

After working for more than thirty years, I am struck with the thought that I might retire without leaving what I had learned so that others could benefit from it. The loss of information reminds me of the ripples in a pond when a stone is thrown in – they just keep getting weaker and weaker. Before long they are overcome by the random waves that are always about. It reminded me of an experience I had had many years before.

Once when I was a young Scout, we went winter camping at one of our familiar sites. One of the great features of the site was that there was a creek with a grapevine hanging from the trees right over it. We loved to swing from one bank to the other, but you had to take a running jump at the vine to make it all of the way across.

Though this particular trip was during the winter, it was fairly warm during the day, and we all took our turns on the vine. One of the younger Scouts, named Richard, did not have the momentum needed to reach the opposite side. The odd thing about this place was that if you didn't make it across, you didn't have enough to get back to the starting point.

I remember Richard's initial excitement of swinging across the creek, and then the look of horror as he didn't make it. The extent of his swing slowly decreased to nothing as he was left clinging to the vine, dangling above the running creek. The look of horror was replaced by a look of despair, defeat, and finally resignation. He finally surrendered and dropped into the frigid water.

He waded out of the creek and back onto land and it was only then that we realized how great a problem we had. He had not brought any extra clothes, and the evening chill was coming on. We dried out things as best we could, but the temperature dropped into the teens that night and I don't think that he ever got really warm. Our Scoutmaster told me later that we were as close to a dangerous case of hypothermia than he had ever experienced.

So when I think of the loss of important information, I have this image in my mind of the slowly degrading swing of Richard's pendulum. This loss is associated with entropy and disorder (as is described in information theory¹). But in a similar way, it is a very sad picture, with similar dire consequences if we don't do something to prevent it.

God ideas are like melting snowflakes. They are delicate things of beauty, but they have short shelf lives. If you don't capture them, they disappear forever.

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1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entropy_\(information_theory\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entropy_(information_theory))
2. see his book Primal: A Quest for the Lost Soul of Christianity, The Doubleday Religious Publishing Group.