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MYTH AND MYSTERY

Developing New Avenues of Dialogue for Christianity and Science

The Problem

Numerous attempts to reconcile Christian faith and modern science have resulted in little progress on the ground

- An antagonistic mindset is pervasive within both communities
 - Rampant misconceptions within both communities
 - Lack of trust between clergy and scientists
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Conventional avenues of dialogue

Focus on the differences between religion and science

- They answer different questions
- They perform different functions
- Different methodologies
- Often assume distinct realms of influence and authority
- Goal is either complete separation or interdependent (distinct) roles
- Dialogue often focuses around
 - Defining boundaries/roles of each
 - Keeping them separate or fitting them together

Conventional avenues of dialogue

Remove all distinctions between faith and science
(assimilate or die!)

- Underlying assumption of concordism by many Christians
- Science used to endorse the Christian narrative
- Christian doctrine used to validate or reject scientific theories
- Science used to explain/interpret elements of faith tradition
- Dialogue often focuses around
 - Zealous scientists explaining away religion
 - Zealous Christians rejecting modern science
 - Attempts at synthesis without destroying the foundations of either

More recent avenues of dialogue

Stick to practical concerns

- Environmental protection (creation care)
- Medical ethics
- Ethics of military technology
- Social justice issues

Novel approaches that focus on similarities

Where can we find similar goals, motivations, tools, and even methodologies?

- The use of mythic narrative as a guiding framework for science and faith
- The use of paradox or mystery to spur discovery and encourage humility in both science and faith communities

*“The history of our understanding not of nature but of science in recent decades has been a growing (and grudging) recognition of the extent to which other factors besides just data and reason – human characteristics, humanness, agency and the like – function in our **doing** of science.” Del Ratzsch*

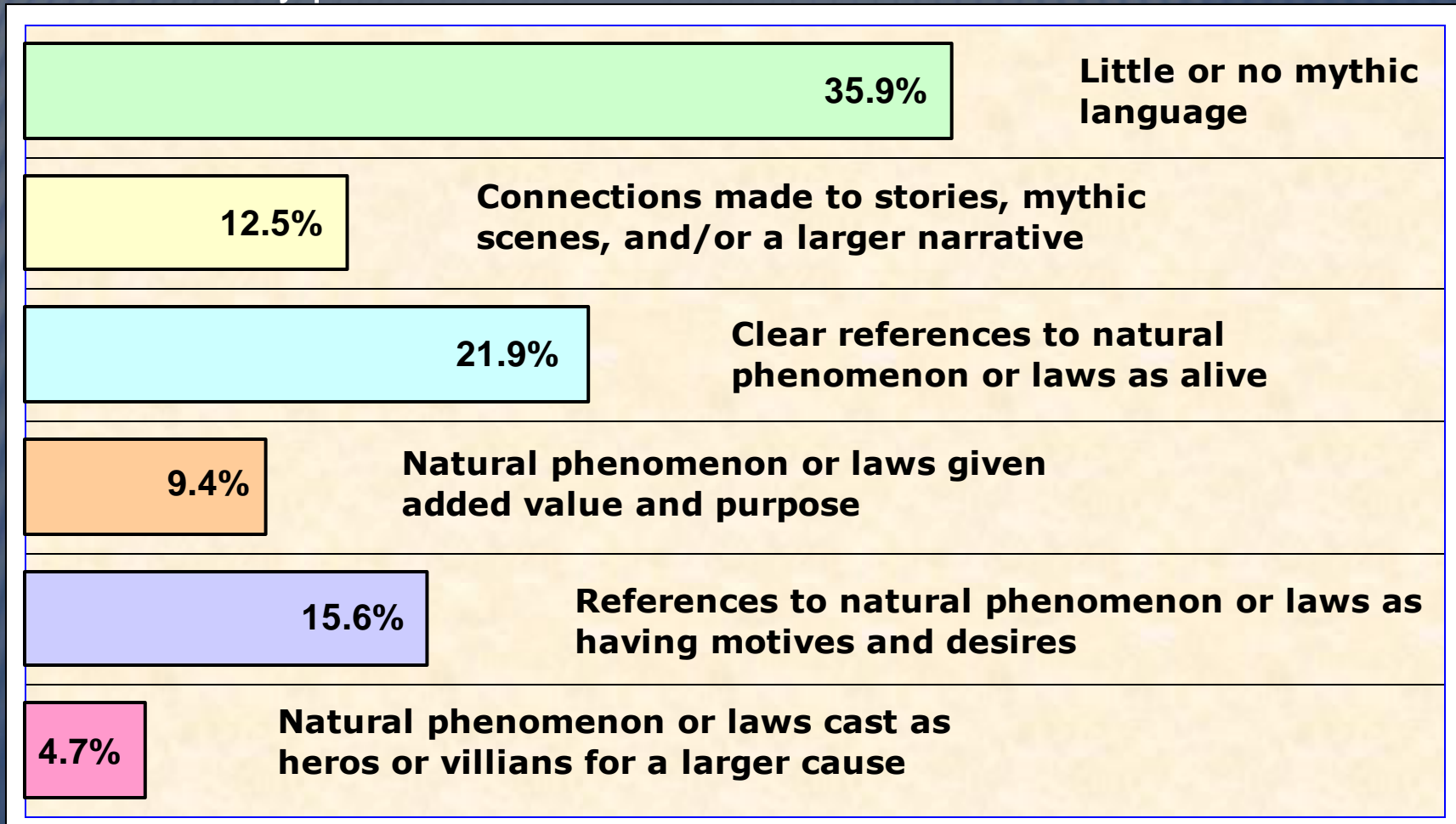
MYTH AND MYSTERY

- **Myth**--a narrative (story), ostensibly connected to historical events, which contains the embodiment of an idea, belief, and/or world view. The term myth, as used here, is neutral and does NOT imply falsehoods or distortions of the truth.
- “Mythic language” is language invoking narrative imagery in order to convey a message which may or may not have any ties to specific events or real characters.
- Mythic language is perhaps the primary method of communication for many religions, including Christianity, and has had a resurgence of popularity in modern times. (e.g. “joining the story of God” or “one’s walk with Christ” vs. “accepting Jesus as my savior”)

*“Even the highest degree of originality can operate only by taking for granted some element of an existing interpretive framework. In science, these elements form the premise and the method employed by the scientist. They define his general purpose, inspire his heuristic vision, and eventually bring forth his problem... **It is impossible to pursue discovery without the capacity to sense our approach to a hidden truth ...**” Polanyi*

MYTH AND MYSTERY

Examination of mythic language in a random sample of space physics and astronomy press releases in 2011



Science Storytelling

Scientists share the implicit, though unrecognized, assumption that “good science” must simultaneously involve both good empirical methodology and a good story, or “myth,” associated with it.

- **The Copernican Myth**
- **The ETI Myth (Astrotheology)**
- **The Unification myth**

Telling stories together

Ideally, scientists should welcome input from faith communities in constructing “science stories” and communicating them to non-scientists.

Ground rules:

- Integrity cannot be compromised for the sake of the myth. Details should not be casually discarded because they run counter to the mythic framework.
- The myth should not be confused with the science it surrounds. (e.g. randomness does not equal meaninglessness)

PARALLEL PARADOXES

“...as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know.”

Donald Rumsfeld

- **Paradox**—an *apparent* contradiction or inconsistency; does not imply actual contradiction or logical impossibility
- Some paradoxes in science have clear solutions (e.g. the Twin Paradox), some don't (e.g. Schrodinger's Cat). Even for those particularly difficult paradoxes, however, the hope remains that a satisfactory solution will be found
- Searching to resolve paradoxes often leads to new and beneficial discoveries
- The more common analog to paradox in scripture is encapsulated by the word “mystery” a word used quite often in scripture, particularly in New Testament; used to imply secret or hidden knowledge—often eventually revealed or discovered; used to describe God's character, methods of interaction, and intentions for the future

PARALLEL PARADOXES

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

"...[time] is one of those concepts that is profoundly resistant to simple definition." Carl Sagan

WAVE-PARTICLE DUALITY

"The idea that something can be both a wave and a particle defies imagination, but the existence of this wave-particle 'duality' is not in doubt. ..." Paul Davies

CAUSALITY AND UNCERTAINTY

"A philosopher once said, 'It is necessary for the very existence of science that the same conditions always produce the same results.' Well they don't!" Richard Feynman

GOD'S TIMING

"What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one who asks, I know not."
Saint Augustine

THE TRINITY

"Anyone who can worship a Trinity and insist that his religion is monotheistic can believe anything."
Robert A. Heinlein

FREE WILL AND DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

"All is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven" Talmud, Berachot 33b

"... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is producing in you both the desire and the ability to do what pleases him." Phi 2:13-14

PARALLEL PARADOXES

CHAOS AND ORDER

"To the layman, fractal art seems to be magical. Much of the underlying equations would have been regarded as part of being pure mathematics, without any application to the real world, had its visual nature not been seen." Mandelbrot

ANTHROPIC TUNING

*"What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?... Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?"
Stephen Hawking*

INTERPRETATION

*"All interesting [scientific] truth is interpreted truth."
John Polkinghorne*

GRACE AND LAW

*"For while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."
John 1:17*

HUMAN PURPOSE

"What are human beings, that you think of them; mere mortals, that you care for them?" Psalms 8:4

RELATIONSHIP

"And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." 1Co 13:2

What can paradox and mystery give us?

Common Humility: Embrace uncertainty!

“The We live on an island surrounded by a sea of ignorance. As our island of knowledge grows, so does the shore of our ignorance.” John A. Wheeler

*“The power of paradox opens your eyes and blinds those who say they can see.”
Michael Card*

Spurring Discovery: Solve the mystery!

“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity.” Einstein

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge...” 2Peter 1:5