

Universals, Particulars, and the Heartbreak of the Excluded Middle



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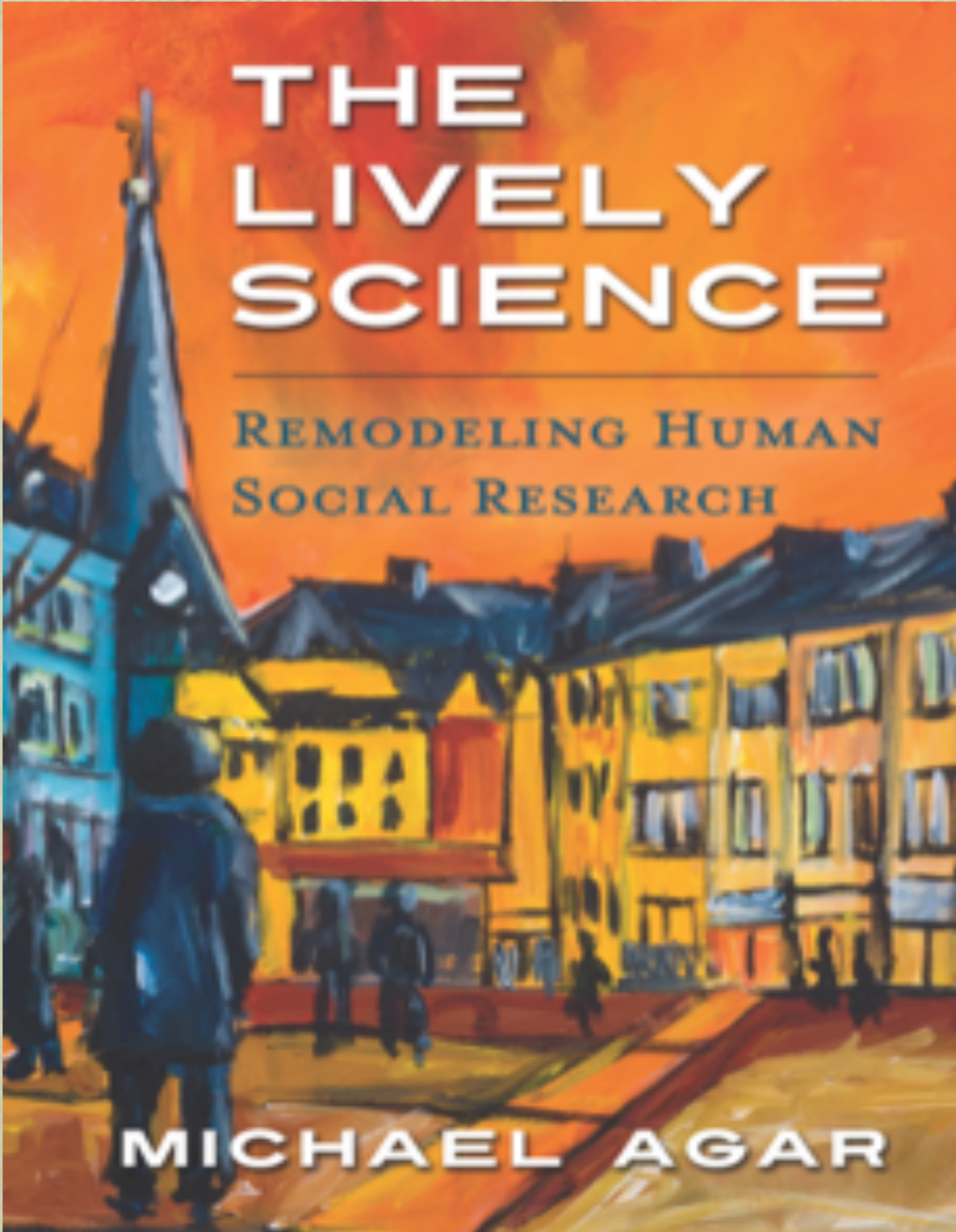
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Here's an Example Excluded Middle That's Still In The Way

Edward Tylor (1871):

Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (p.1)

[this introduces the continuing confusing between trying to bring together under the word 'culture' both historical objects, and particularized internal properties of 'man']

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949):

Man is a biological being as well as a social individual. Among the responses which he gives to external stimuli, some are the full product of his nature, and others of his condition... But it is not always easy to distinguish between the two... Culture is neither simply juxtaposed to nor simply superposed over life. In a way, culture substitutes itself to life, in another way culture uses and transforms life to realise a synthesis of a higher order. (1969 [1949]: 4)

Franz Boas (The mind of primitive man 1911):

Culture may be defined as the totality of the mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the behavior of individuals composing a social group collectively and individually in relations to their natural environment, to other groups, to members of the group itself and of each individual to himself. It also includes the products of these activities and their role in the life of the groups. The mere enumerations of these various aspects of life, however, does not constitute culture. It is more, for its elements are not independent, they have a structure (p. 149)

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952)

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (p. 357)

With thanks to Hervé Varenne's web page

http://varenne.tc.columbia.edu/hv/clt/and/culture_def.html

Rich Points within and between

- Incomprehensible
- Contradiction
- Depart from Expectation
- Repetition
- New/Old Information
- High Arousal

Theory of Noticing

The Translation Metaphor

- The goal of HSR is to *translate* meanings and contexts between two or more POVs
- “Translate” here means showing how social action from one point of view makes sense from another
- Avoid the moral relativity trap. This is about meaning-making across semiotic differences, not moral evaluation
- Making sense of human differences in terms of human similarities

But it's not all differences

Maybe not even mostly differences

What about the psychic unity part

What about **human universals**

What about a theory of what it means to be human?

Kluckhohn's mantra

<http://www.pangeaday.org/filmDetail.php?id=18>

It might be, in our poststructural world, that the best way to teach intercultural communication would be to teach human universals.

The AI/Serious games project

Universals Presupposed and Assumed

Schmäh

Capotear

Cop

Couldn't do it without human universals

Another excluded middle bites the dust

One historical way anthro tried to handle this
excluded middle and why it didn't work

(Phon)etic and (Phon)emic

How does biology play into all this?

Does Universal Necessarily Mean Biology?

The drug case, brain science as way to avoid questions (naive realism), but mechanisms of addiction useful and helpful to explain variation, as in endorphins. Trend theory identifies group but within group 15% or so.

Epigenetics? At least a reasonable research question.

Maybe not a choice between universals and particular, or between biology and culture.

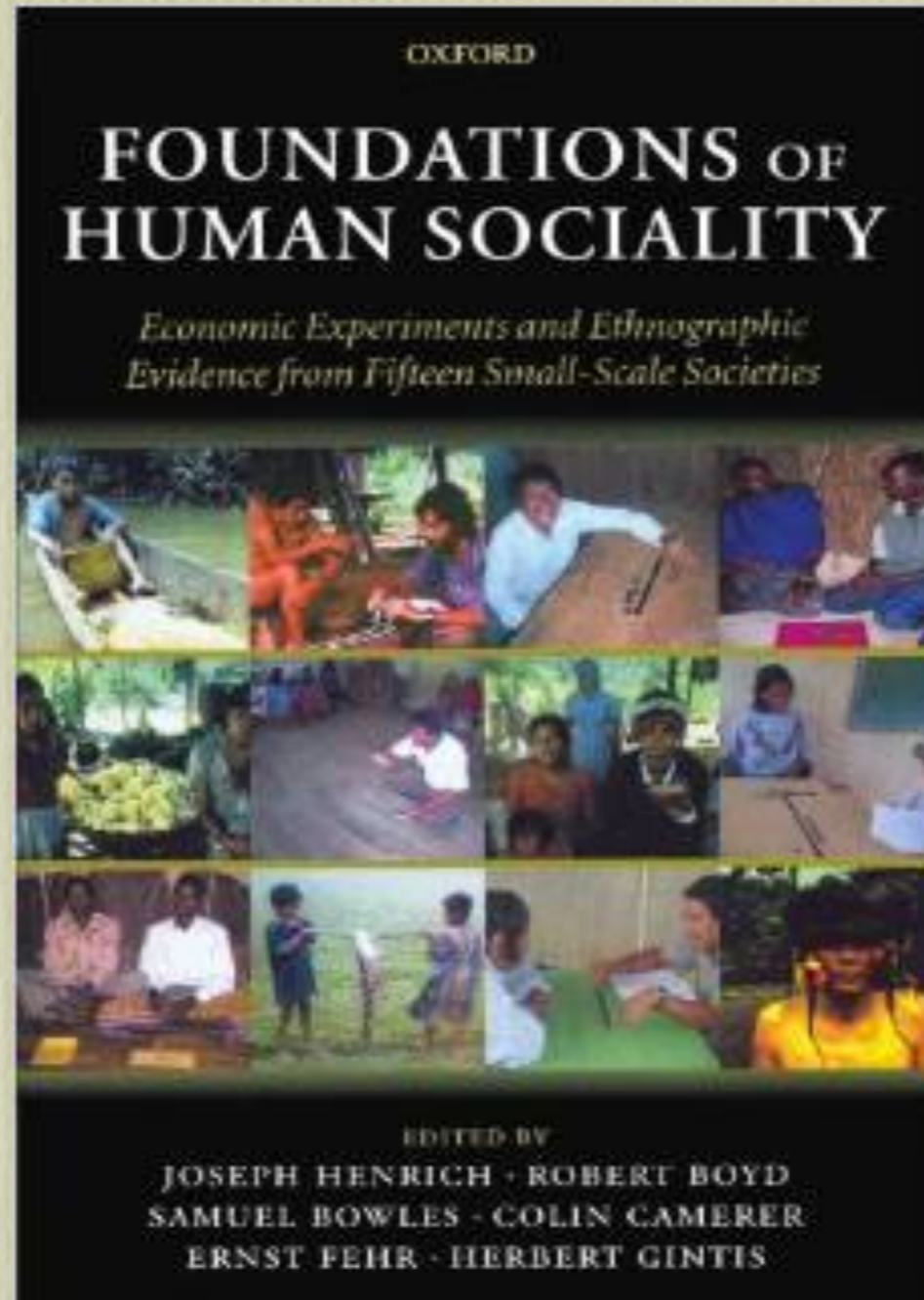
Maybe both/and rather than either/or.

Return to anthro tradition?

So how do we get out of the excluded middle
with both ends intact?

How do we include ***both*** “C”ulture, a theory of being human,
and “c”ultures, the various forms humanity takes,
in our research?

Fairness, for example



Comparison

The Ultimatum Game

None played like an economist

Usual x 40-50% offer, 15 villages x 25-57%

Rejections vary, 4 no rejections, some accepted less than 30%,
two rejected > 50%

Case of PNG, hi 33% reject even with hi 41% offers

Relation to everyday, work coop or game, not anonymous

Extrafamilial task groups, market integration

Sometimes just say what?

Frans de Waal Fairness Study



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meiU6TxysCg>

Theory of Mind

Makes fairness possible

(Though what is “fair” varies)

Not to mention Human Social Research?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUpXZksAMPw>

The Social Brain Hypothesis

Boyd and Richerson Cultural Evolution

1. Mutual learning selected for rapid adaptation to varying climates

2. Increased group variation leads to group selection

3. Within group pro sociality, moral system, empathy, shame

Probably in Pleistocene, particularly chaotic. Bad equilibria evolve as well because credulous, i.e. “readiness to believe things”

The Excluded Cultural Middle?

So here's the design

Given a candidate for basic dimension of experience
like fairness

Empirical distribution?

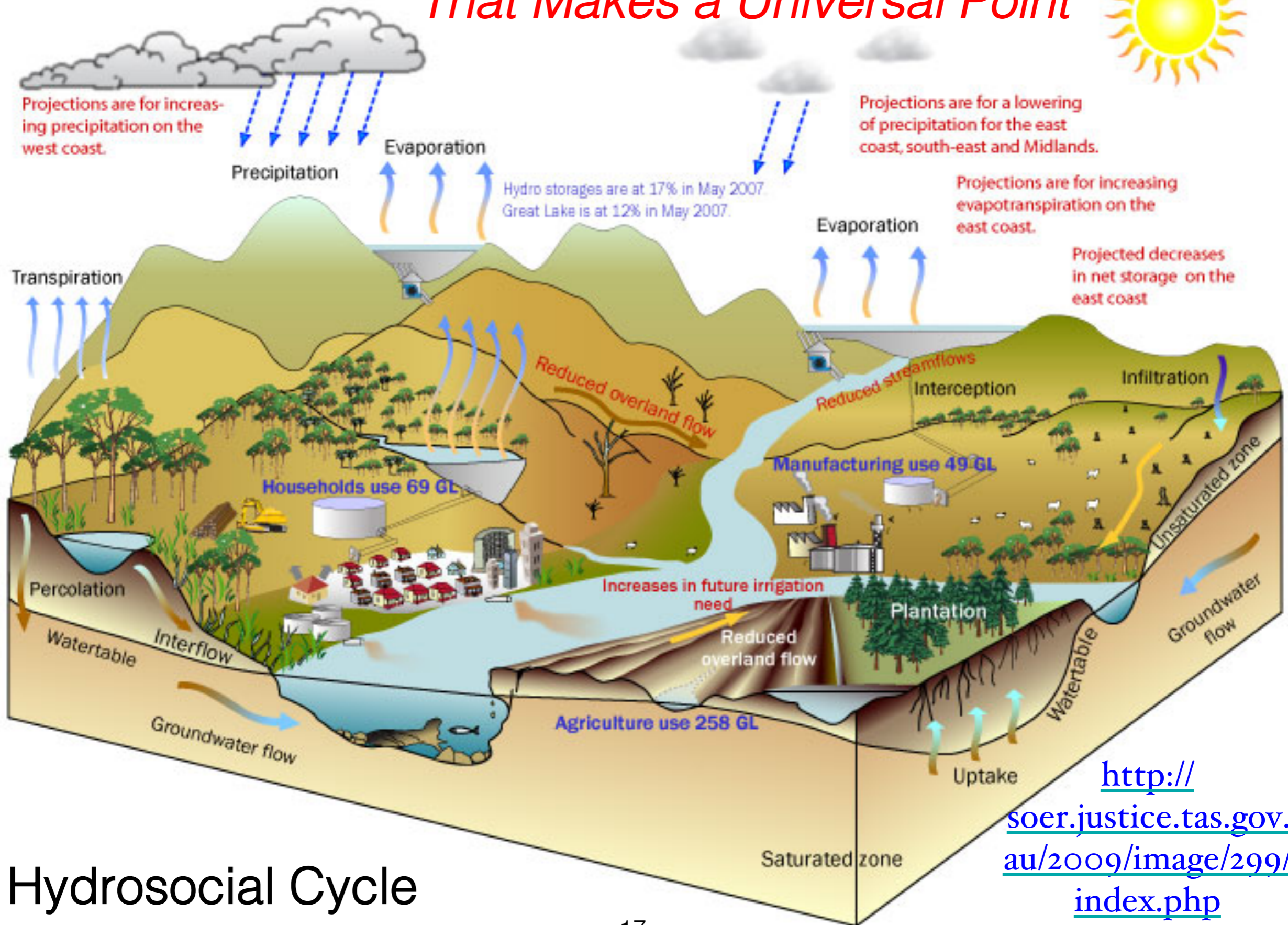
Primates?

Child development?

Evolutionary plausibility?

Then what is the space of specific instances
and how and why does it vary?

Humans and Nature in *the Same Schema* *That Makes a Universal Point*



Hydrosocial Cycle

<http://soer.justice.tas.gov.au/2009/image/299/index.php>

So fairness at scale is major in making sense out of history,
contemporary political ecology, discourse variations,
in hydrosociality as well as
problem-solving and conflict resolution
and governance change

What other fundamental dimensions might be amenable?

Trust, Transparency, Sanction?

Biology and Culture/culture part of the phenomenon of interest

So are physics and chemistry

Not to mention political economy, history, etc.

This is your brain; this is your brain on distinctions. Repeal the Law of the Excluded Middle

Data construction fluid, not predetermined

What is the question?

What are the relevant domains and levels and interactions?

This is why water is so complicated.

You may get it right, but you'll get grief from the idea distinguishers

Enough Already