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SLOPSISM IN THE COLOSSUS OF MAROUSSI BY HENRY MILLER

DR. SHIKHA AGARWAL

There are different kind of slopism viz . metaphysical, epistemological and son on. In this paper I wish to find out what of slopism is there in The **Colossus of Maroussi** if any. Metaphysical solipsism is the "strongest" variety of solipsism. Based on a philosophy of subjective idealism, metaphysical solipsists maintain that the self is the only existing reality and that all other reality, including the external world and other persons, are representations of that self, and have no independent existence. There are weaker versions of metaphysical solipsism, such as Caspar Hare's egocentric presentism (or perspectival realism), in which other people are conscious but their experiences are simply not *present*.

Epistemological solipsism is the variety of idealism according to which only the directly accessible mental contents of the solipsistic philosopher can be known. The existence of an external world is regarded as an unresolvable question rather than actually false.

Epistemological solipsists claim that realism requires the question: assuming that there is a universe independent of an agent's mind and knowable only through the agent's senses, how is the existence of this independent universe to be scientifically studied?If a person sets up a camera to photograph the moon when he is not looking at it, then at best he determines that there is an image of the moon in the camera when he eventually looks at it. Logically, this does not assure that the moon itself (or even the camera) existed at the time the photograph is supposed to have been taken.

The Colossus of Maroussi is an impressionist travelogue by Henry Miller which was first published in 1941 by Colt Press of San Francisco. Set in pre-war Greece of 1939, it is ostensibly a characterization of the "Colossus" of the title, George Katsimbalis, a poet and raconteur. The work is frequently heralded as Miller's best.

In 1939, Henry Miller left Paris, his home of nine years, as the events of the Second World War began to unfold. An impoverished writer in need of rejuvenation, he travelled to Greece at the invitation of his friend, the writer Lawrence Durrell, who lived in Corfu. Miller had already found his voice as an author whilst an expatriate and

had published some of his best-known works, including Tropic of Cancer, Black Spring and Tropic of Capricorn. The text is inspired by the events that occurred during Miller's nine months living there. Miller's evaluation is tempered by the outbreak of the Second World War which eventually forced him to return to America in December 1939. The book, written in New York, was influenced by Miller's resentment at having to return to his native land and his subsequent feeling of isolation.

Okay, that's probably an exaggeration, but the sentiment is, I think, accurate. As does Kerouac in *On the Road*, Miller displays the same quickening to judgment, the same contempt for the bourgeois, the same obsession for the real. Greece to him is real. Unfortunately, the Greece that he sees is anything but. Miller falls in love with a vision of Greece that is as much made of present Greek poverty and past Greek myth. Part lengthy diatribe against modern civilization, part poetic paean of the Greek landscape, *The Colossus of Maroussi* is more a voyage into Miller than it is into Greece. Some critics call *The Colossus of Maroussi*—Henry Miller's account of his trip to Greece on the eve of World War II—the greatest travel book ever. But, like all great travel books, it's much more than mere depiction of beautiful landscapes, missed connections, bad weather, and surly waiters—though Miller recounts those as well. Rather, the book stands as a compelling paean to the Greek spirit, to liberty, and to life—as well as a barbaric yawp prefiguring the coming cataclysm.

The Canadian critic Northrop Frye once said that the "story of the loss and regaining of identity…is the framework of all literature." That certainly applies well to travel literature, where the journey often occurs within the narrator as well as over the Earth, and in particular to *The Colossus of Maroussi*. At its core lies Miller's spiritual transformation through welcomed encounters with warm-hearted, generous, high-spirited Greeks, particularly the "colossus" Katsimbalis. "I love these men, each and every one," writes Miller, "for having revealed to me the true proportions of the human being…the goodness, the integrity, the charity which they emanated. They brought me face to face with myself, they cleansed me of hatred and jealousy and envy."

Like most of Miller's writing, from the joyous novel *Tropic of Cancer* to his trenchant essays, this book succeeds thanks to his freewheeling iconoclasm, his divine madness, and his inimitable language:"…Out of the corner of my eye I caught the full devastating beauty of the great plain of Thebes which we were approaching and, unable to control myself, I burst into tears. Why had no one prepared me for this? I cried out…We were amidst the low mounds and hummocks which had been stunned motionless by the swift messengers of light. We were in the dead center of that soft silence which absorbs even the breathing of gods…Through the thick pores of the earth the

dreams of men long dead still bubbled and burst, their diaphanous filament carried skyward by flocks of startled birds."

Here, as always, we see Miller as primitive shaman, awed and humbled by nature and humanity, disdainful of modernity and materialism: "Mechanical devices have nothing to do with man's real nature—they are merely traps which Death has baited for him."He underscores this view of us, as animals caught in a steel maze of our own making, by his frequent metaphoric mixing of nature's fecundity and manmade tawdriness, as when he describes the approach to Delphi:"This is an invisible corridor of time, a vast, breathless parenthesis which swells like the uterus and having bowelled forth its anguish relapses like a run-down clock."No, this is not your grandmother's travel writing, with its propriety, politeness, and "realistic" depictions, but word-pictures of an emotional landscape. That's the essence Miller strives to show: his subjective, experiential, inner reality. The subject here is Henry Miller, and what matters most is how these objects—the world—affect him.

As a result, this 1941 literary bombshell, ostensibly about Greece, documents Miller's memories of New York inspired by a view of Athens, provides a lengthy disquisition on jazz when he's confronted by a French woman who disdains the chaos of Greece, and paints a disquieting, mad, and ominous picture of Saturn when he climbs to an observatory and views it through a telescope. He tells us his dreams and daydreams and what he wished he would have said. Everything is fair game; the seeming digressions frequent and fabulous.

This is still nonfiction, but Miller's imaginative life at the time of his travels is real, and thus an important part of his narrative. In the end it all hangs together like a sumptuous tapestry woven by an inspired madman—which perhaps it is. We come away understanding more about the taste of Greek water, the quality of Greek light, and the magnificence of the Greek spirit than from reading all the objective reporting on Greece in the Library of Congress. He captures it all as it arrests him.

Traveling at times with Katsimbalis, the poet Seferiades, and/or Lawrence Durrell, Miller moves from Athens and Corfu to Knossus and Delphi as if in search of dead Greek gods—and finds them reincarnate. A feature of the metaphysical solipsistic worldview is the denial of the existence of other minds. Since personal experiences are private and ineffable, another being's experience can be known only by analogy. Philosophers try to build knowledge on more than an inference or analogy. The failure of Descartes' epistemological enterprise[*citation needed*] brought to popularity the idea that all certain knowledge may go no further than *"I think; therefore I*

exist"[3] without providing any real details about the nature of the "I" that has been proven to exist[*citation needed*].

The theory of solipsism also merits close examination because it relates to three widely held philosophical presuppositions, each itself fundamental and wide-ranging in importance:

1. My most certain knowledge is the content of my own mind—*my* thoughts, experiences, affects, etc.
2. There is no conceptual or logically necessary link between mental and physical—between, say, the occurrence of certain conscious experience or mental states and the 'possession' and behavioural dispositions of a 'body' of a particular kind
3. The experience of a given person is *necessarily* private to that person

Solipsism was first recorded by the Greek pre-Socratic sophist, Gorgias (c. 483–375 BC) who is quoted by the Roman skeptic Sextus Empiricus as having stated:[4]

1. Nothing exists.
2. Even if something exists, nothing can be known about it.
3. Even if something could be known about it, knowledge about it can't be communicated to others.

Much of the point of the Sophists was to show that "objective" knowledge was a literal impossibility. (See also comments credited to Protagoras of Abdera).

Metaphysical solipsism is the "strongest" variety of solipsism. Based on a philosophy of subjective idealism, metaphysical solipsists maintain that the self is the only existing reality and that all other reality, including the external world and other persons, are representations of that self, and have no independent existence.[*citation needed*] There are weaker versions of metaphysical solipsism, such as Caspar Hare's egocentric presentism (or perspectival realism), in which other people are conscious but their experiences are simply not *present*.

Solipsists may view their own pro-social behaviors as having a more solid foundation than the incoherent pro-sociality of other philosophies. Indeed, they may be more pro-social because they view other individuals as actually being a part of themselves. Furthermore, the joy and suffering arising from empathy is just as real as the joy and suffering arising from physical sensation. They view their own existence as human beings to be just as

speculative as the existence of anyone else as a human being. Epistemological solipsists may argue that these philosophical distinctions are irrelevant since the professed pro-social knowledge of others is an illusion.

We are lucky enough to travel with him, enduring treacherous seas, precipitous mountain passes, and heroic debauches, as well as feasting on the simple food, viewing the sublime beauty, and feeling the brotherhood and humanity that come to Miller like beneficent Peloponnesian sun wherever he turns. It is a trip I will make over and over again. So,we come to know that it has more of epistemological slopsism.

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