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Is Context and Complexity a Bridge Too Far? Metaphors for Infusing Multi-Level Governance in Policy

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The views expressed are those of the author and are not attributable to the Economic Research Service or U.S. Department of Agriculture





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Quoted in “The Rhetoric of Economics”

a memorable metaphor has the power to bring two separate domains into cognitive and emotional relation by using language directly appropriate to the one as a lens for seeing the other





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Outline

- Why are memorable metaphors so powerful?
- Suspicion of metaphors as tools of simplification
- Simple vs. complex natural metaphors
- Multi-level governance as tending a garden





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A 2016 Update to Max
Black
Good metaphor links a
paradigmatic way of knowing
the world with our hard-wired
programs for surviving in it.





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Inputs to Regional Policy Formation

World Bank *Reshaping Economic Geography*/
New Economic Geography
/Place Neutral

Evidence
Paradigm

OECD *Promoting Growth in all Regions*/Economic
Geography/Place-Based

Engines of Growth

Metaphor

No Place Based Metaphor

Evolutionary Hard Wiring to Solve Survival
Problems





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Paradigms are generally inaccessible things

par · a · digm

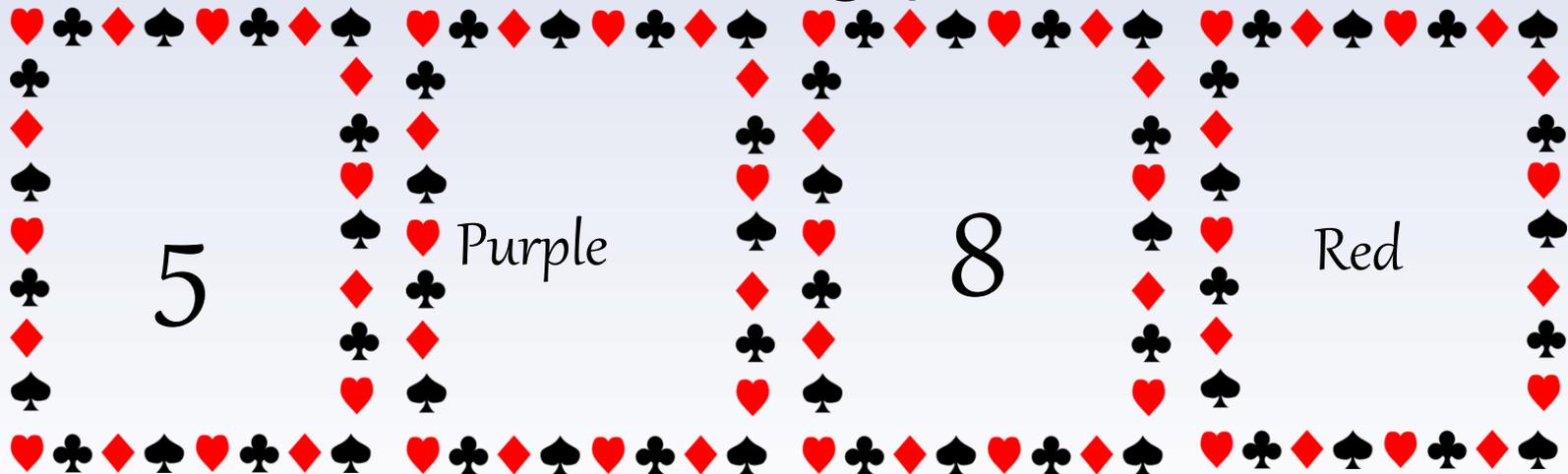
/'perə ,dīm/

1. a framework containing the basic assumptions, ways of thinking, and methodology that are ***commonly accepted by members of a scientific community*** [emphasis added].



Logic Problem

- If a card has an even number on one face, it has the name of a primary color on its opposite face. Which two cards do you need to flip over to assess whether I am telling you the truth?



Parallel Logic Problem

- New rule: if you're under 18, you cannot drink alcohol. Now each card shown below has the age of a person on one side and the drink they are holding on the other. Which cards do you need to turn over to see if the rule is being broken?





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Ease of Solving Natural Problems Points to Value of Nonrational Ways

- A new wrinkle on Milton Friedman's "As If" argument
 - The pool player does not know the geometry needed to rationally solve the problem of getting the ball into the pocket, but primitive functions developed to exploit the laws of motion to increase survival chances work "as if..."
- But while the mathematician can specify a highly detailed, irrefutable *representation of the truth of the matter*, the pool player possesses an ineffable *sense of the truth of the matter*.





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Metaphors as Tools of Simplification

- Ostrom's *Governing the Commons* takes a pretty dim view of the value of metaphor for helping to solve social problems
- Need to distinguish between value of tool and value of how tool is used
- Economics as social physics eager to exploit First Law of Thermodynamics metaphors

- Economics as sustainability science better suited to Second Law of





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Arithmomorphic transformation of dialectical problems

- The persuasiveness of *Reshaping Economic Geography* accomplished by providing a natural lens for seeing a complex problem, not by inducting policy-makers as neophyte neoclassical economists
- Paradigmatic way of knowing world linked to neural machinery to solve specialized problems of locomotion and conservation of energy





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Is neural machinery concerned with order and decay in open systems?

- If your theory is found to be against the second law of thermodynamics I can give you no hope; there is nothing for it but to collapse in deepest humiliation -- A.S. Eddington
- Is “optimization” merely a contrived objective relative to the survival instinct of balancing exploitation with exploration?





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A sufficient statistic for Engines of Growth regional policy

Distance—why Americans must be mobile
Economic production per square kilometer in the United States



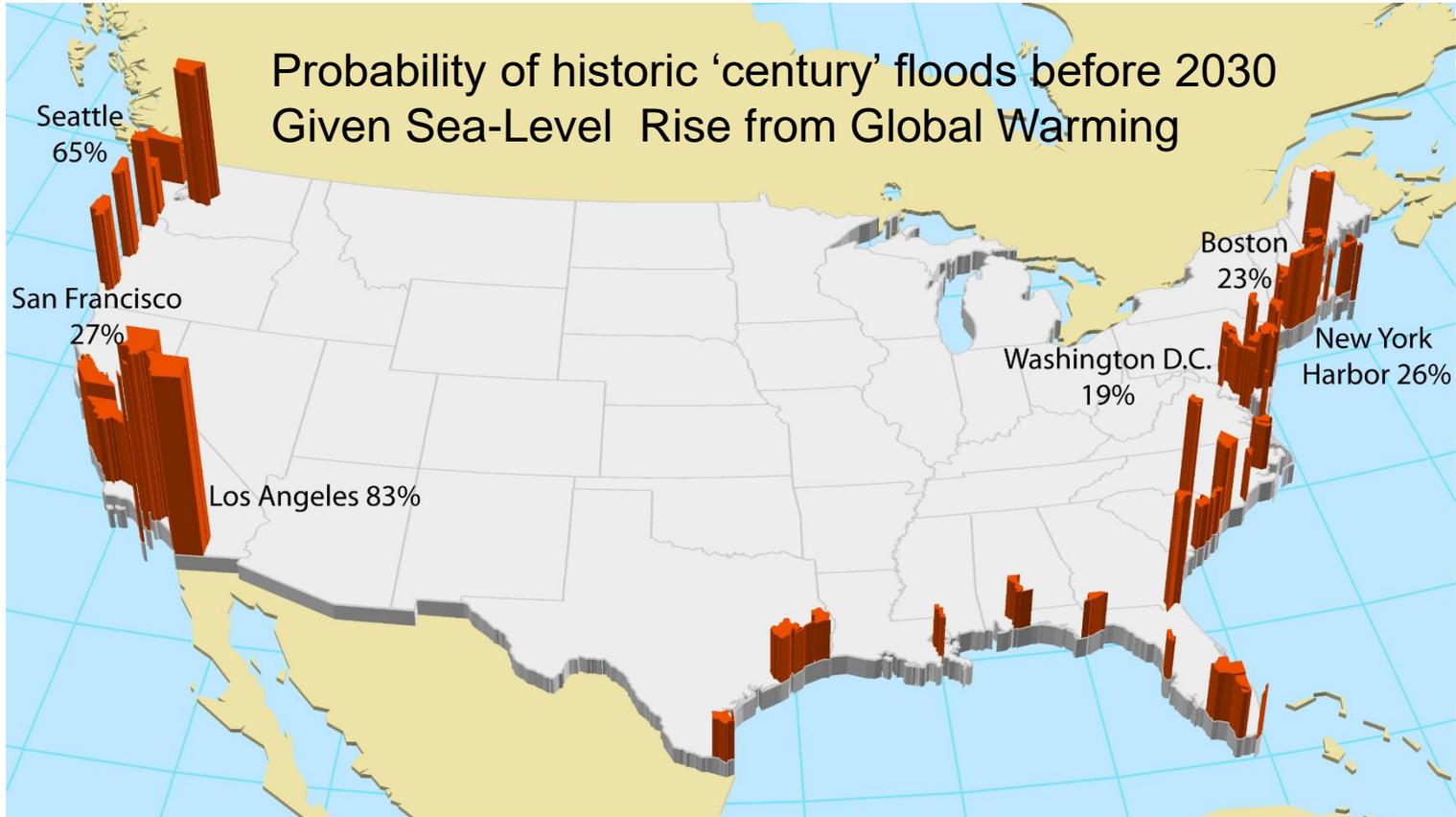
Source: WDR 2009 team and World Bank Development Research Group based on subnational GDP estimates for 2005. See also Nordhaus (2006).





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A sufficient statistic for differentiated pathways to growth



Source: Strauss, Tebaldi, and Ziemlinski (2012)





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Creative coping in a complex world

If we want to push the envelope of complexity further, we have to use all of our devices for accessing information - not all of which are rational.

--Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

- Metaphor can be a powerful tool for connecting rational explanations with nonrational ways of knowing





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Questions or Comments?

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Metaphors of Regional Policy: Cities as Engines,
Multi-level Governance in Gardens

Regional Studies Latest Articles

doi: 10.1080/00343404.2016.116483

tinyurl: <https://t.co/iZcullXfl9>





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Metaphors of Regional Policy: Engines vs Gardens

- Persuasiveness of World Bank's argument to facilitate growth of global cities reliant on "engines of growth" metaphor
- OECD *Promoting Growth in All Regions* relies on empirical data to dismiss engines metaphor
- But displacing metaphors may be needed:
 - Megacity slums addressed by general policies vs.
 - Megacity slums as weeds of neglect that require context specific application, and learning what works best across different

