

When Lucian presents philosophers, whether for the better or worse, they are speakers: speakers of extended *logoi* (*Nigrinus*), of shorter *apophthegmata* (*Demonax*), of verbal assaults (Menippus and Diogenes in *Dialogues of the Dead*), theories (*Icaromenippus* 5-9) and puzzles (the letter of the Stoic Hetoemocles in *Symposium*). Yet when Lucian presents subjects who come to know “true” things, or who recognize their ignorance or acknowledge their desire to know, he often uses metaphors of vision, eyes, the sun, light, and shadows (e.g. *Nigrinus* 4, *Slander* 1, 32, *Icaromenippus* 14, *Menippus* 11, 22). These generally sympathetic images of knowing and wisdom are not usually called “philosophy” nor are their subjects “philosophers.” Nor must imagery of vision and light imply a philosophical stance: these are traditional Greek metaphors for knowing that pre-existed any philosophical theories of knowledge. Yet Plato's epistemology, specifically that conveyed in the metaphors of the Sun, the Line and the Cave in *Republic* 507-517, distinguished lower from higher perception or vision and equated the difference with that between belief in images and knowledge of the truth. Because Lucian sometimes combines terminology from Plato's three famous metaphors in striking ways (e.g. in Skintharos' statement in *True Histories* 1.33 that “we conjecture/ *eikazomen* that we have died but we trust/*pisteuomen* that we live,” using the terms from the two lower parts of Plato's Divided Line), because these images often occur in reference to perception within “other worlds,” and because they are often conjoined with a subject's change of state (between life and death, or ignorant and knowing), or a motion from one world to another, we have good reason to ask whether Lucian is not only borrowing Platonic myth (as Georgiadou and Larmour 1998:13 ff. well describe) but also using traits of a specifically Platonic epistemology, and even activating this epistemology exactly when by other measures he seems to attack philosophy. This paper will examine the ways *Icaromenippus* uses para-philosophical concepts to “refute” philosophy and will point to ways Lucian uses this strategy elsewhere.

In *Icaromenippus*, the philosophers are attacked by Menippus himself (5-9, 16), by the Moon (20-21), and finally by Zeus (29-32). Menippus, meanwhile, far from needing a conversion or “initiation” into philosophy (Whitmarsh 2001:258), knows from the start that human life is “laughable and trivial and insecure,” has learned to create leisure for investigating serious matters, and has encountered *aporiae* and phenomena resisting conjecture in his fundamental questions about the *kosmos* (4): while not a philosopher by name or reputation, he has the same desire to know as the first Greek *phusiologoi*. When Menippus seeks help from his contemporary philosophers, he finds them not so much morally corrupt as deficient epistemologically: they claim to “see” truth about the cosmos (5), although they are going blind; they make their pronouncements not as “conjectures” (7) but with the confidence of certainty; and their efforts produce contradictions among themselves (8), the ultimate sign that their mode of truth seeking is futile. Menippus, claiming to take inspiration from an alternative wisdom of Homer and Aesop, appropriates an eagle's wing, and this generates for him an eagle's eye, which unlike other eyes can look straight at the sun (13-14; contrast the difficulty in gazing at the light in *Rep.* 515d-e). Through this quasi-divine eye, Menippus is able to see the human spectacle (15-19), not as it looks to the informed earth-bound (Cynic) observer, who knows that life is a spectacle, but from an even superior perspective: the voices are discordant, the combinations are without order, and finally the choreographer drives the players off the stage (17). In its elements this truth may be more Cynic or Menippean than Platonic (Helm 1906), and it does not reside in a realm separate from that of ordinary belief: the spectacle is the same one we can see on earth. But the objects of Menippus' higher knowledge are a wholly different set from those claimed by the earth's philosophers with their doubly deficient sight, and a contribution from *Republic* 507-517 to Menippus' flight to the sun, if not without a parodic inversion of the appropriate objects of knowledge, seems plausible.