

In *Oration 12*, composed for and delivered at the Olympic Games of 97, 101 or 105 CE, Dio Chrysostom treats religion in terms of the formation and transmission of *representations*, both private/mental and public. The public representation on which Dio focuses is of course the great statue of Zeus which Phidias had created half a millennium before. Dio poses the question: precisely what is it that Phidias represented in that statue, and what are the mental representations that we should make or do in fact make when we view it?

Dio's approach is in some ways analogous to modern cognitivist approaches, especially to Dan Sperber's theory of religions as 'epidemics' of mental and public representations (Sperber 1996). These representations are in constant flux and development as mental representations (thoughts) generate material/public representations (texts, artifacts, etc.) which in turn generate new mental representations in fresh minds. Dio also anticipates the modern cognitivist premise of the *naturalness* of religion, i.e. that the representation of supernatural beings is a normal function of the human mind/brain to be studied and explained as such (Boyer 2001).

The paper will explore the similarities — and dissimilarities — between the (by no means untypical) methods of Dio and those of the modern cognitive study of religion (in addition to Sperber 1996, cf. also Boyer 2001, Atran 2002, Whitehouse and Martin 2004, Beck 2006).

Dio is closest to the modern cognitivists in chapters 27-37 where he locates the first 'source' of religion firmly in an innate and universal human capacity for making representations: '... opinion (*doxa*) and thought (*epinoia*) common to the entire human race, both Greeks and barbarians, essential and innate (*anankaia kai emphytos*), naturally occurring in every rational creature, without mortal teacher or mystagogue, never deceptive ...' (27). Emphatically, culture is secondary to nature.

Where Dio parts company with the moderns is in his conviction that our capacity for making representations of the gods is attuned to an external reality, a *kosmos* which includes more than our mere physical environment. Whereas the modern cognitivist sidelines ontological questions — the phenomena of interest are the representations, not the things represented — for Dio representations of the *kosmos*, whether in whole or in part, as an ordered whole ordained by Providence are necessarily well founded.