

The Big

by [Robert Lewis](#) (May 2021)



Loddie, Michael Williams, 2007

. . . the use of reason is to justify the obscure desires that move our conduct, impulses, passions, prejudices and follies.

—Joseph Conrad

It is a law of the universe. Small wants to get big. Big wants to get bigger. Bigger wants to be mega-big. If all things small (a grain of sand, cell life) could yearn, they would yearn to be big. Like infinity itself, or the number of zeros in a bank account, there are no limits to bigness; unless bigness, as a mirror image of the expanding universe, of its

own internal mandate is programmed to collapse on itself and become smaller than small. The stuff of the Big Bang, we are told.

The impulse towards big is coeval with the survival instinct. Almost without exception bigness is being's riposte to the menace of obliteration, oblivion, nothingness. A cliff side—but not the pebble—will survive the erosions of wind and water. A big animal will best a smaller one. Under a searing sun, a lake will survive puddles and ponds.

Bigness stands for presence, perseverance, power. Bigness increases the odds of duration. In the proximity of big, small is more fragile, vulnerable. When small becomes smaller it can perish or disappear. Towards the end of life, all things become smaller: ice-floes melt away, plant life withers and shrivels, humans shrink between two and three inches.

As life forms reach their zenith they expand, vaunt their strength, flash feathers and colours, swell their sexual parts to make themselves noticed. In the cosmos, a black hole gets noticed when it explodes into a galaxy.

Life begins as a single ephemeral cell equidistant between being and nothingness. A human being is comprised of billions of cells that can sustain the death of tens of thousands of its own on a daily basis without consequence. From brawn to brain size, bigness is natural selection's favourite algorithm.

Big feeds off small. Small things are swallowed into big. Big fish bottomfeed off small fish. Small farms disappear into mega-farms. A big business buys out, acquires through predatory mergers smaller ones, local enterprises go national, and then international. When corporations are sufficiently big (powerful), they are able to dictate to governments tax policy specific to their advantage; they influence the dynamics of a

country's engagement with foreign governments in the drafting of trade agreements, strategic alliances; they manipulate elections, consumer behaviour. These developments are the natural outreach of bigness, and provide the reasons and rationale why big wants to become bigger. Big is synonymous with power and influence. Unrestrained self-interest is the handmaiden of the big.

Big business typically looks for ways and means to diversify in order to maintain its bigness or become bigger. Specialty stores and websites now offer a range of products outside their specialty: medical and pharmaceutical sites offer travel packages, music videos, traffic and weather reports, live streaming of news—whatever it takes to pre-empt becoming smaller by becoming bigger.

On the world stage, a big nation, a large population is much more likely to preserve than smaller ones. There was a Roman time when there were more Jews in the world than Christians. Today there are two billion Christians and only 15 million Jews. Big numbers count big. There would not have been a Holocaust had there been two billion Jews in the world.

There is no finessing or downplaying the importance of being quantitatively big, just as big's self-esteem is appropriately proportionate to its bigness.

Big speaks loud and proud in the exponential language of ubiquity. Dandelion spore in its extravagance is spread by the wind and takes root everywhere. Fledgling, nascent ideas (divine right, democracy, communism, the Ten Commandments) become big ideas by virtue of the number of minds and territory under their persuasion.

Small resents big; small envies big; small's confession is that it wants to be big. In pursuit of big, the means—the lies and deceits—justify the ends. On the silver screen, small looks big when saloon doors are shrunk, and the

small actor, a Dudley Moore (5'2"), a Joe Pesci (5'3"), a Richard Dreyfuss (5'4"), a Dustin Hoffman (5'5") is provided a raised platform to meet the taller actress. Fame is big and is why the small disproportionately seek fame and fortune. People small in their field predictably exaggerate, inflate their accomplishments, their wealth, their prowess.

Small people come to believe that bigness can be achieved through vicarious association, and are always looking for ways to engineer meaningful contact with big people. However more explicit in women, the groupie instinct runs deep in both sexes. Magazine culture caters to the unacknowledged or subconscious desire of small people wanting to feel intimate with big (famous) people. When a small person purchases *People* magazine, s/he is confessing her/his unhappiness being small, and wishing to become big. Advertisers pay big money to big people in order to sell their products to small people who feel big wearing, driving or owning them.

Big, in manner and style, is charismatic and sexual. Women are attracted to men who are accomplished (big) in their field of endeavour: cinema, sports, politics. Among smaller males, one of the bitterest truths to swallow about bigness is that it takes precedent over physical appearance and personhood. It is not uncommon to observe young, attractive women in intimate relationships with old and unattractive men: they find bigness (wealth, prestige, fame) attractive.

But big is not a law unto itself. When big becomes its own terminus, when it violates its limits, it risks self-negating. Whatever its project, big must learn to stay within itself as it pertains to fitness and aptitude for a desired outcome. Every big must uncover its particular law of bigness. Woe to the man whose goal or project blinds him to his unfitness for it.

A company or country that becomes too big at the

expense of the millions of its small parts may be made small by these parts joining together to become big enough to undo big's disregard for small's role in big's being big. In the 1980s, millions of small Filipinos turned against their leader, Ferdinand Marcos, and made him small. A small nation, blinded by ambition, yearning to become big or bigger on the world stage, may unwisely set itself against a bigger nation, and in the process, become smaller, or disappear altogether.

Since Hiroshima, bigness (an unholy alliance of big bomb and big miscalculation) no longer answers to the predilections of a species that finds itself teetering on the brink of an apocalypse of its own making. If man is proving to be no match against his intractable nature, what resources are at his disposal that would allow him to outwit, outbig the big? What conjunction of events will compel him to prioritize reason and Being above the bigness that derives from the mechanical and biological?

Big becomes truly big, achieves grandeur and its distinctly human aspect in the play of freedom. Big evolves, grounds itself philosophically (ontologically) by turning its first principles and assumptions about the world into subjects of inquiry. Such an undertaking is tantamount to a revolt against the conventional modalities of bigness.

The challenge of bigness is to free itself from its worst impulses and the threat of self-obliteration in whose aftermath awaits a reversion to the bigness that reigned before the advent of Being and freedom (before self-consciousness), a bigness that was inseparable from dumb nature.

Integrating the strictly human dimensions of bigness into the productive life of the species is not just a big deal—it is the biggest deal. Man is still playing with the same cards he was dealt when he took his first human steps, but now the game is called Either/Or—winner take all, loser

lose all; and we are all players on the biggest stage where there is ground zero cold comfort to be had in the Camille Paglia utterance “Nuclear war would just be a spark in the grandeur of space.”

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