

## The distant starlight problem

I would first like to applaud the exciting work being conducted by creationists in addressing many difficult issues. One such issue is the distant starlight problem. As a long-time amateur astronomer, I am encouraged by the activity and interesting work in this area.

However, I am also chagrined that the creationist literature in this area consistently rejects the possibility of a mature creation for the cosmos, or the created in transit theory. Authors regularly cite the 'deceptive God' implications of this approach. I question whether the 'illusion' is caused by God-deception or self-deception.

John Hartnett has recently put the concept in the category of 'Mystery and Miracles', and equates it to fraud. He writes: 'Creating a beam of light from source to observer so that the observer appears to see current information must also mean there is a whole stream of information in the beam that is false.'<sup>1</sup> Hartnett has elsewhere recently said: 'But I don't believe that we see any false information, like "light created on its way"'. This would mean that we would be seeing light from heavenly bodies that don't really exist ... This, in effect, portrays God as a deceiver.'<sup>2</sup> Humphreys spends several pages on this issue in *Starlight and Time*,<sup>3</sup> including the following: it would make the study of distant stars into a kind of theological literary criticism, a study of the fiction God would have chosen to write for us in the sky.

The reasoning behind such comments derives from the view that the universe appears as it does *solely* for the benefit of man, and leaves no space for a God who has a sense of beauty or pleasure in his own right. This viewpoint is wanting. The Bible indicates that while certain aspects of the heavens benefit the creation, they also reflect the Creator. Of the 70+ biblical references which may be applied to astronomy, a small minority

touch on, or illumine, the purpose of these objects.

Those which do touch on purpose or function include: Genesis 1:14–18 (echoed in Psalms 136: 5–9), Psalms 19:1, Psalms 50:6, Psalms 69:34, Psalms 89:5, Psalms 97:6 and Jeremiah 31:35. The pertinent Genesis passage says: 'And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.'" Here we find a purpose described for the sun and the moon, but it is not necessarily their sole purpose, nor is it necessarily for the benefit of mankind alone. Nor does the purpose appear to include the stars, as the extended passage simply says, 'He also made the stars.' Most of the relevant psalms above expand on Psalms 19:1: 'The Heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.' The main message of these passages is superbly summarized as follows: 'Their glory testifies to the righteousness and faithfulness of the Lord who created them.'<sup>4</sup>

Notice that it is the heavens themselves which declare this. It is not scientific instruments which declare this; it is not people describing their measurements of the heavens. It should be clear that since the creation, people have looked to the heavens and received this declaration. They did not need the results of the latest telescopic observations, or interpretations of the redshift. Nor are such physical parameters the emphasis of what the heavens are declaring; it concerns spiritual matters. So, as we consider the criticized 'deceptions' of the mature creation model, just who is fooling whom here?

Most creationists writing in this field are focused on the perspective of the contemporary human astronomer; but what about God's perspective? Several significant Bible passages indicate a broader purpose in the creation: Colosians 1:16, on the supremacy of Christ, states that 'all things were created by him *and for him*'. Hebrews 2:10 states, 'it was fitting that God, *for*

*whom* and through whom everything exists ...'. Revelation 4:11 says, 'for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being'. The KJV translates 'by your will' as '*for your pleasure*'. These passages make it clear that the creation does not appear as it does solely for the benefit of man. It reflects a God of beauty, pleasure and mind-boggling creativity.

Consider the artist who, from his keen imagination, paints the image of a beautiful woman. We, the viewers of the painting, do not conclude that his intention is to fool us into thinking that the painting is as old as the woman appears. I believe when God created the heavens, he created the complete painting, which was fully functional, with an appearance which was beautiful and satisfying to Him. I also believe that a mature creation is consistent with all of the passages referenced above. Does it provide signs to mark seasons and days and years? Yes. Does it declare His glory? Yes. Can we measure physical aspects of it? Yes. Is it our sophisticated measurements which declare His glory? No. Does it appear old to us? Yes (to astronomers anyway). Does it appear old to Him? Ah, now there is the crux of it. What human is qualified to answer that question?

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### References

1. Hartnett, J.G., A New Cosmology: Solution to the Starlight Travel Time Problem, *TJ* 17(2):99, 2003.
2. Hartnett, J.G., interviewed by Gary Bates in: Exploding the big bang! *Creation* 25(4): 38–39, 2003.
3. Humphreys, D.R., *Starlight and Time*, pp. 43–46.
4. Ps 19:1 study note, Zondervan NIV Concordia Self-Study Bible.