

# Noncognitive function and religious representations

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# Something Completely Different



# Line of argument

Function and truth

Ideologies

The superempirical

Religious ideologies

Conclusions



# A hunt

Beliefs vital for success:

The lay of the  
land

The stag's  
location

The stag's  
behaviour

*Vital difference*

But also...

Others  
trustworthy

Leader punishes  
defection

Deity punishes  
defection



# Noncognitive function

Function not tied to truth

Beliefs need not be true

Must be believed to be true

Profound consequences





# Ideology

Beliefs motivate cooperation

Indirectly tied to behaviour

Need not be true

The Proletarian Utopia

Did not have to be achievable

Only had to be believable



# The boy who cried wolf

McKay & Dennett BBS 2009

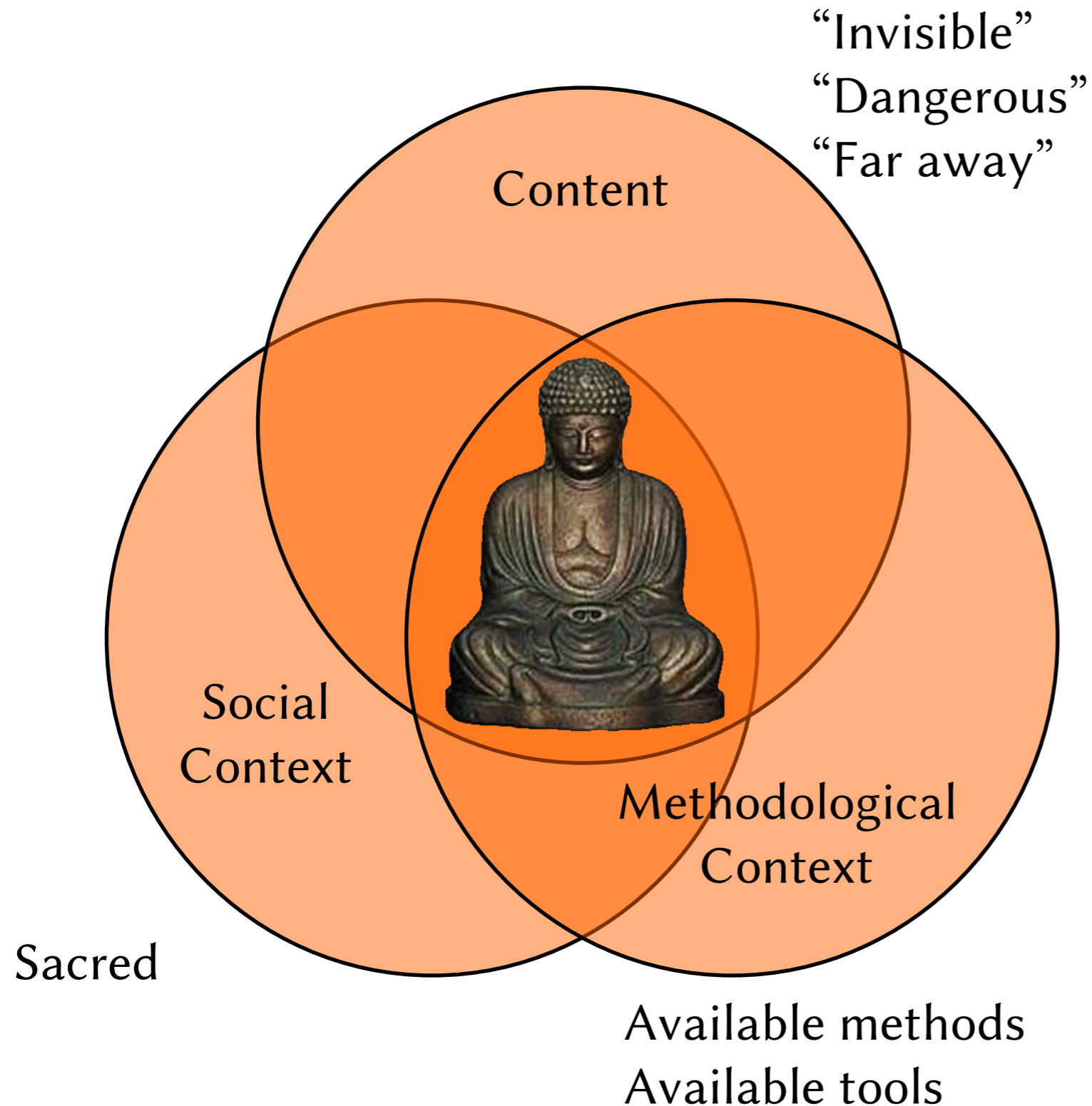
False beliefs very unstable

Can not support function

NF has to be protected against  
counterevidence

Beliefs have to be superempirical

# Superempirical



Superempirical

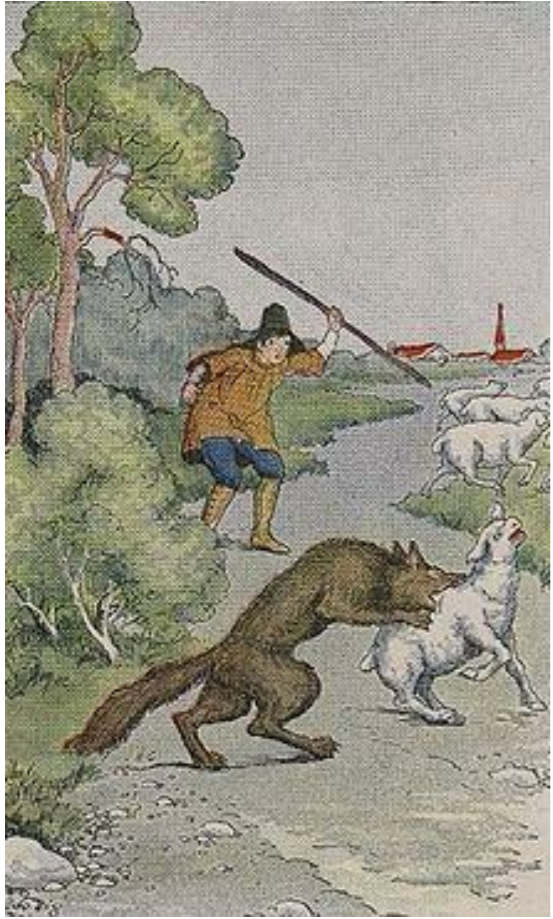


Unfalsifiable

Superempirical



Unfalsifiable



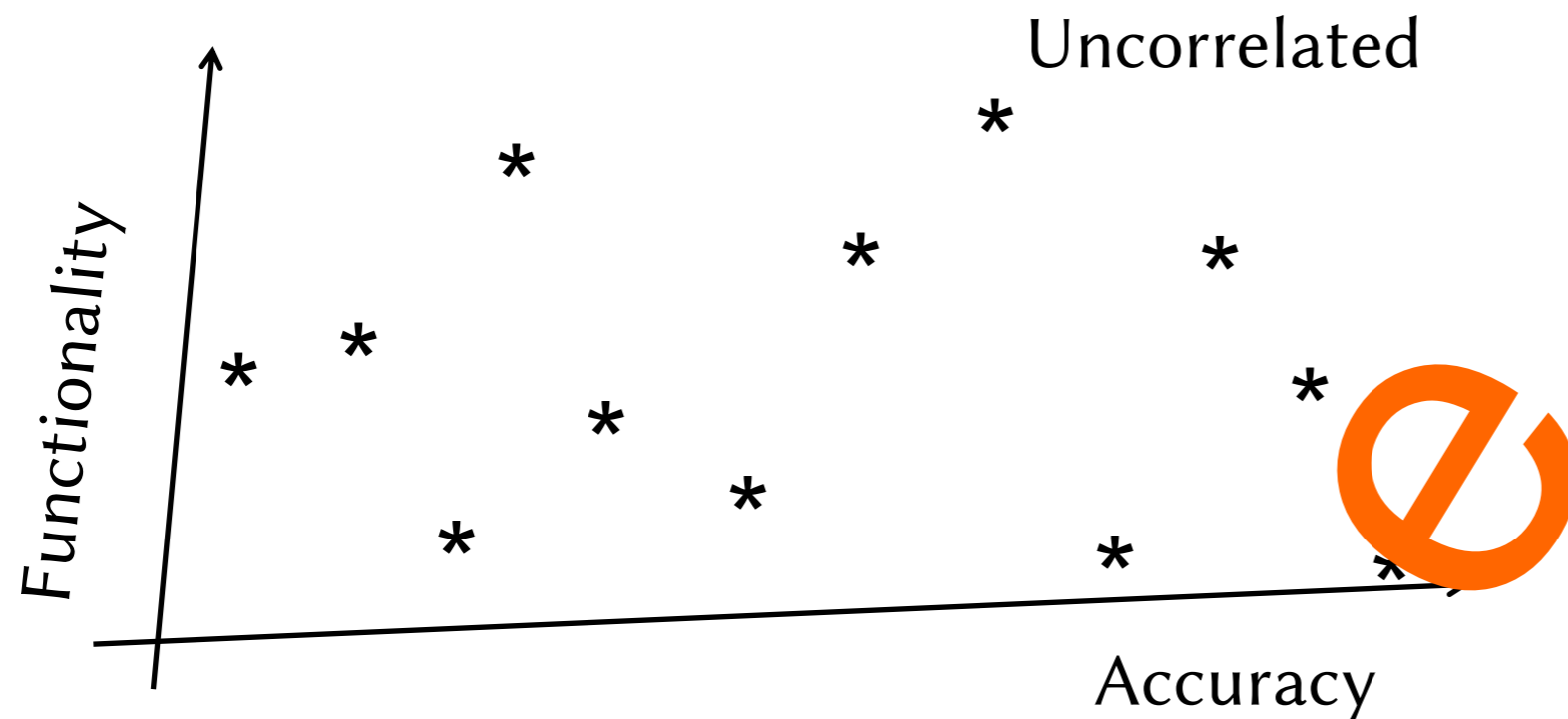
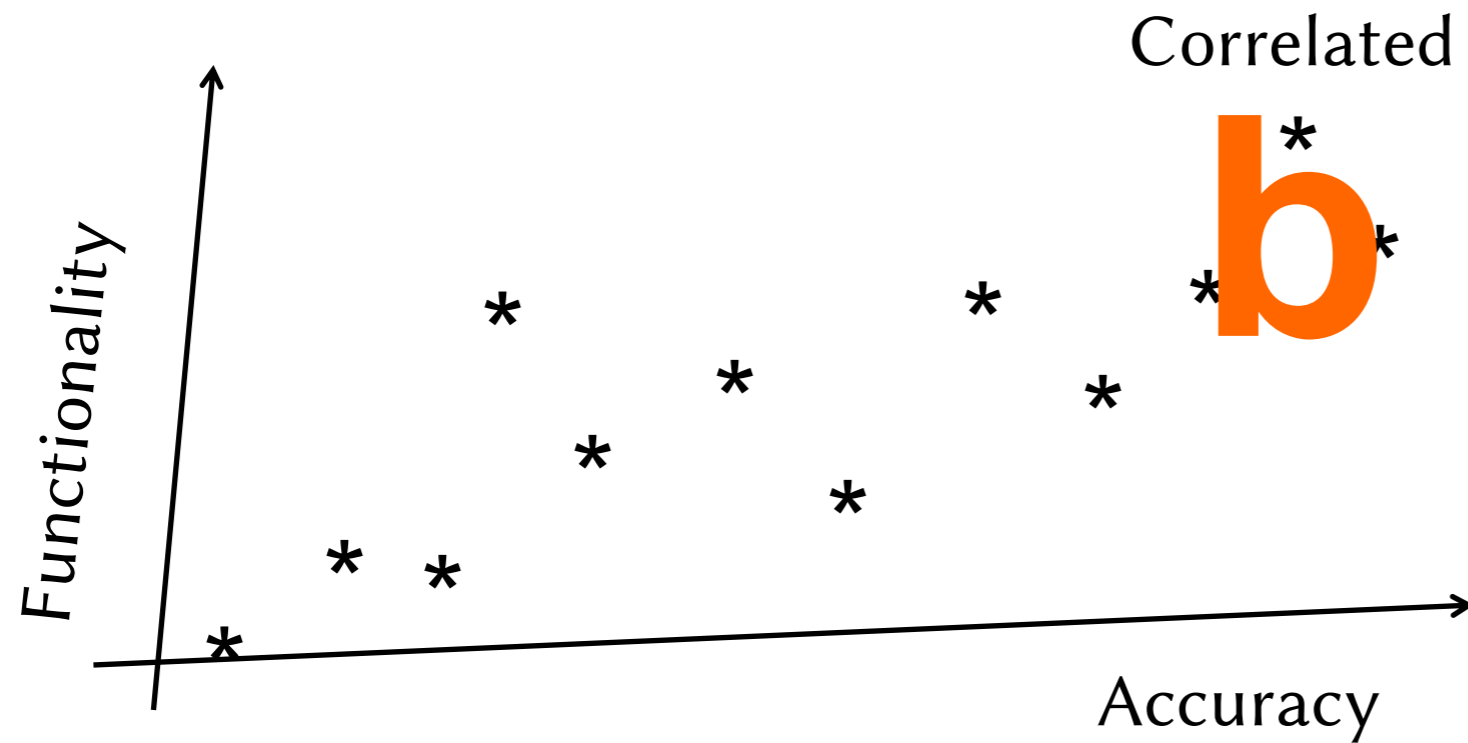
# Function & evidence

Counterevidence need not falsify  
Enough that it destabilises belief  
within culture

Social rather than individual scale

With NF want function not truth  
determining stability

# Truth & function





# Religious ideologies

Effects outside mundane world

Heaven vs. proletarian utopia

Content less investigable

Plausible due to cognitive  
byproducts

A dual inheritance account

Cognitive byproducts recruited for  
prosocial function



# Religious doublethink

Religious beliefs not about “facts in the world”

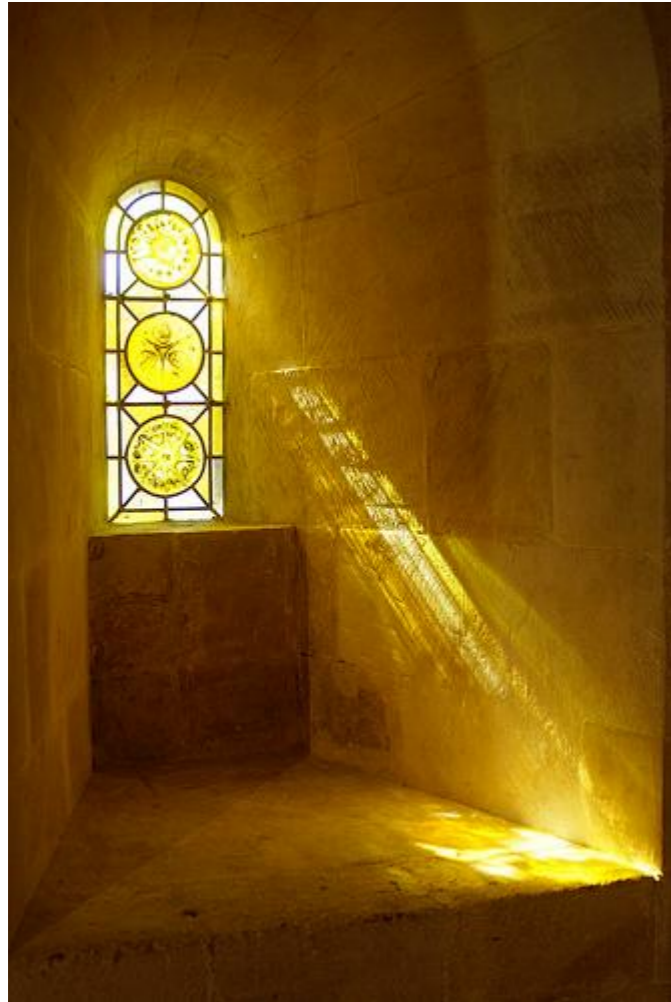
Unrepresentative attitude

Only claims held to be true  
motivate action

Doublethink required

Beliefs held to be true

While evidence avoided



# Conclusions?

Religion provides an interesting case study for representation

Truth and function can come apart

Talk about noncognitive  
function not noncognitive  
beliefs

Thank  
you

Konrad Talmont-Kaminski

*In a Mirror, Darkly: How the  
Supernatural Reflects*

*Rationality* (forthcoming in  
Religion, Cognition and Culture  
series)

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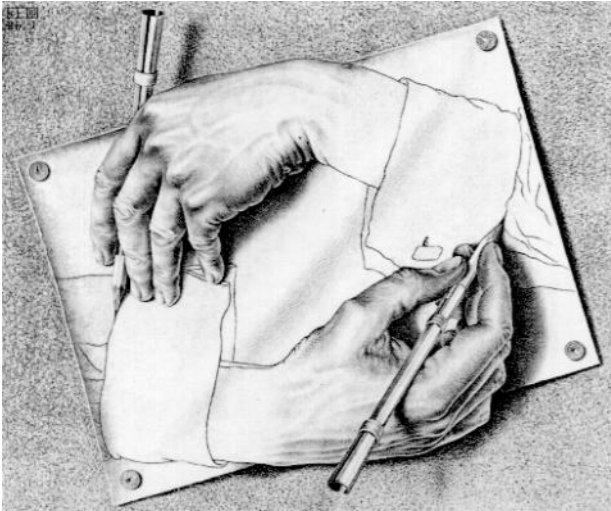
# Representation x 2

e-Representation – ‘environment tracking’, covariation, ‘indicator relations’

i-Representation – functional, inferential or computational role

Does religion talk fit this picture?

Yes and no



# i-Representation?

Parasitic upon other beliefs

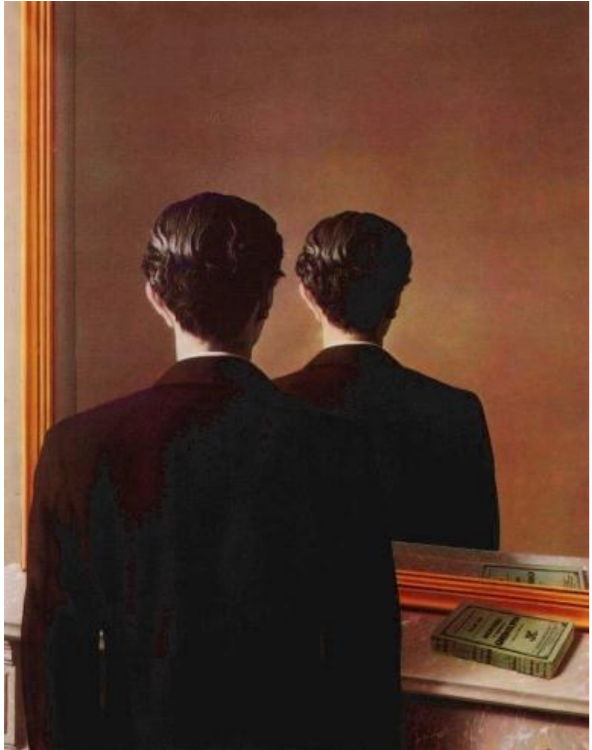
Can not connect to referent

Not all beliefs can be like that

Encodingism (Bickhard)

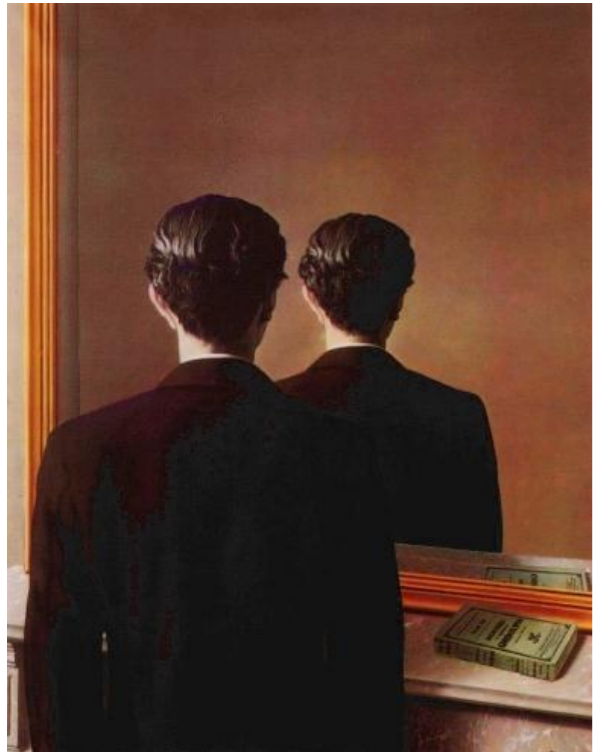
Must emerge out of

e-Representation



# i-Representation?

Vital to talk about truth-value  
Both in practice and in analysis  
i-Representation allows complex  
fictions  
Highly unlikely to be true



# e-Representation?

Truth rendered irrelevant

Nothing to do with supernatural entities

Correlations not robust enough

Functional presuppositions

(Bickhard)

Tied to prosocial function

Costly signaling?



# e-Representation?

Which environment?

Social environment

Break down of dualism between  
discourse and nature

Discourse not a game

Discourse a part of nature





# John Collier

No meaning without intention;  
no intention without function;  
no function without autonomy.