



Lucian's "Menippus or A Consultation with the Dead" features a descent into the world of the dead. The lead character, Menippus, seeks wisdom and advice from the dead on the art of living.

1. How does Menippus, who is identified as a "cynic" philosopher at the beginning of the dialogue, compare to the main character of "The Cynic"? Do you see any connections between these dialogues? What are the major objects of satire in "Menippus"?
2. Menippus first appears attired like Hercules, who was called the "most outstanding" human being in "The Cynic." What might the author mean to communicate by this opening detail?
3. The entrance of Menippus is rather strange and humorous. Throughout the text, what specific details or moments in his trip to the underworld make you laugh, and why?
4. What does Menippus reveal to us about his own character as he describes his trip? Keep careful track of how his words reveal—or conceal—his character.
5. Menippus suggests that human affairs are the work of "sad, unfortunate people." Why is there "nothing new" in the city?
6. Why does Menippus agree to share with Philonides the "new" things he has learned about "our lives" through his journey to Hades, and the "decrees" of the dead about us?
7. According to Philonides, what is the dominant passion of Menippus? What motivates Menippus most strongly?
8. When Menippus explains the reasons that compelled his journey to Hades, he shares how his youthful experience with "poets" and their stories collided eventually with the commands of "the laws" and "law-makers" when he reached manhood. What fundamental question confronted Menippus and left him "in doubt"?
9. What does Menippus want from the philosophers exactly? What does he get from them? What is the most "absurd" thing about philosophers that Menippus eventually notices?
10. What does Menippus learn from different philosophers about pleasure?
11. On what grounds does Menippus console himself after his hopes in the philosophers are disappointed?
12. What exactly are the "strange attorneys" that accuse wrongdoers in the judgment court of Minos?
13. What kind of human evil especially incenses Minos during his careful examination of souls?
14. Why does Dionysius the Sicilian tyrant receive a "favorable judgment" from Minos?
15. When Menippus watches the spectacle of skeletons on the Acherusian plain, "human life" suddenly strikes him as being like "some long pageant." How does he develop the simile? What does this long passage reveal about "the way of mortal affairs" and human role playing? What is the difference between an experienced and an inexperienced actor?
16. Why does Menippus laugh at Mausolus and his tomb, and at "these kings of ours" now become "just like the most worthless of slaves"? How does the dead life of Socrates and Diogenes, both "men of wisdom," compare to the fates of kings?
17. What are, finally, the decrees of the dead against the wealthy? In particular, what does "a certain leading man of the people" say about them? What new "law" is promulgated after his speech?
18. When Menippus comes to Tiresias at last, he asks him what "the best kind of life is" for human beings struggling with ignorance and blindness. "Leading" Menippus very far away from the others, Tiresias answers him. What is his answer exactly? What kind of life is best, finally, and what kind of character seems required to live it?
19. Considering "Menippus" as a whole, do you think Menippus will live this kind of life after his "consultation with the dead"? Does his conversation with his friend suggest that he is likely to take Tiresias's advice to heart?
20. As a translator, More usually follows the Greek very closely. Why do you think he departs at the end of this dialogue, as footnotes 64 and 65 indicate?

Comparing Menippus' trip to the underworld with those in Homer, Plato, and Vergil

1. What does Menippus learn and experience during his visit to the underworld? How does it affect him? How does his journey compare or contrast with Odysseus's in book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey* or Aeneas's in book six of *The Aeneid*?
2. Footnote 61 suggests that Lucian alludes to the ending of Plato's *Republic*, the famous "Myth of Er." Do you agree or disagree? How does Menippus compare to the figure of Er, or Odysseus, in Plato's myth?