RECOLLECTIONS ON KURT GÖDEL

PAUL ERDÖS

Authorized Interview: Questions and editing by Norbert Brunner (U. Bodenkultur, Wien); original questionnaire filed at the Kurt Gödel archive.

Q: On what occasion did you first meet Gödel? What were your impressions?

Erdös: I first heard about Gödel in 1931 or 1932 from Kalmar. I met Gödel early in October 1938 at tea in the house of Marston Morse. He told me that he recently proved that if there is no contradiction in ZFC (Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory with the axiom of choice) then the continuum hypothesis $2^{\aleph_0} = \aleph_1$ can be assumed and we still have no contradiction.

Q: What are your views on Gödel's axioms to determine the truth of the continuum hypothesis?

Erdös: Gödel sometimes believed that eventually mathematics will be developed assuming $2^{\aleph_0} = \aleph_1$ and sometimes also $2^{\aleph_0} =$ something else. He believed that eventually one of these assumptions will prove more successful than the others and will be accepted as true. He was very impressed by Cohen's work.

Q: What were Gödel's views on science and politics in general?

Erdös: Gödel had of course a high opinion on Einstein and also a high opinion on Eisenhower. I certainly agreed with the first, and once in a discussion on politics he said Einstein instead of Eisenhower. We told him laughing Einstein would disapprove of confusing him with Eisenhower. Einstein once said joking:"Gödel ist ganz verrückt, er ist für Eisenhower anstatt für Stevenson."

Q: What were your relations with Gödel?

Erdös: I often visited Gödel at his house and had many discussions with him. I do not know much logics but often talked to him about set theory and other branches of mathematics. We often talked about politics,too. He was greatly interested in Leibniz and once I told him:"You should spend less time on Leibniz! After all you should rather prove and conjecture, so that people in 500 or 5000 years should have to spend more time in studying your work." I last saw Gödel when I visited him with my mother in may 1970.

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