Constitutive and regulative conditions

for the assessment of academic literacy

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Necessary and sufficient

conditions for language testing

◆ avoided by Messick (1980: 1019)

◆ embraced by Bachman & Palmer (1996: 23), Davies & Elder (2005: 798)

◆ perhaps not adequate, but to some extent useful to explain "constitutive" and "regulative"

loveactually

"*… sometimes something is so **transparency** that one needs no **evidential proof** "* (the Colin Firth character in the film [Jamie] proposing in broken Portuguese to his beautiful Aurelia).

THE ULTIMATE ROMANTIC COMEDY

loveactually

in theaters november 7

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Regulative conditions for test design

◆ indeed include love and care for others, but also

◆ transparency, appropriateness (relevance), utility, accountability

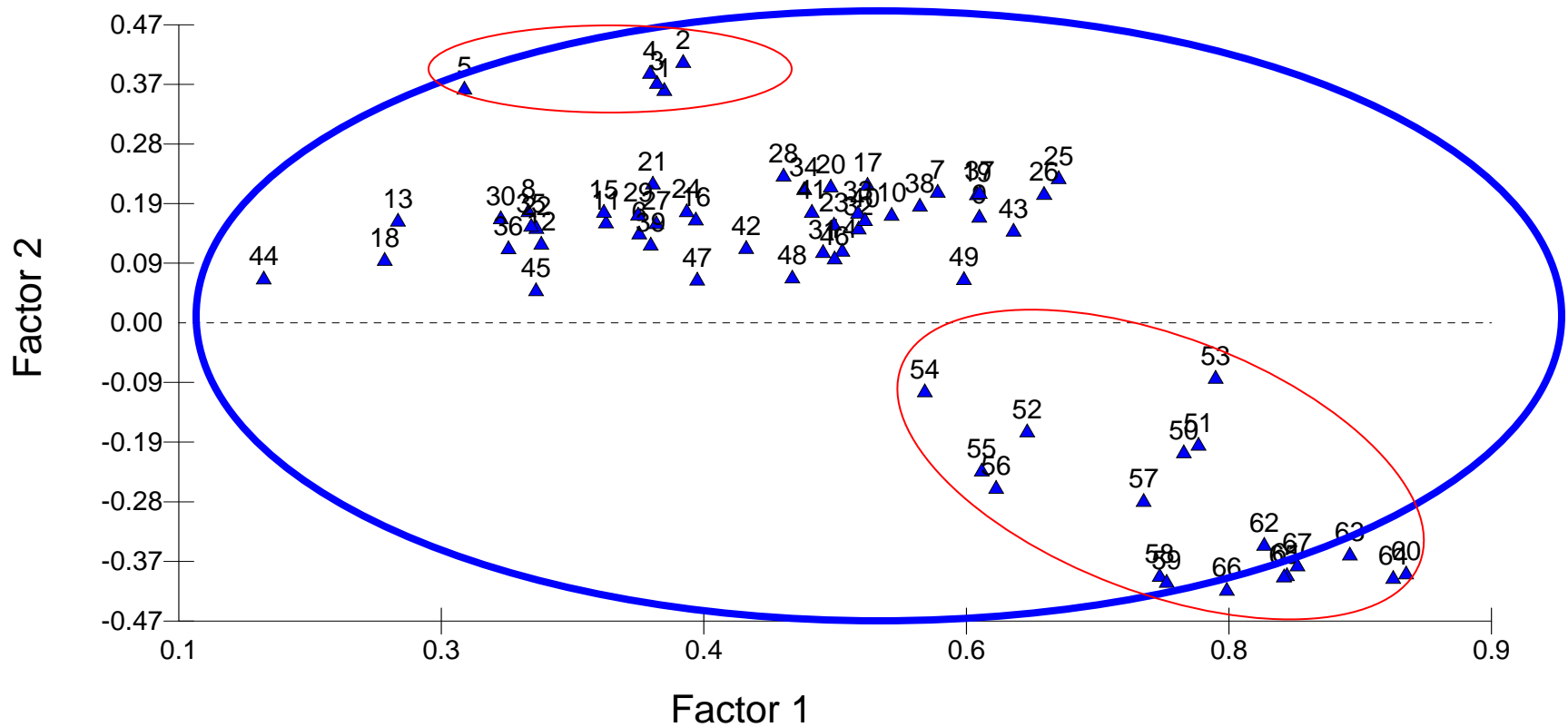◆ complement and disclose *constitutive* technical reliability and validity, theoretical defensibility of the design.

An outline of the argument

- Language testing is a "central area of applied linguistics" (McNamara & Roever 2006: 255).
- Applied linguistics is a discipline of design.
- If so, what unitary or overarching notion is appropriate and desirable for language testing?
- An emerging foundational framework can help us
    - develop a robust systematic account for fundamental concepts in testing
    - provide an alternative conceptualisation of such concepts.

Context: trade-offs in testing

TiaPlus Factor Analysis: Subgroup 0 - Subtest 0

Two "most fundamental" considerations for testing

1) **Validity** is … the most fundamental consideration (AERA 1999: 9)

2) The most important consideration in designing … a test … is its **usefulness** (Bachman & Palmer 1996: 17; Bachman 2001: 110)

1) and 2) are both divergent and congruent

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Divergence masked

by inclusion of validity under usefulness:

Usefulness = Reliability + Construct validity + Authenticity + Interactiveness + Practicality

Bachman & Palmer's model of test usefulness

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Congruences

◆ Validity as judgment / interpretation of test scores (Messick, Kane)

◆ Usefulness echoes Messick's test utility, efficiency, instrumentality

◆ A unified/unitary view of language testing is desirable

Validity reconsidered: reinterpreting Messick

	adequacy of…	*appropriateness* of…
inferences from scores	multiple sources of evidence	relates to impact / consequences
design decisions based on inferences	reflected in utility, relevance	anticipate public justification of test use

Validity reconsidered (cont.)

- = coherence / systematic fit of fundamental considerations?

- Consider exhibits (3) to (6).

- Why subsume everything under validity?
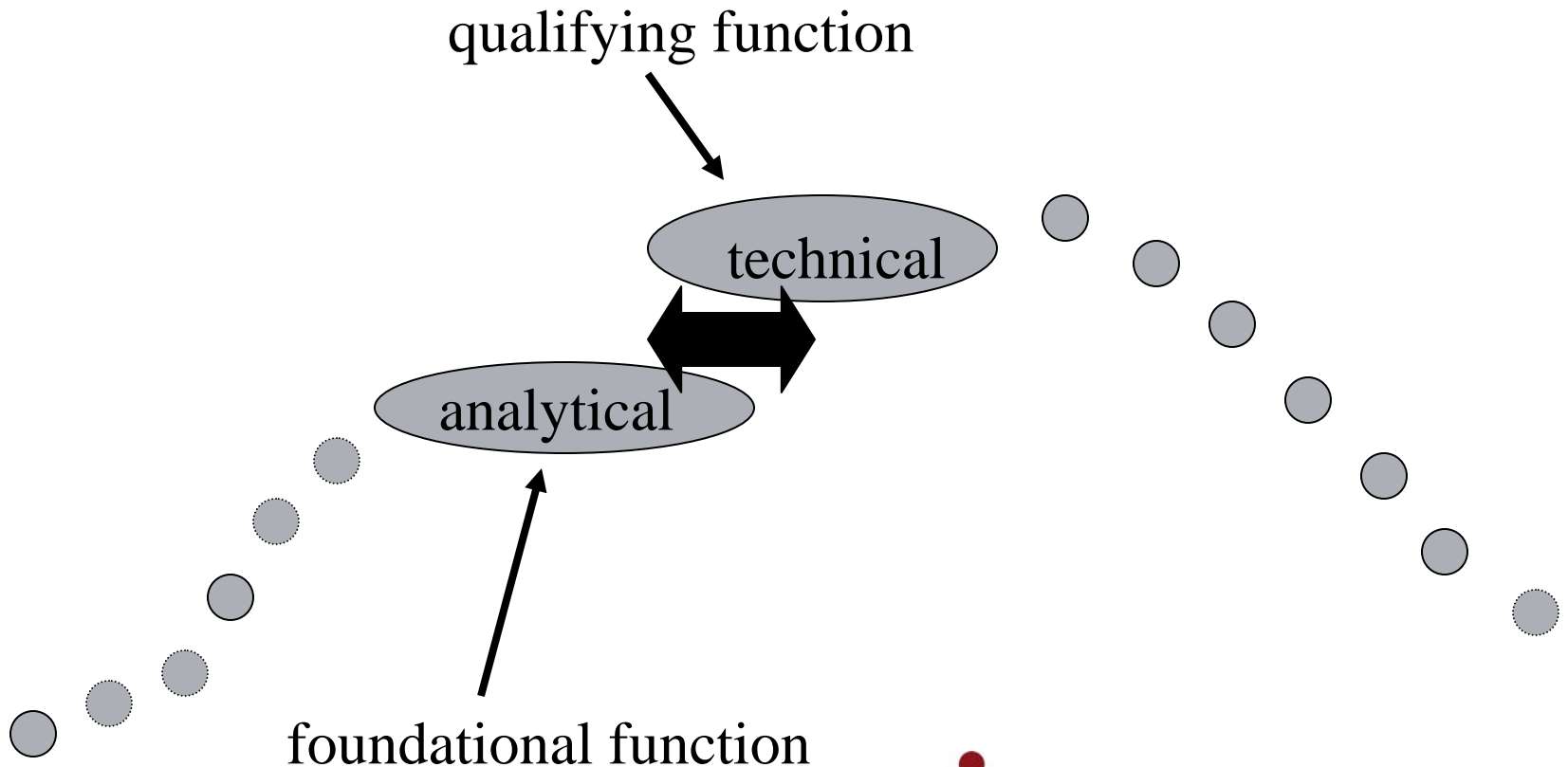
- Distinguishing what is conceptually distinct.

Subjective & objective components of validity

- Help from the neighbours (jurisprudence)
- Result of process of validation?
- Subjective technical interpretation achieved on the basis of objective measurements.
- Fear underlying orthodox view: modernist belief in scores having meaning on their own.
- Validation as process and validity as function.

Terminal functions of an applied linguistic design

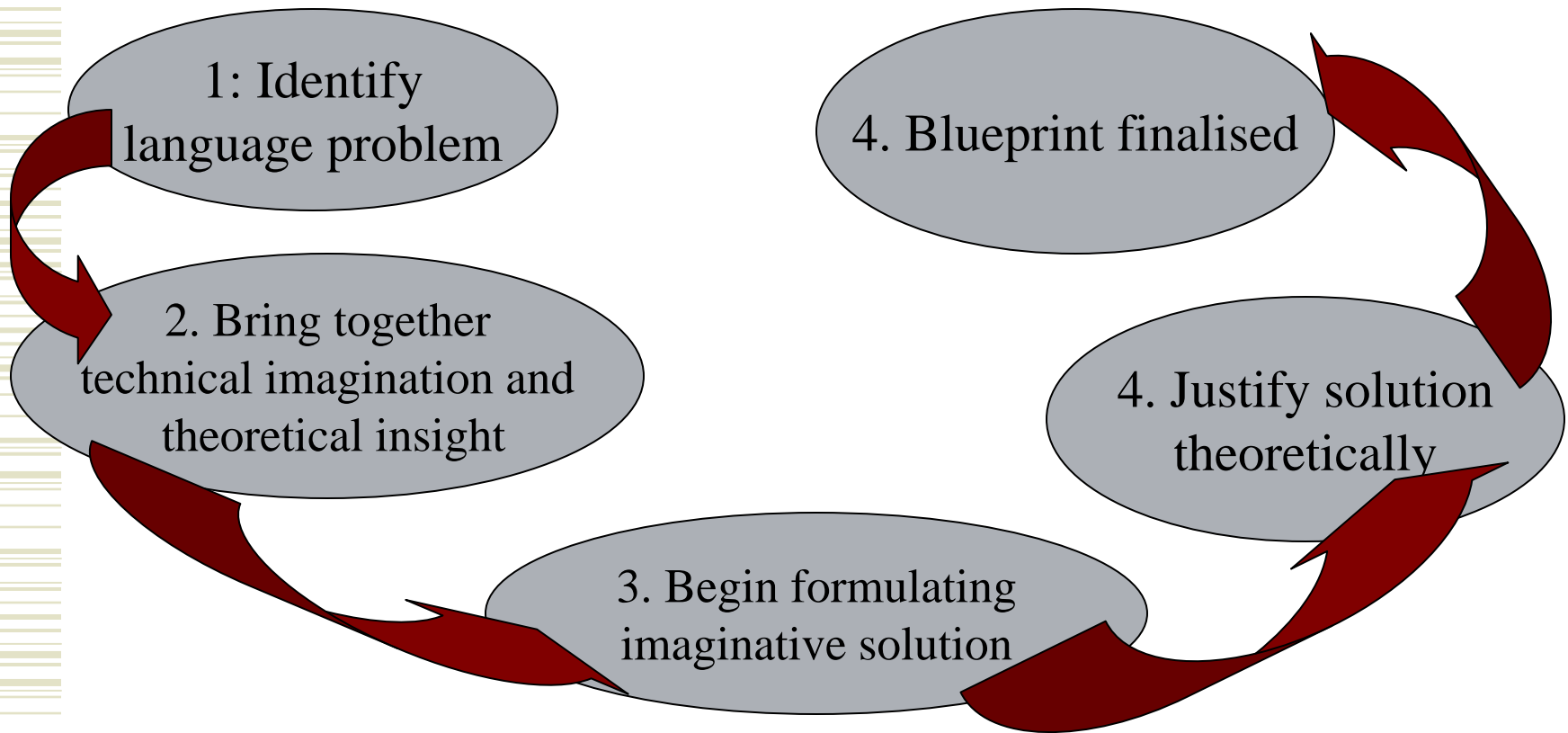qualifying function

technical

analytical

foundational function

We need technical fantasy as well as theoretical analysis …

… and, contrary to modernist belief, the technical fantasy of the designer of an applied linguistic product has primacy.

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Phases in the design process

1: Identify language problem

2. Bring together technical imagination and theoretical insight

3. Begin formulating imaginative solution

4. Justify solution theoretically

4. Blueprint finalised

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Constitutive concepts in language testing

← foundational direction

technical

analytical

validity

consistency

constitutive concepts

multiplicity of evidence

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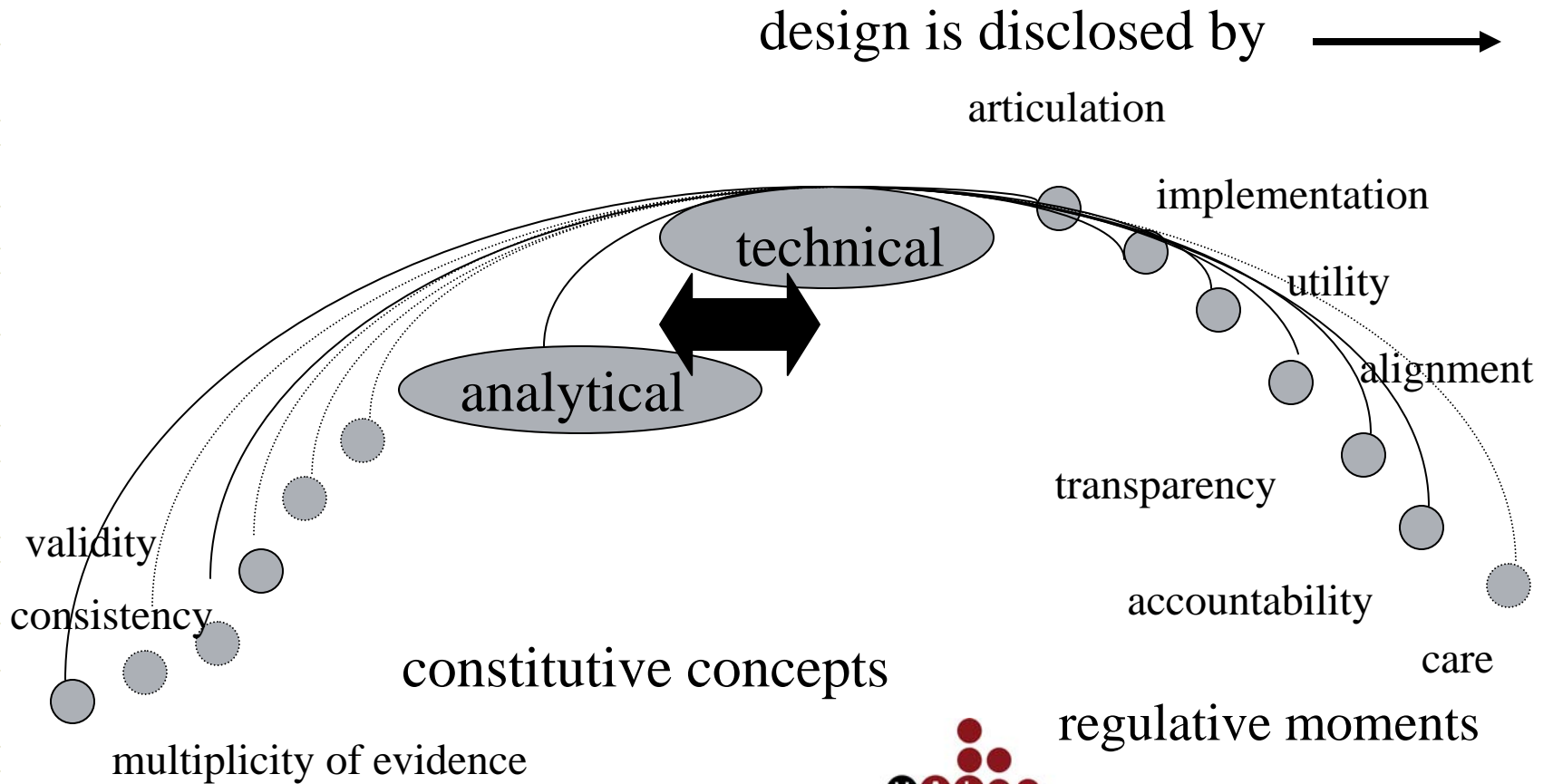# Technical consistency / reliability of TALL

Version of test	Alpha
2004 (Pretoria)	0.95
2005 (Northwest)	0.94
2006 (Pretoria)	0.94
2006 (Stellenbosch)	0.91
2008 (Pretoria)	0.94
Average	**0.94**

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Regulative conditions for test design

design is disclosed by →

articulation

implementation

technical

utility

analytical

alignment

transparency

validity

consistency

accountability

constitutive concepts

care

regulative moments

multiplicity of evidence

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Disclosing the meaning of design

- Designs need both theoretical and social accountability, public justification.

- Trade-offs in design (between technical means and ends) analogical economic idea.

- Designs are imaginatively conceived.

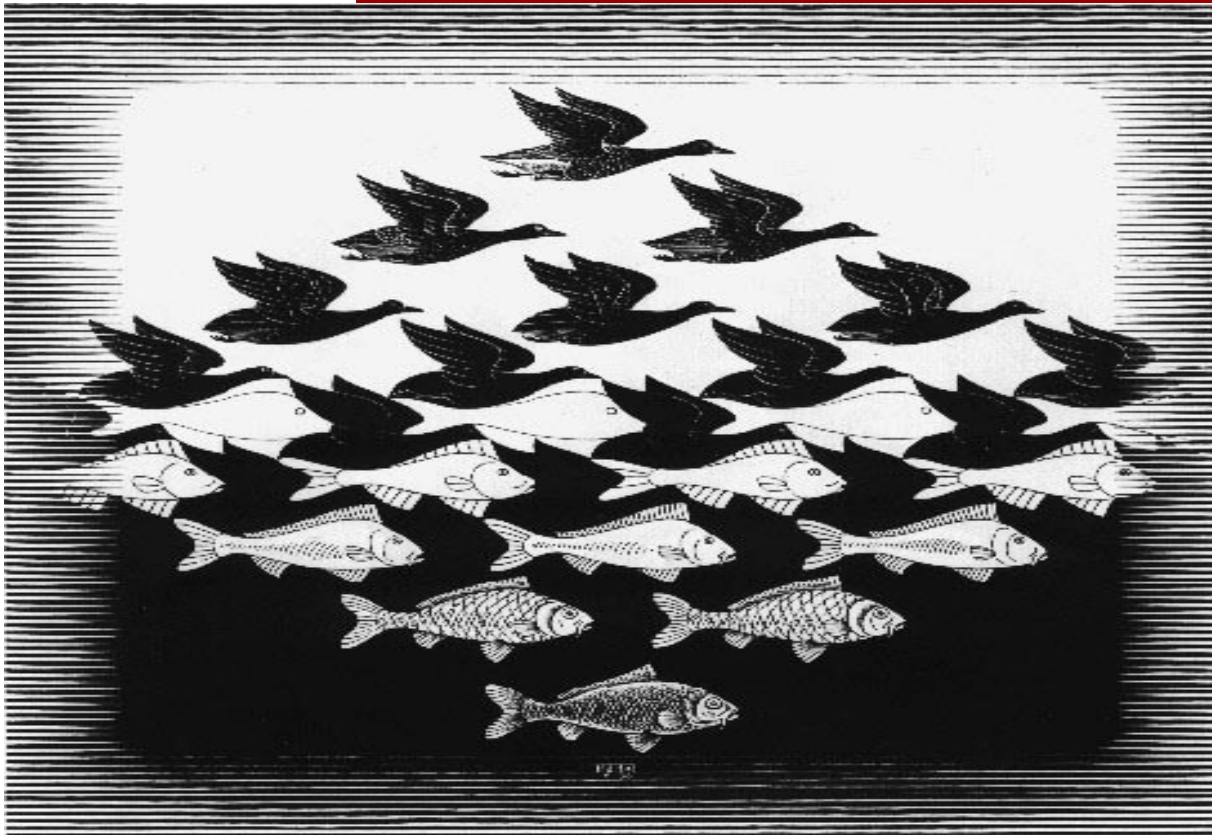- Designs are made to demonstrate love, care for others.

Constitutive conditions enriched

- ◆ Validity reconceptualised as theoretical defensibility (construct validity)
- ◆ Further enhanced by technical articulation: interpretation (meaning) of scores
- ◆ Redefined in social terms as impact
- ◆ Political and juridical concerns added
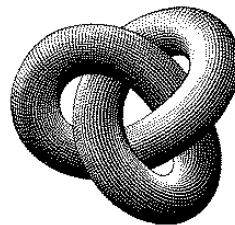- ◆ Yet enrichment not = reason to conflate

Systematic fit: constitutive and regulative conditions

The function of a theoretical framework

- "… break down the walls" – relate field to others
- Messick's example: clarification sought from Leibniz, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Singer
- Our field is related to both natural and human (cultural) sciences
- Conceptual conflation leaves the discipline poorer

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