members of particular religious communities.

Indeed, people's "participatory experiences" in religion entail linguistically-enabled definitions of situations, focused activities, and adjustive interchanges, as well as particularized modes of emotional expression. These things not only attest to the *enacted*, sociological nature of people's religious experiences but also serve to embed these experiences in the socially achieved, humanly engaged fibers of people's consciousness.

As instances of humanly engaged activity, people's involvements in religion also take participants into realms of openness, mutuality, and resistance. This is signified by matters such as receptivity, intrigue, affection, devotion, coordination, cooperation, loyalty, compromise, competition, regulation, animosity, and conflict. This includes people's attempts to affirm, support, and promote particular viewpoints, as well as their ways of dealing with the resistances they encounter from close associates, other group-based insiders, disinterested others, skeptics, and those promoting other religious viewpoints.

Like those representing other life-worlds, it is important to consider the ways that people experience and engage religion as humanly promoted and contested

arenas of community life (see: Blumer 1971; Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; Prus and Grills 2003).³³ Thus, in addition to the rationales that those articulating religious standpoints offer in making sense of human existence, experiences, losses and enjoyments, and the like, people also may use religion to promote social order and perpetuate particular moral viewpoints, as well as enable certain people to assume more prominent (influential) roles in their respective communities.

Beyond the resources that religious paradigms generally offer people for (a) making sense of the things that happen and (b) helping them deal with the dilemmas, troubles, and losses of the present, people also (c) may invoke notions of divinity in attempts to anticipate and more effectively shape the future.

Although sociologists and others have tended to approach matters such as religion, politics, education, medicine, and recreation as unique arenas of human endeavor and scholarly specialization, Lucian's texts also serve to remind us that these divisions of community life are rather artificial and serve to conceal the many ways in which particular aspects of people's life-worlds may be integrated into other realms of human endeavor—not as factors, but as ongoing, interfused fields of activity and interchange (also see: Plato's *Republic* [1997] and *Laws* [1997]).

Lucian's texts also point to an exceptional assortment of engaged (actively-focused, emotionally-embedded, sometimes entertaining, sometimes unsettling, and frequently intensely experienced) features of people's

³³ Those familiar with Durkheim's (1915 [1912]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* will find much in this conclusion that resonates with the conceptual materials Durkheim develops therein.

religious involvements. These are signified by the collectively-achieved embeddedness of people's religious beliefs and practices in their broader sets of community-based viewpoints, activities, and emotional experiences. In addition, one may recognize a socially achieved synthesis of people's religious experiences with their more comprehensive (embodied and active) senses of self.

Lucian's statements are instructive, too, for acknowledging people's intrigues with matters that transcend human capacities for knowing and acting. Likewise, this material provides scholars with a valuable reminder of the uncertainty with which people live, their concerns about the afterlife, and the ways in which these notions may be integrated into people's here and now existences.

Still, if there is one message that pervades the selection of Lucian's texts considered in this paper, it revolves around the more comprehensive enterprise that accompanies people's notions of religion and the extent to which "the realism of religion" is so deeply rooted in and contingent on the *human activity* that constitutes the longer and shorter term developmental flows of community life.

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