

How is Nissim Ezekiel's poem "Enterprise" a social satire?

It can be said that Nissim Ezekiel's poem "Enterprise" satirizes mankind's typical journey through life. Ezekiel's poem points out that men, as they journey through life, are so focused on their goals that they fail to see the broader meaning of life, the importance of the actual journey, not the destination, the importance of the here and now.

The poem starts out with a group of travelers undertaking a pilgrimage, which is typically understood to be a journey to a holy place so that religious persons can worship their god. In the first stanza, we see that the pilgrims set out "[e]xulting minds and making all / The burdens light," which can be interpreted to mean that they started out on their difficult journey by encouraging each other and making each other feel cheerful so that the journey did not feel like such a burden. However, as the pilgrims progress, they feel more and more weary and more and more tested to the point that "[t]he sun beat down to match [their] rage."

As we progress through the rest of the poem, it becomes clear that the pilgrims have lost all sight of the purpose of their journey, which is to worship. So, by the time they finally reached their holy destiny, they "hardly knew why [they] were there." Instead, "home," the place they left, is the place where they need to "gather grace," meaning reach religious understanding before venturing forth. Hence, had they first reached religious understanding before leaving, they never would have lost sight of the importance of the journey itself, with all of its trials and tribulations. They would have realized that the journey is the true goal, not the destination.

Since all of mankind daily fails to see the importance of the day-to-day journey, allowing themselves to be distracted by the glittering goal, we can see how this poem serves as a social commentary, not just as a religious commentary. Plus, since Ezekiel is poking fun of mankind's actions as they undertake their journey through life, we can also see he is using the poem to satirize mankind, to satirize a very true aspect of society at large.