True things in jest: the intrusion of the philosophic in Julian's *Caesars*.

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In his *Caesars* (more properly titled *Symposium or Kronia*), Julian represents himself as a reluctant humorist: obliged to write a festive skit, he summons a line of deceased Roman emperors to an Olympian feast and subjects them to satirical review. Modern interest in the piece has mostly focused on its literary debts and affiliations, and on what Julian's depictions of his imperial predecessors disclose about the sources and extent of his historical knowledge. Here, we consider another angle. In his prologue, Julian disclaims any talent for comedy and signals that *Caesars*, at bottom, will convey a serious lesson of a philosophic sort: beneath its raillery, he says, its story will convey import truths, in the fashion of the myths recounted in the dialogues of Plato. (For good measure, the myth in *Caesars*' case comes with an extra imprimatur: Julian says it was relayed to him by Hermes – and Hermes will speak to him again as *Caesars* closes, in a coda to that promises him personal salvation in return for his faithful obedience to Mithras.) How seriously can we take this claim for *Caesars*' philosophic seriousness? Where and how does 'philosophy' intrude in the story, and at what level of conceptual precision? Insofar as the myths in Plato's dialogues are at issue, is any particular myth preeminent in Julian's mind? And beyond allusions to Plato's dialogues, are there any distinctively Neoplatonist theories or touches that leave traces in the details in *Caesars*' story? (On this score, correspondences with the *Hymn to King Helios* may be suggestive; it and *Caesars* were composed in the same month.) These questions prompt speculation in turn about the readership, or audience, that Julian envisaged for *Caesars* (on one view, it was a kind of manifesto, produced to instruct his subjects in the principles of true philosophic kingship).