

# HWRS 561b: Physical Hydrogeology II

## Pore scale fluids distribution

### Agenda:

1. Air-water interface
2. Capillarity

# Air-water system in capillary tubes

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Spring 2026



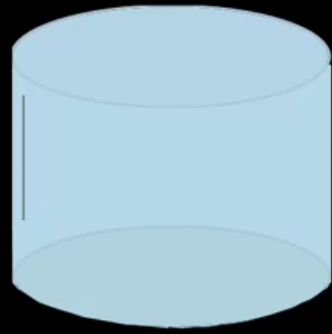
1. Why does the water try to hold together?
2. Why does the water not wet the surface?

# Air-water system in capillary tubes

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## SURFACE TENSION



Link to the video: <https://youtu.be/zMzqiAuOSz0>

# Air-water system in capillary tubes

- Two and three phase systems: water, oil, air
- *Interfacial tension (cohesive forces between fluid molecules)*

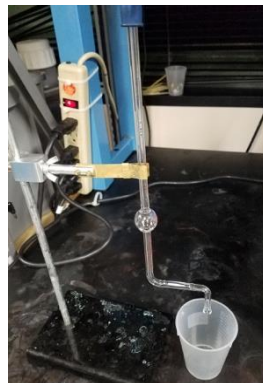


## Typical values of surface tension:

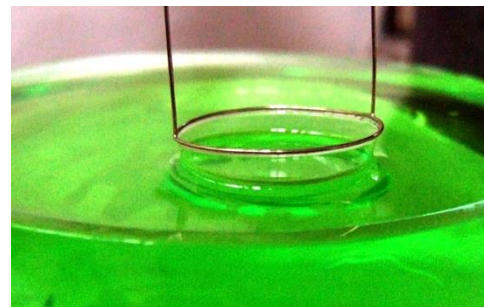
air-water	0.072 N/m
oil-water	0.20 N/m
oil-water w/ soap	0.0001 N/m

How to measure interfacial tension?

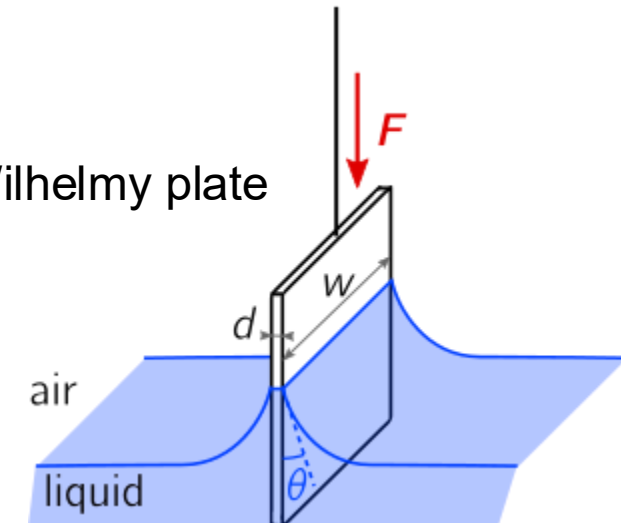
Drop weight  
method



ring method

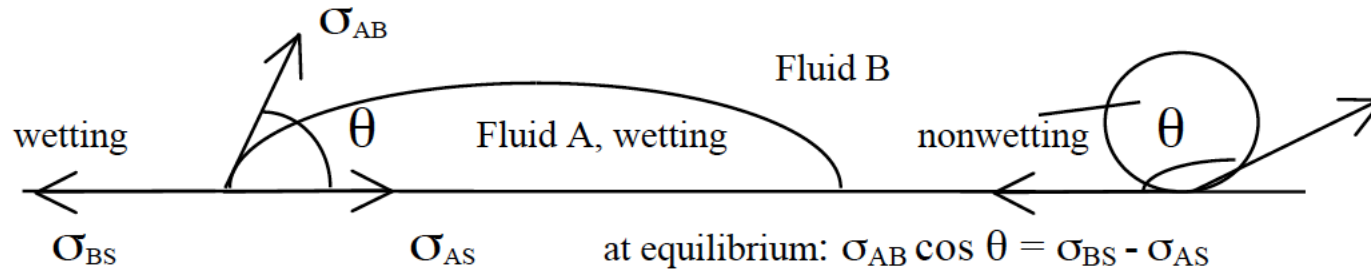


Wilhelmy plate



# Air-water system in capillary tubes

- *Wettability (adhesive forces between the fluid and solid surface)*



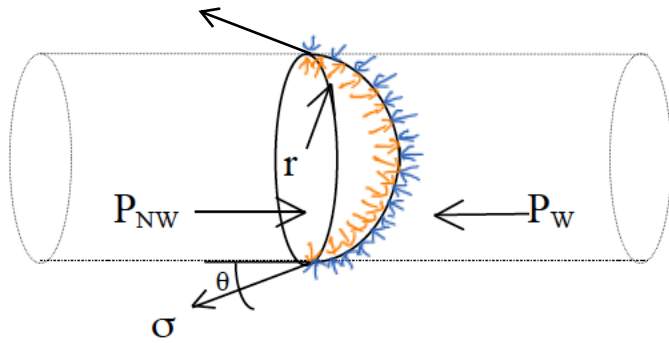
$\theta < 90^\circ$ : fluid A is wetting with respect to fluid B on the solid S  
 $\theta > 90^\circ$ : fluid A is nonwetting with respect to fluid B on the solid S

Wettability is a function of the fluid properties, soil properties, and history of contact. For most soils, the relative wettabilities are: water > oil > air

Recommended video for the concepts of *viscosity, cohesive and adhesive forces, surface tension, and capillary action* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_jQ1B9UwpU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_jQ1B9UwpU)

# Air-water system in capillary tubes

Capillary pressure (difference between the nonwetting and wetting phase pressures)



Interface is static  $\Rightarrow$  Force balanced

$$\Rightarrow 2\pi r \sigma \cos \theta = \pi r^2 P_{nw} - \pi r^2 P_w$$

$$\Rightarrow P_{nw} - P_w = \frac{2\sigma \cos \theta}{r} \quad \Rightarrow \quad P_c = \frac{2\sigma \cos \theta}{r} \quad \text{Young-Laplace Eqn.}$$

Define  $P_c \equiv P_{nw} - P_w$

1°. More general equation for any m-v interface:  $P_c = \sigma \left( \frac{1}{r_1} + \frac{1}{r_2} \right)$

2°. For a perfectly wetting fluid,  $P_c = \frac{2\sigma}{r}$  ( $\theta = 0$ )

For the capillary tube,  
 $r_1 = r_2 = r / \cos \theta$


# Air-water system in capillary tubes

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## Capillary pressure

Pressure jump across a  
fluid-fluid interface



## Young-Laplace Equation

Pressure jump across a fluid-fluid interface is  
determined by interfacial tension + geometry  
of the interface (radii of the curvature)



# Art of porous media flow

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## Optional, but strongly encouraged, Mini-project

Take a photo or a video ( $< 2$  min) in your day-to-day life that you think best illustrates some cool phenomena of porous media flow.

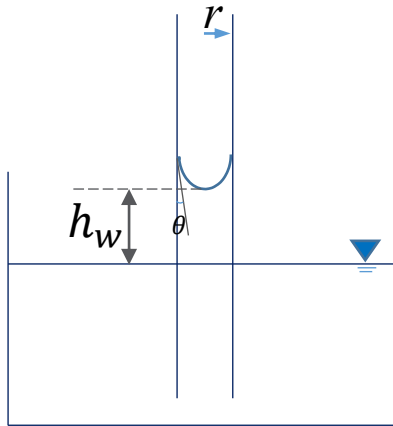
I will create a dropbox on D2L for you to upload the photo or video (due **April 26**).

Depending on the quality of your picture or video, you can receive up to 5 bonus points in your final grade (out of 100 points).



# Air-water system in capillary tubes

## Capillary rise in a Capillary tube



static  $\Rightarrow$  Force balanced

At the water table

$$P_a = 0$$

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} P_w = 0 \\ z = 0 \end{array} \right\} \Rightarrow H = \frac{P_w}{\rho_w g} + z = 0$$

At the air-water interface in the tube

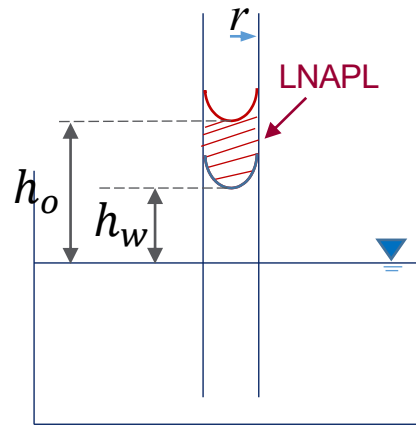
$$P_a = 0$$

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} z = h_w \\ H = 0 \end{array} \right\} \Rightarrow \psi_w = H - z = -h_w \Rightarrow P_w = \rho_w g \psi_w = -\rho_w g h_w$$

$$P^{cap} = P_a - P_w = 0 - (-\rho_w g h_w) = \rho_w g h_w \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Young-Laplace Eqn: } P^{cap} = \frac{2\sigma \cos \theta}{r} \end{array} \right\} \Rightarrow h_w = \frac{2\sigma \cos \theta}{\rho_w g r}$$

# Air-water system in capillary tubes

Capillary rise in a Capillary tube in the presence of an LNAPL (Assuming zero contacts)



static  $\Rightarrow$  Force balanced.

At the oil-water interface:

$$P_w = 0 - \rho_w g h_w = -\rho_w g h_w \quad \text{--- (1)}$$

$$P_o = P_{ow}^{cap} + P_w = \frac{2\sigma_{ow}}{r} - \rho_w g h_w \quad \text{--- (2)}$$

continuing through the oil to the oil-air interface, the oil pressure

$$P_o = \frac{2\sigma_{ow}}{r} - \rho_w g h_w - \rho_o g (h_o - h_w) \quad \text{--- (3)}$$

At the oil-air interface

$$P_o = 0 - P_{oa}^{cap} = -\frac{2\sigma_{oa}}{r} \quad \text{--- (4)}$$

$P_o$  in (3) and (4) are equal

$$\Rightarrow h_w = \left( \frac{2\sigma_{ow}}{r} + \frac{2\sigma_{oa}}{r} - \rho_o g h_o \right) / (\rho_w g - \rho_o g)_{10}$$

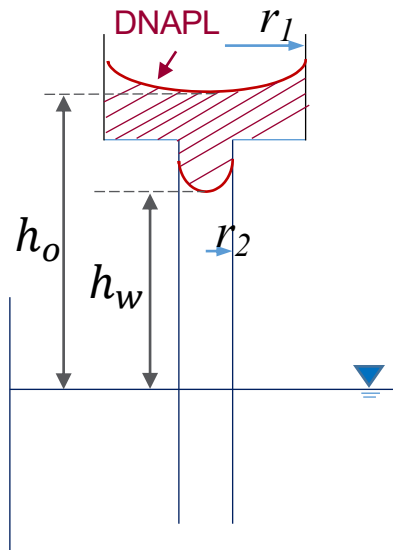
Note: w/o oil ( $\theta = 0$ )

$$h_w = \frac{2\sigma_{aw}}{\rho_w g}$$

# Air-water system in capillary tubes

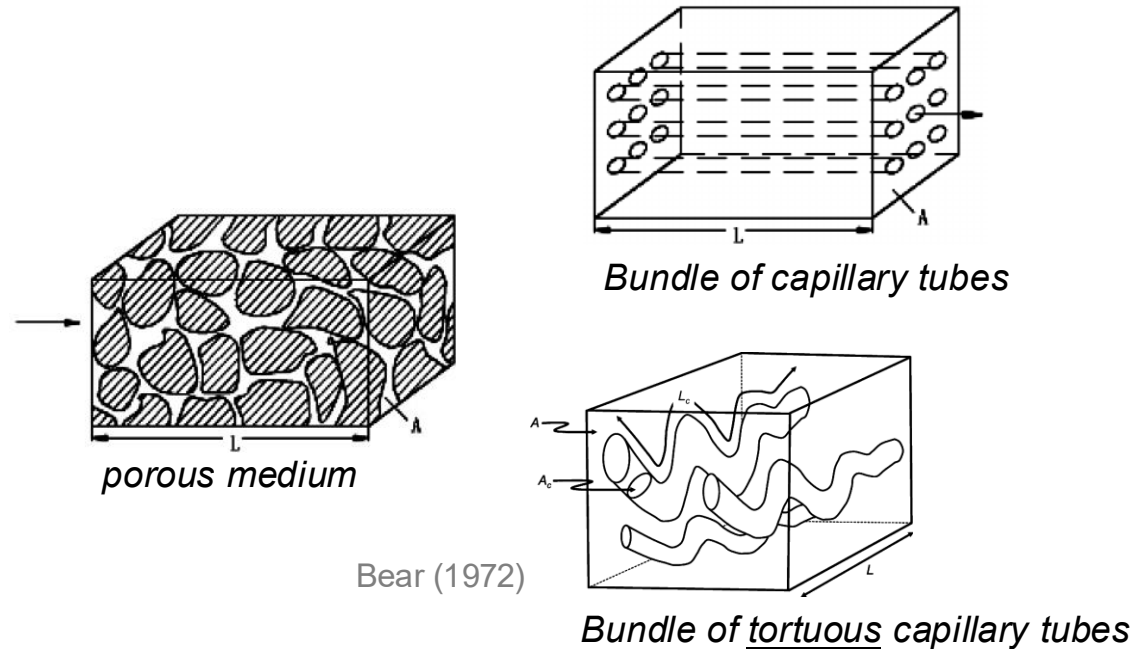
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*Invasion of a nonwetting fluid into a pore (Assuming zero contacts)*



# Air-water system in capillary tubes

*Model of a porous medium as a Bundle of Capillary Tubes*



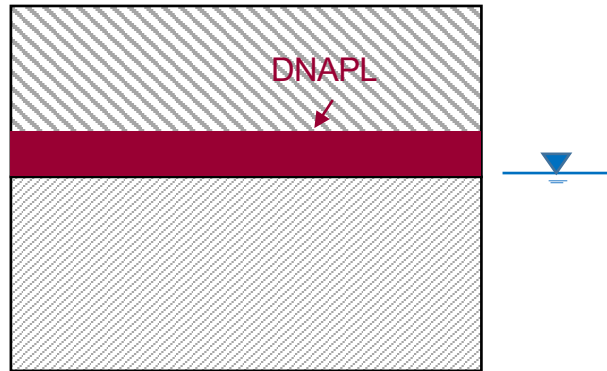
❖ Very simplified model, but its application has tremendously improved our understanding of fluid flow and transport phenomena in porous media.

Some examples:

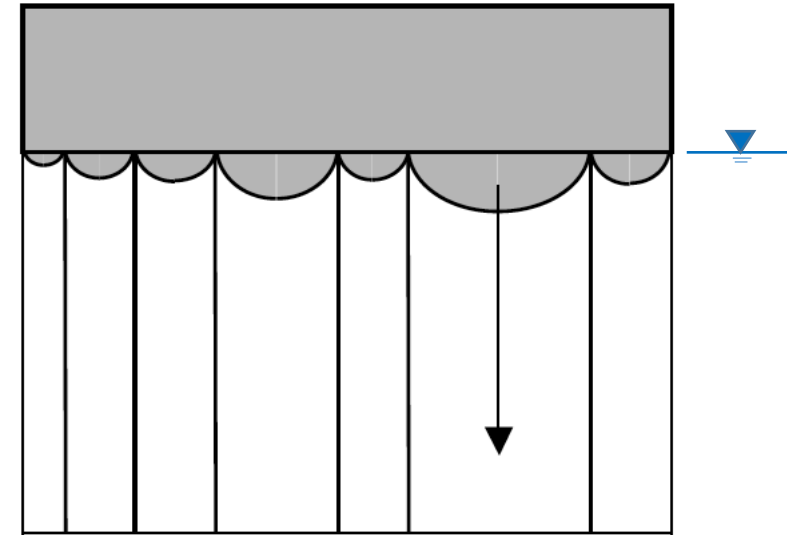
- Permeability (already discussed)
- Dispersion (already discussed)
- Fluid invasion
- Capillary transition zone
- Soil water characteristic curve
- Relative permeability

# Air-water system in capillary tubes

*Invasion of a nonwetting fluid into an aquifer*



Representing the aquifer as a bundle of capillary tubes



1. Which is easier for DNAPL to invade?

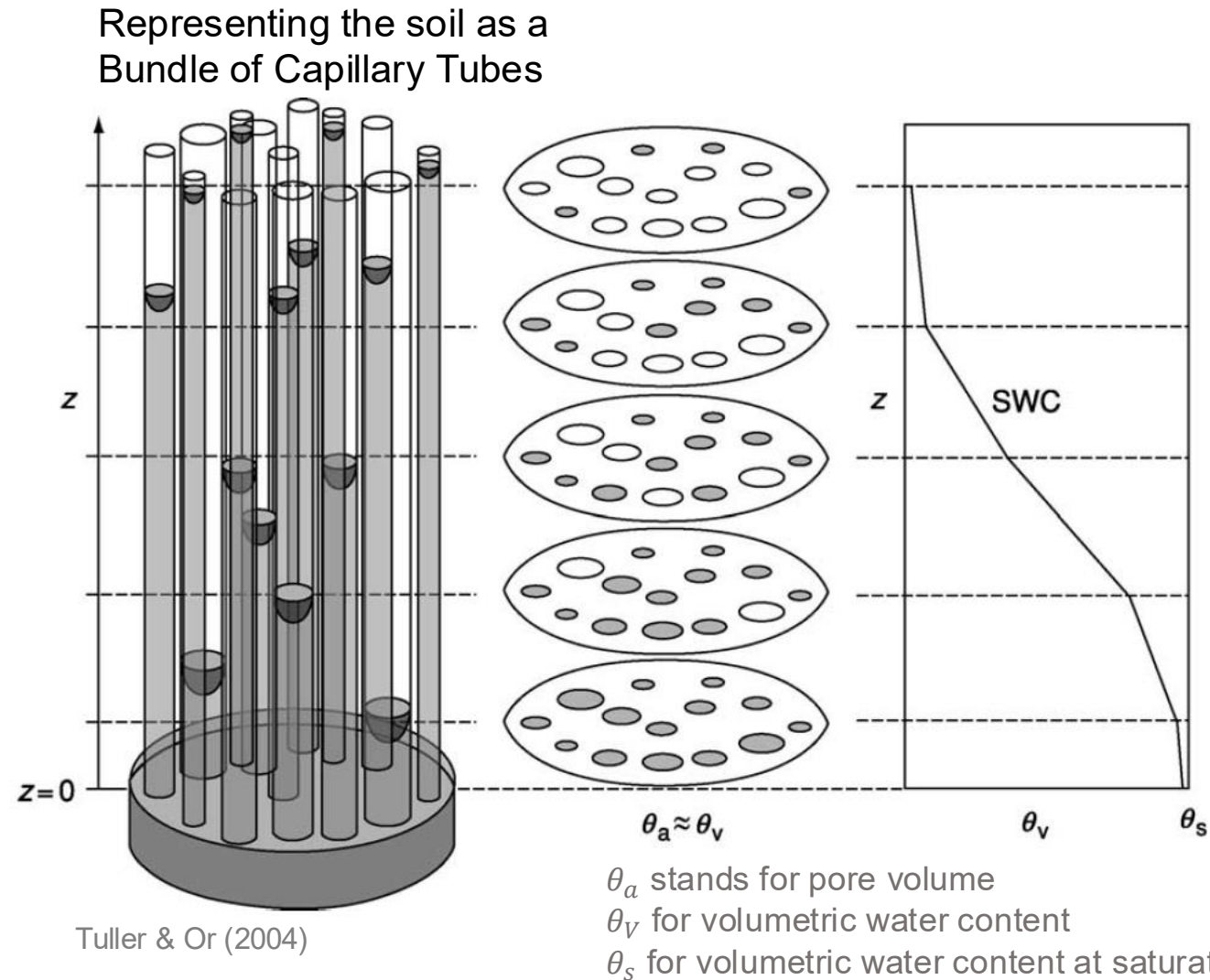
Coarse sand or fine-grained medium?

2. For some reason, if DNAPL modifies the wettability of the porous medium grain surfaces, e.g., the contact angle of water increases from  $0^\circ$  to something between  $0^\circ$  and  $90^\circ$ .

What may happen to the DNAPL?

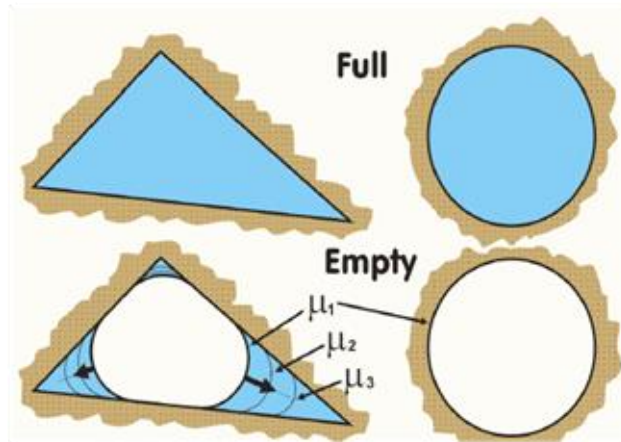
# Air-water system in capillary tubes

*Water retention (or capillary transition zone) in the vadose zone*



# Air-water system in capillary tubes

*Bundle of triangular capillary tubes vs. bundle of cylindrical capillary tubes*



Tuller, Or, Dudley (1999)

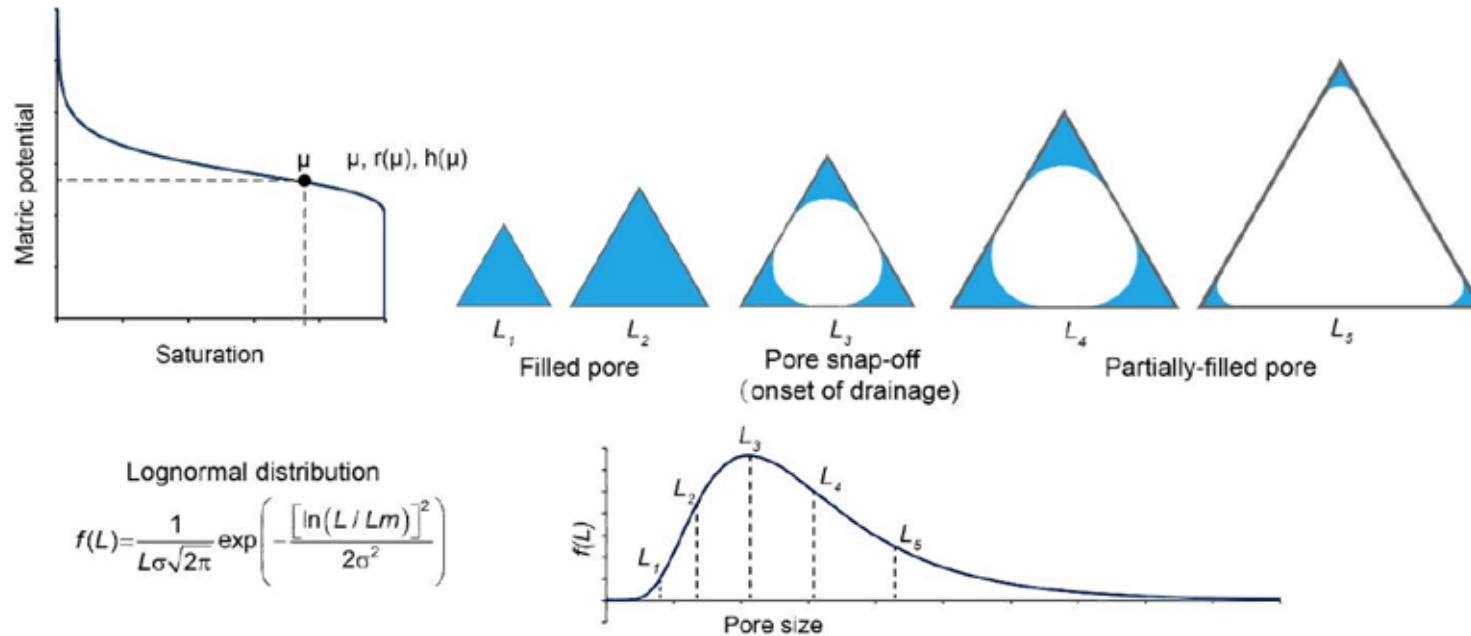
Bundle of triangular capillary tubes model have several advantages:

1. Can represent thin films and corner fluid
2. Saturation-dependent capillary pressure within a single-pore
3. More realistic representation of pore geometry
4. ...

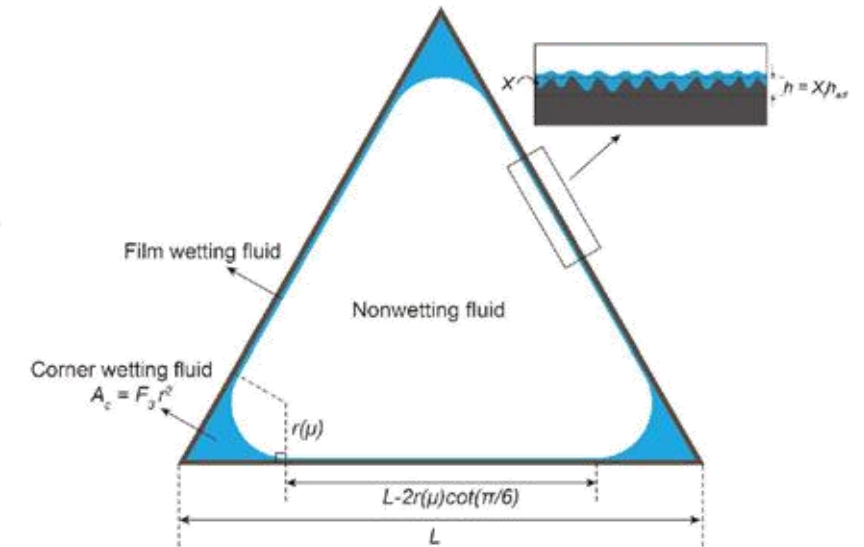
# Air-water system in capillary tubes

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An example study using the bundle of triangular capillary tubes model to examine the impact of surface roughness on fluid-fluid interfacial areas  $A_{aw} = A_{aw}(S_w)$



Simulating the soil-water characteristics



Representing the surface roughness and films