

Hilbert's Dilemma

Or "The Insufficiency of Science"

I applied my mind to seek and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied. I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind. What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. I said to myself, "Look, I have amassed wisdom far beyond all those who were over Jerusalem before me, and my mind has thoroughly grasped wisdom and knowledge." I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly; I learned that this too is a pursuit of the wind. For with much wisdom is much sorrow; as knowledge increases, grief increases. - Ecclesiastes 1:13-18 HCSB



The Ransomed believe firmly in education. We encourage our youth to go into the sciences, believing that in careful observation of the universe, God and His principles may be found.¹ We want to be on the very bleeding edge of science and the arts, doing everything to the best of our ability for the glory of our God.²

However, we humbly recognize the limitations of the human mind.³ For example, there once was a man by the name of David Hilbert who dreamed fantastic mathematical dreams. He dreamed of creating a set of axioms that would be completely consistent and totally able to cover all truths that could flow from this set. His vision inspired scores of young mathematicians to boldly advance into the arcane fields of math, seeking to subdue their recalcitrant prey.

Unfortunately for Mr. Hilbert, a young Austrian named Kurt Gödel came along and knocked down Mr. Hilbert's mathematical house of cards. Gödel proved in 1931, that there would always be some questions that cannot be answered by axioms. His work came to be known as Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem.

Math's ability to determine ultimate truth is thus limited. Heisenburg's Uncertainty principle dictates the same type of limitations in physics.⁴ Today, great stock is rightfully placed in science and math. Scientists have used the work of mathematicians to produce wonderful things. However, we need to keep in mind that scientists and mathematicians are human too. Listening to some of them talk or reading their papers makes this fact difficult to believe at times, but there it is. They have belief systems that influence how they design their tests. Their metaphysical outlooks influence how they interpret the data.

Beyond that considerable problem lies the one that states that there are inherent limits in what they can prove. Perhaps this is why the wisest among us finally concluded that it is impossible to discover everything under that sun no matter how hard we try and even if a wise man claims to know it, he is actually unable to discover it.⁵

¹ Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-21, 25, 28, 32; 2:14-15

² Ecclesiastes 9:10; Colossians 3:23

³ Isaiah 55:8-9 cp Romans 1:22

⁴ This problem is more formally defined as the "ontological status of unobservable entities in science."

⁵ Ecclesiastes 8:16-17