

Colossal & Tiny Meanings of Life

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 15 March 2012 19:29

After a long, dusty, dirty spell on Political Row, taking in the various forms of Republican roadkill -- best they can muster in this, the *Year of GOP Mass Hysteria & Ignorance, c. 1312* -- it is a soothing relief to bathe a while in modern, scientific waters, sponge off some grime, replenish logic and sanity lost in skirmishes with the heavily duped and dumbed-down.

There is nothing like strolling among some new discoveries and thoughts to help illuminate parts of the path one might be on, to help leave behind the same old, lame, old laments, and be rid of the filth oozed from intractable GOP obsessions with constant obstruction at all levels, at all costs, not matter what price all the People must pay.

An excellent spot-relief spa and fishing spot for science news is the BBC, always worthy of trawling, never know what you'll get. This time out: colossal squid, half-again as long as a Londoner's double-decker bus. Along with giant squid, the colossal squid have eyes almost a foot across, huge, even for their gigantic scale, especially given ratios in the rest of the animal kingdom. Turns out the huge eyes are likely useful only as early-warning systems, not for clear seeing at depth, but for spotting large, moving blobs in limited light -- something signifying an old enemy: *sperm whales*.

Despite the swiveling, barbed hooks on colossal squid, matching the wounds seen on sperm whales, indicating the two do routine battle, the whales win these battles often enough for squid beaks to be sometimes seen in the stomachs of whales.

Back at the end of February, New Zealand fishermen landed the first intact, adult, colossal squid, just ten pounds short of a thousand, coming in at 33 feet long. The species, a rarity, it's thought, was first identified in 1925. No one knows for sure where they top out, these mysterious creatures. Everything need not be reduced down to the level of food, but one expert's statement was a startling indicator of the size and scope of this happenstance catch: *C alimari rings from this one would be like tractor tires*.

Food for plenty of thought, showing us how much we know about *the deeps*

The same gigantic eyes in such squid are also seen in fossil ichthyosaurs, too, making scientists suspect predation by whales has driven the evolutionary bus for whale prey having bigger

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headlights or windshields -- for having larger eyes -- to help them spot their predating pursuers, and, sometimes, staying alive by running the heck away from those hurtling blobs, from those wriggling and fast-swimming sperm whales.

Switching gears on you here, regarding life and its amazing range of sizes, from micro-compacts to busses and beyond, here is a reminder it's 2012, and we are still arguing about human sperm and egg, of course. See: [Sperm whales hunger for squid](#). [Squid hunger for life](#). [Humans hunger to argue like mad about life, about everything, really](#).

We appear to all be just following our natures. So, before we amble off here, get rambling on some other thing, we wanted to pass along a couple points regarding human reproduction. These caught our ear on Mike Malloy's radio show, and thought them highly worthy of passing along for your consideration, too.

The first point is an easy one, a linguistic stumbling block we've all been falling over, breaking our necks all the time, usually without even knowing so. The stumbler here is a mighty big humbler: the easily thrown-around phrase, "birth control" -- is actually better named "pregnancy control," reflecting a few facts of use. Unknown, the inception date of using that errant phrase, but its use and reception has plunged the conversation into the deep freeze, as if Frank Luntz had crept back into the language, sprayed us all, and the topic, with liquid nitrogen, kept the idea poisoned, frozen in time. *Thaw this one out, see what you think.*

The second point is just as crisply refreshing in vision, although likely not for the usual hotheads: *Life is **not created** at conception, it is **passed on** at conception.* This point was brought up by one of Mike's listeners, a retired scientist who said she had spent an entire lifetime studying life itself. The listener suggested there are times when debates are not resolved because of the question being asked. In the eternal debates about abortion, for example, the listener pointed out that we all get hopelessly bogged down in asking, "When does life begin?" The question really should be, "When does legal personhood begin?"

Take a moment, squint with your eyes, and see this part clearly, too. Only life can give life. Life does not arrive magically when sperm and egg meet -- both are already alive. Sperm and egg are both alive, are both human cells, but not yet a person. A zygote is a clump of human cells, like an embryo. Neither are persons, just as spilled sperm is not a "spilled person."

We should all re-focus the conversation instead on an area nonetheless tricky: deciding when legal personhood begins, the only area in which government has any business in any of our

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lives, large or small. This is the real question all the bickering's been begging all this time, but that none of us have been seeing, as our eyes are -- *scientifically speaking* -- still quite small.

Mike Malloy's radio show has been spoken of here, and cannot be spoken about too much, nor too highly. ☐ If you are not listening to Mike, you are not getting the whole story. ☐ Find his show locally and/or get info here: ☐ <http://www.mikemalloy.com>. ☐ Listen, support, repeat. ☐ Your scientifically-oriented brain will thank you. ☐ As do we.