Veracity Claims Assessment by Christian College Students

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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

Background

- How to train students to think critically?

- Origins as a foil.

- Developed instrument to evaluate positions on origins (2010).
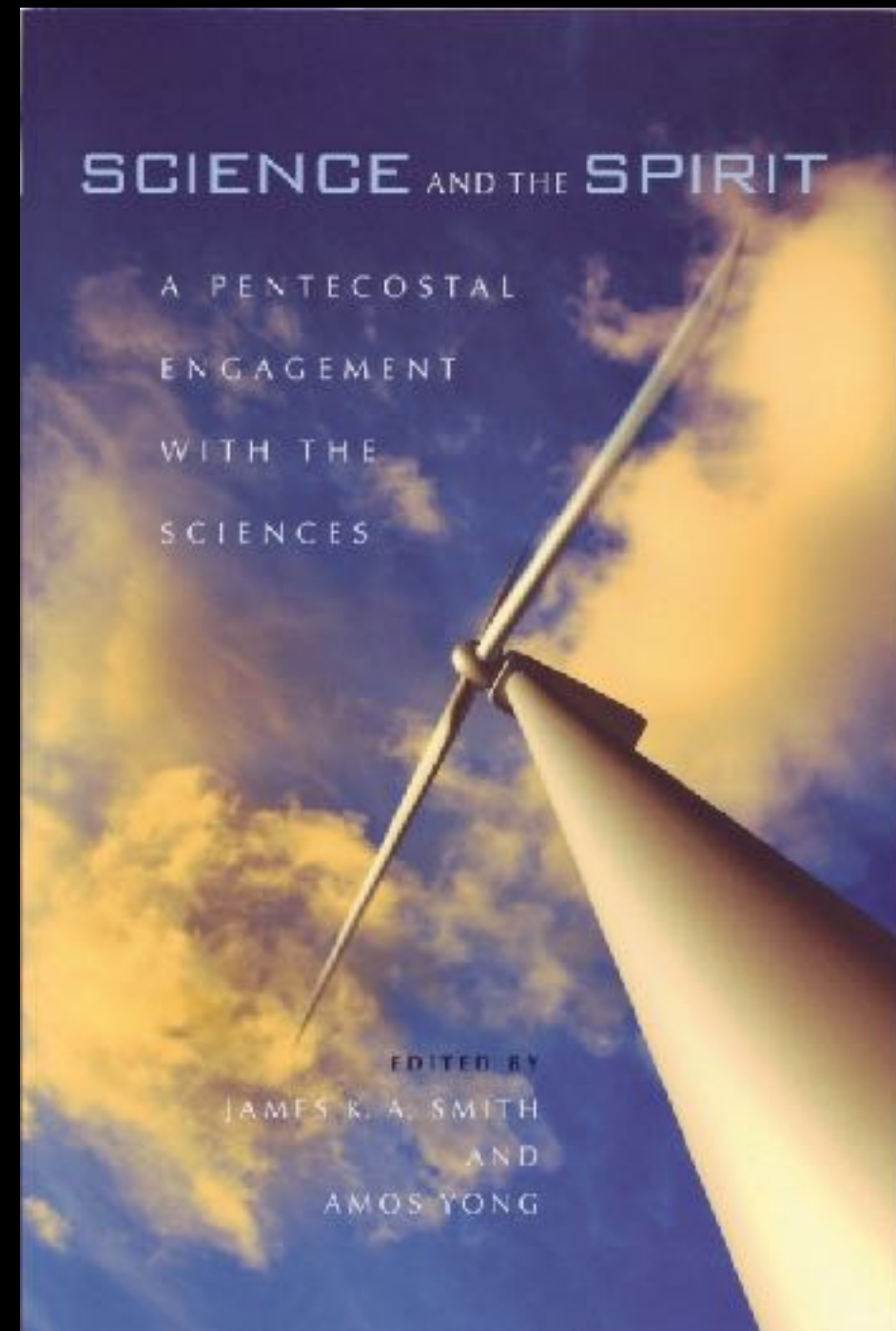
AG Students

Science Theology Paradigm Scale

- September 2015 PSCF.
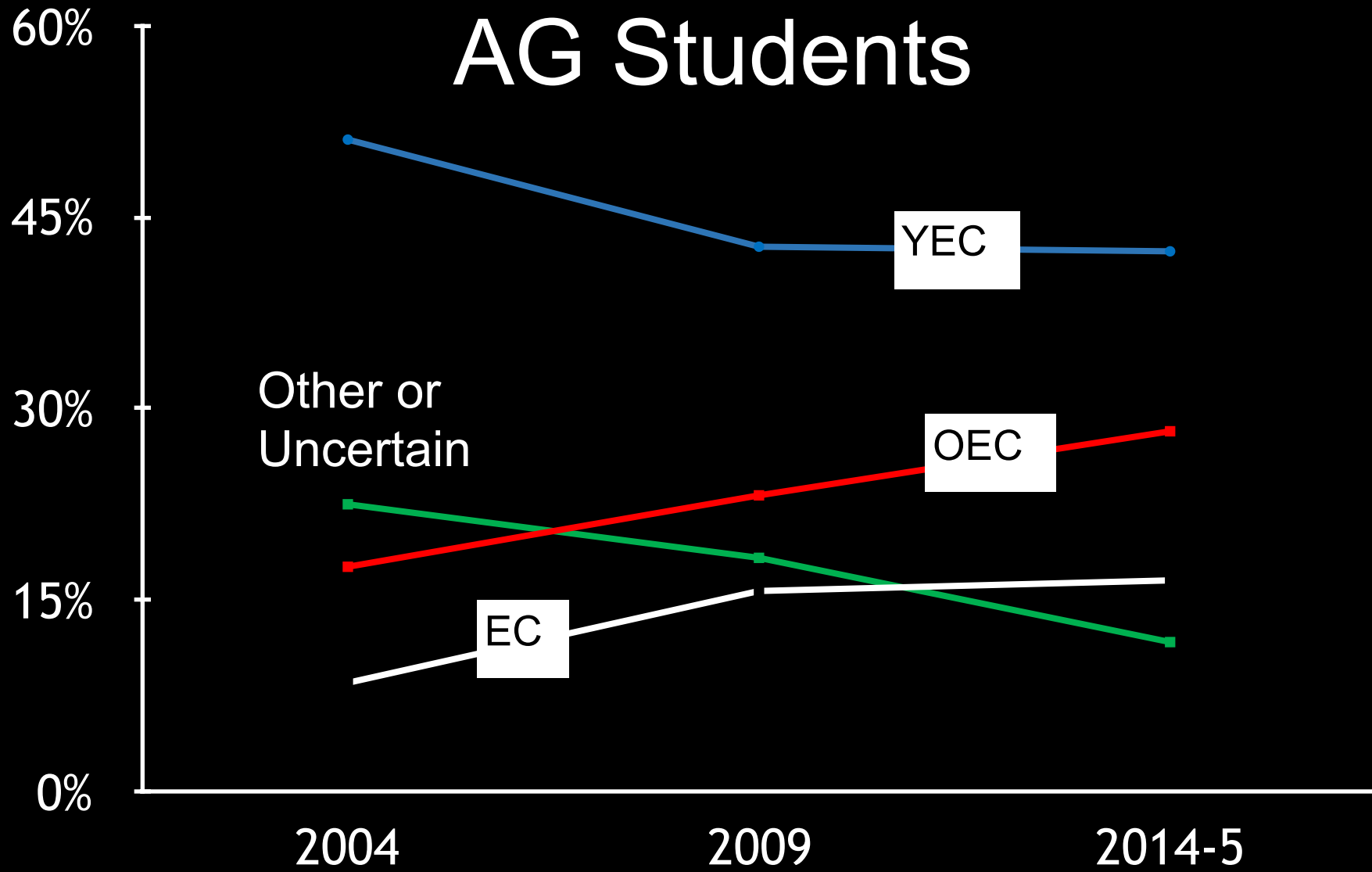
- People use different S/T relational approaches.

- But, how do they arrive at a favored approach?

- To examine this, we are developing:
  - Epistemology instrument.
  - Biblical hermeneutics instrument.
  - Methods of science instrument.

STPS Scale Findings

- U.S. scientists (2003 n=312) and Baylor students (2014 n=471) mostly used Complementarism.

- AG and other Protestant educators, pastors, and students (2011, 2014, 2015 n=511) favored Complementarism and Concordism.

- 46.5% of scientists (2003) did not use any relational approach.

Origins Views with Relating Science and Theology

- **YEC**: Complementarism and Conflict: Theology over Science.

- **OEC** and **EC**: Complementarism followed by Concordism.

Purpose of the *Deciding Truth Scale*

• To determine how people evaluate truth claims.

• Particularly related to theology and science.

Theories of Truth

- **Correspondence**: A proposition is true if and only if the real world is as the proposition says it is.

- **Coherence**: The veracity of a knowledge claim is affirmed when it fits other beliefs that are known to be true.

Kirkham, R. L. 1992. *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction.* Vol. 55. MIT Press.

Theories of Truth

- **Pragmatic** (two components):
  - **Consensus**: The veracity of a statement should be accepted when it is endorsed unanimously by everyone competent to judge it.

  - **Instrumentalist**. Truth is inferred to a knowledge claim that in the long run will benefit those who believe in it.

Kirkham, R. L. 1992. *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction.* Vol. 55. MIT Press.

Theories of Truth

- **Semantic**: The grammatical structure of a sentence affects its truth-value.

- **Performance**: Performance rather than a statement determine truth.

- **Redundancy**: Stating a proposition is true is superfluous; the statement's existence infers its veracity.

Kirkham, R. L. 1992. *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction.* Vol. 55. MIT Press.

Theories of Truth

- **Appraisal**: Conflates "Truth" and "Good."

- **Truth-as-justification**: Belief should result when doubts have been removed.

Kirkham, R. L. 1992. *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction.* Vol. 55. MIT Press.

College Student Epistemological Development: William G. Perry

1. **Dualism**: dichotomies and dualisms like right versus wrong, black and white.
2. **Multiplicity**: acknowledging legitimate uncertainty, diversity, and multiple solutions.
3. **Contextual Relativism**:
   - World is essentially relativistic and contextual.
   - Few absolutes.
   - Beliefs must be translated into action.
4. **Commitment within Relativism**:
   - Combine personal experience with outside evidences.
   - Acceptance of some uncertainty.

Epistemological Development: Jean Piaget

1. **Sensorimotor**: infancy.

2. **Pre-Operational**: toddler, early childhood.

3. **Concrete Operational**: elementary and early adolescence.

4. **Formal Operational**: adolescence and adulthood.

Egocentric Thinking

- Use of self-centered psychological criteria to determine what is true and false.

- Predominates in the Pre-Operational stage.

- Diminishes during Concrete Operational stage.

- Shows a resurgence in in the early Formal Operational stages (adolescence and young adult).

Egocentric Truth Tests

- **Innate Egocentrism**: What they believe is true even though they may have never questioned the basis for this conclusion.

- **Innate Sociocentrism**: Accepting the dominant beliefs of a group to which the person is associated.

Paul, Richard, and Linda Elder. 2001. *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts & Tools*. Foundation Critical Thinking.

Egocentric Truth Tests

- **Innate Wish Fulfillment**: Belief in elements that support other beliefs that:
  - do not require any significant change in thinking,
  - do not require admission of error.

- **Innate Selfishness**: Beliefs that justify the acquisition of power, money, or other personal advantage even when those beliefs are not grounded in logic or evidence.

Paul, Richard, and Linda Elder. 2001. *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts & Tools*. Foundation Critical Thinking.

Critical Thinking

- Identify presuppositions.

- Evaluate truth claim validity and accuracy.

- Consider alternate perspectives.

- Then act accordingly.

Brookfield, Stephen D. 2011. *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions.* John Wiley & Sons.

Deciding Truth Scale Development

- Open-ended survey questions based on a literature review.

- Twenty students were interviewed using these prompts.

- Their responses were collated and formed the basis for survey statements.

Results

- 313 student respondents.
- 260 useable responses.
- Content validity experts judged item content validity.
- Factor analysis evaluated construct validity.
- Reliability analysis assessed survey reliability.

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Is truth absolute, relative, or some combination of both?	No match.
Level of resistance to new ideas.	No match.
Ways to handle new information when it contradicts beliefs.	No match.

Demographic factors that did not affect these truth constructs

- Level of religious commitment.

- Major.

- Class level.

Percentages of respondents utilizing each factor (n=260)

Factors	Percent using this approach (agreement with 80+% of factor statements)
1 Critical thinking.	77.8

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1 Critical thinking.	77.8
2 Important speaker characteristics.	72.8
3 Must match religious beliefs, unwavering, and is accurate.	66.7

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Factors	Percent using this approach (agreement with 80+% of factor statements)
1 Critical thinking.	77.8
2 Important speaker characteristics.	72.8
3 Must match religious beliefs, unwavering, and is accurate.	66.7
4 Faith is paramount, based on experience, biblically based.	62.5

Agreement with Correspondence and Coherence

Truth statement	Percent Strongly Agree or Agree
Truth is something that is accurate.	79.2

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I compare new information to what I know to be true.	93.1

Conclusions

- Deciding Truth Scale instrument is valid and reliable.

- Christian college students use critical thinking approaches to evaluate truth claims.

- They favor speaker characteristics that underscore his/ her credibility.

Conclusions

- Truth claims must align with currently held religious beliefs.

- Beliefs are not readily abandoned.

- Beliefs must appear to be accurate.

- Faith is paramount, experiential, and biblically based.

Next Steps

- Develop recommendations for teachers.

- Help students to abandon egocentric approaches while embracing critical thinking approaches for veracity assessment.

END