

Mature creation and seeing distant starlight

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The concept of a mature creation is defined and explored. There is a rich history to the idea including Bible scholars, renaissance artists, and the much-maligned book *Omphalos* (1857) written by Philip Gosse. Of special interest to a mature creation is the problem of how we can see distant starlight in a young universe. Four major objections to a mature creation are discussed along with rebuttals. A mature, fully functioning universe, including starlight formed in transit, remains a credible option for the young-earth creationist worldview.

Some long-held young-earth creationist concepts have faded in popularity in recent years. The vapor canopy theory, once widely accepted, is today considered passé by many. This is also true for assumed gaps in the genealogical records of Genesis 5 and 11. A third concept undergoing challenge is creation with apparent age, especially with respect to seeing distant stars. Many creationists feel uncomfortable with the suggestion that starlight was created instantly with its information-loaded light photons in transit between the physical star and the earth.

Spokesmen have described the mature creation of the cosmos as “a gigantic phony lightshow of things that are not real”,¹ and a “fiction ... in the sky”.² Critics of young-earth creation have been less charitable: “There is no logical reason why a god would impart ‘the appearance of age’ into a creation, unless that god’s purpose was to deceive the ‘created’ (and that says a lot about the god).”³ In contrast, I humbly suggest that the mature creation of the heavens, with starlight made in transit, remains a credible interpretation of creation. After all, a ‘mature creation’ is so-named precisely because it is a matured form of an apparent previous stage of development.⁴ Other names for apparent age include “functioning completeness”⁵ and “prochronism”.⁶

The term ‘mature creation’ generates about 3,600 Google hits, showing significant interest. There have been previous related creationist studies, for example by Marsh,⁷ Akridge,⁸ Sonstroem⁹ and Murphy.¹⁰ I will define ‘mature creation’ in the following way. The earth, solar system, Milky Way Galaxy and entire universe were brought into existence supernaturally during six 24-hour days. Top soil and trees appeared virtually instantaneously in the Garden. Fully-grown animals were miraculously formed on land and in the air, complete with symbiotic relationships. The seas instantly swarmed with creatures, great and small, that had never been born or developed from infancy. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were adults from their first breaths. The sun’s nuclear fusion furnace began on Day 4, at full power and in thermodynamic equilibrium. Starlight from distant stars was created in transit, complete with a virtual history of information embedded within the light waves. Adam and Eve could look at the night sky their first evening on Earth and see cosmic light sources much as we

do tonight. To an observer, the completed creation on Day 6 was fully functioning in a steady state.

The preceding is a personal definition of mature creation, and I realize that the term *virtual history* is controversial. If true, where does real age start? Biblically, actual historic time begins with the Creation Week. Concerning starlight, however, an answer to the question is less clear.

The mature creation definition does not include such present realities as thorns, thistles, disease and death. These profound defects follow from the post-creation Fall, or Curse as described in Genesis 3. Likewise, the mature creation description does not include the idea that fossils were created *ex nihilo* in Earth rocks. Such evidences of judgment and death find their source in the Genesis Flood which took place about 1600 years following creation. Terry Mortenson further explains this biblical chronology.¹¹

History of the idea

Mature creation was a common assumption of many early Bible scholars¹² Admittedly, early writers did not struggle with the challenge of seeing distant starlight in a young universe; the vastness of stellar distances was realized only in modern times. Consider the following selected quotations.

“But in the first creation of the universe, as I have said already, God produced the whole race of trees out of the earth in full perfection, having their fruit not incomplete, but in a state of entire ripeness, to be ready for the immediate and undelayed use and enjoyment of the animals ...”¹³

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC–AD 50)

“In a moment earth began by germination to obey the laws of the Creator, completed [in] every stage of growth, and brought germs to perfection. The meadows were covered with deep grass, the fertile plains quivered with harvests, and the movement of the corn was like the waving of the sea. Every plant, every herb, the smallest shrub, the least vegetable, arose from the earth in all its luxuriance.”¹⁴

Saint Basil of Caesarea (c. AD 330–379)

Hexameron

Commenting on the Creation Week, John Calvin wrote, "... things which were not came suddenly into being... God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men...the light was before dispersed [Day 1], but now [Day 4] proceeds from the lucid bodies; which, in serving this purpose, obey the command of God."¹⁵

The writings of Morris and Whitcomb strongly support a mature creation: "There could be no genuine creation of any kind, without an initial appearance of age inherent in it."¹⁶ They extend this concept to the level of atomic elements as shown in the next two quotations:

"We have already shown that the Bible quite plainly and irrefutably teaches the fact of a grown Creation—one with an 'apparent age' of some sort, analogous to the 'apparent age' of a mature Adam at the first instant of his existence. This Creation must have included all the chemical elements already organized in all the organic and inorganic chemical compounds and mixtures necessary to support the processes of the earth and of life on the earth."¹⁷

"It is ... quite reasonable to believe that both parent and daughter elements in each radioactive chain were created at the beginning, probably in 'equilibrium' amounts. The amount of originally created radiogenic end-product in each chain is uncertain; it is likely, however, that homologous amounts were created in all such minerals so that all such elements would, when created, give an 'appearance' of the same degree of maturity or age."¹⁸

Philip Henry Gosse

The history of mature creation is incomplete unless the writings of Philip Henry Gosse are considered. This British naturalist has been scoffed at, ridiculed, and vilified for his 1857 book, *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot*. It was published two years before Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and by then the scientific establishment and virtually the entire British church hierarchy had accepted the idea that the Creation was millions of years old. *Omphalos* suggests that the world is not nearly as old as geologists assume, but instead is made with a built-in appearance of age. Gosse discusses the cycles of nature including water, soils, rocks and life, and he argues that



Figure 1. English naturalist Philip Gosse (1810–1888). His 1857 book *Omphalos* attempted to reconcile biblical creation with apparent geologic ages.

all things were created *ex nihilo* as if they were part of these ongoing cycles. Gosse promotes the position that creation took place in 4004 BC. He suggests that light from distant stars was created in such a way that it could be seen from Earth the moment the stars were formed.¹² Unfortunately, Gosse's otherwise sound arguments were torpedoed by his suggestion that mountains, canyons, tree rings, and fossils embedded in sedimentary rock layers also were instantly formed in the original creation. The inclusion of fossils perhaps was his most serious mistake.

The book title *Omphalos* is Greek for 'navel'. The implication is that Adam and Eve had navels or bellybuttons because all parts of creation were made with the appearance that they were embedded within cycles of ongoing natural processes. Others argue against navels because Adam and Eve did not

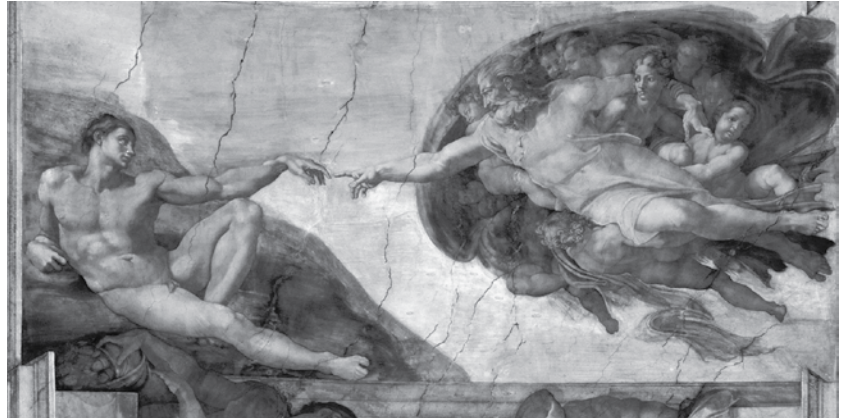
have human parents. Those who scoff at the title of Gosse's book reveal a lack of understanding of the significance of the word *Omphalos*. Historically, *Omphalos* was a cultural concept representing the seat of wisdom. The Greek world worshipped special *omphalos* stones and tablets. Delphi was the ancient Greek mountaintop site where citizens and world rulers came for healing and for counsel from the resident oracle. The Delphi site itself was known as *Omphalos*, that is, the navel, or center, of the world. A great temple to Apollo was located there, and Delphi also was the site of the Pythian Games, forerunner of the modern Olympics. The ancient splendor of Delphi can be seen in its present-day ruins. The book title chosen by Gosse carries the meaning of probing a deep mystery, offering his solution to the growing challenge of deep geologic time.

Then and now, Philip Gosse has been unfairly pictured as naïve and unscholarly. In truth, he authored dozens of scientific works. He was well-known for his original studies of the natural history of birds, insects, orchids, marine biology and stewardship of the earth. Gosse was a highly-respected fellow of the British Royal Society. However, the publication of his objections to the old-earth evolutionary timescale did not win friends in scholarly circles. Instead, the immediate result was ostracism. While biological evolution was not widely accepted until after Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, the geological evolution of the earth over millions of years had been accepted in scholarly circles for decades by the time *Omphalos* was written.¹⁹

As readers may conclude from this section, I believe that Philip Henry Gosse was an outstanding creationist pioneer with a negative reputation which is undeserved. Certainly, his *Omphalos* argument about the fossils and rock layers was badly mistaken, but the balance of his book is well

reasoned, true also of his other writings. A semi-positive review of *Omphalos* is offered by Burgeson.²⁰

As a point of interest, the question of Adam's navel has also impacted the art world. Raphael (1483–1520) included navels for Adam and Eve in his ceiling fresco at the Vatican. Michelangelo (1475–1564) likewise included a navel for Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (figure 2). In contrast, Dutch artist Jan van Scorel (1495–1512) painted smooth, featureless stomachs in his *Adam and Eve in Paradise*. One can imagine the artistic debates over this issue at the time of the paintings, a debate still unresolved.



Michelangelo Buonarroti: www.wikipedia.org

Figure 2. Michelangelo's fresco *Creation of Adam*, painted on the ceiling of the Vatican's Sistine Chapel in 1511. Adam is shown with a navel.

Four objections to a mature creation of the heavens

I will list four common objections to the mature creation view, followed with rebuttals. The rebuttals are not meant to convince critics of mature creation but to encourage discussion.

1. Mature creation is an outdated, naïve assumption. It does not wrestle with the hard questions such as seeing distant stars, supernovae, and colliding galaxies. A fully mature creation viewpoint takes the easy way out, dismissing origin details instead of doing the hard work of facing them and offering technical explanations. In addition, the idea of a mature creation is unscientific because it cannot be tested.
2. If God created starlight in transit, then at what point does the built-in appearance of age cease? Did God also create fossils of plants and animals which never lived? Did He instantly make igneous, granitic and basaltic rocks which were never molten? Did He arrange sedimentary strata from rock particles that had never eroded from elsewhere? Did He place radioactive decay products such as radiohalos and fission tracks within rocks which had no real history of radioactivity?

If a mature creation extends everywhere, both on Earth and in the heavens, then all of history may be false. The entire cosmos could have been made just last Thursday, including people with artificial, manufactured memories. Hugh Ross writes, "Taken to its logical conclusion, the appearance of age theory would imply that we could not establish [that] our past experience actually occurred."²¹

3. For God to create starlight in transit implicates Him in deception. All stellar light spectra contain vast amounts of information on previous history. It would be deceitful to instantly create such an apparent, unreal history. God is not a liar or deceiver according to Numbers 23:19 and Titus 1:2.

4. Mature creation, if extended into space, makes astronomical inquiry futile. We must abandon any hope of valid scientific investigation.

Rebuttals to the preceding objections

1. In spite of the common assumption of every generation, older ideas are not necessarily wrong. In addition, many questions regarding creation events lie entirely beyond our understanding. The Creation Week, including the placement of the heavens, can be described as miraculous, supernatural 'holy ground' which is beyond scientific analysis. There are several creationist models that attempt to explain seeing distant starlight in a young universe. They include exponentially-decaying light speed, curved space, and large-scale relativistic time-dilation. Each of these models remains unproven and tentative. For example, the just-mentioned ideas do not explain the nature of sunshine as we understand it today. In current solar models, 10,000–170,000 years are required for solar radiation to reach the sun's surface from the core due to absorption and reemission.²² Do the solar photons we detect today come from the sun's core, or were they directly created midway from the solar core on their outward journey?

It is premature to assume that any current creation model is the final word, including the mature option. Later research may show otherwise. The mature creation view does not scientifically explain all the difficult questions such as seeing detailed information in distant starlight, but this is not a sufficient reason to abandon or ridicule the position. Every model of origins, whether sacred or secular, has its full share of unanswered questions.

2. Some early creation models, including that of Philip Gosse, did indeed propose that fossils were created within rocks. One extreme suggestion is that God placed such items underground to lead astray those who reject Him and choose instead the lie of evolution. The text 2 Thessalonians 2:11 states, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

This reference, however, is not in the context of creation. I would suggest that the appearance of age is limited to those events in the Bible that are clearly miraculous in nature. Every part of the Creation Week was miraculous in some way and there is clear evidence of maturity in the origin of animals, plants and people. This trend encourages us also to expect supernatural maturity with respect to the creation of the heavenly bodies on Day 4. The mature creation view fully accepts the Genesis Flood as the explanation for the subsequent formation of fossils and sedimentary strata. There is nothing in the Genesis 6–8 Flood account that leads us to seek a supernatural explanation for the rock strata and their fossils. RATE research also finds evidence for radiohalo and fission track formation occurring during post-Creation Earth history.²³

Biblical revelation clearly describes 6000 years of detailed human history, as well as a sequence of future events. Hugh Ross misses this point in describing an appearance of age: “we could have been created just a few hours ago with the Creator implanting memory, material possessions, scars, and hardening of the arteries to make us appear and feel older than we really are. As such, we could not be held responsible for any of our ‘past’ actions.”²¹ Ross appears to have discounted the clear account of literal biblical history.

3. The spectra of distant stars do indeed contain detailed information. Furthermore, every single component of any conceivable supernatural creation faces this ‘problem’. Consider a pebble lying upon the ground in the Garden of Eden. Today, rocks come from previously existing materials. If the just-created pebble in the Garden is a smooth stone, it bears an apparent record of chemical weathering or tumbling in water. If it appears rough or

broken, it then bears an apparent record of fracturing by previous mechanical weathering.²⁴ The reader is challenged to describe any detail of the Creation Week, large or small, which would not carry such a historic record.

It is readily acknowledged that there is a vast difference between a rounded pebble lying in the Garden of Eden, and the ongoing spectral information streaming to us from distant stars. Did the Creation event consist of minimal, partial, or total maturity?²⁵ That is, was an artificial history of information built into starlight? Likewise, did trees in the Garden have rings and knots? We simply do not know.

Adam and Eve arrived in this world with adult minds pre-wired with thought processes, language, and knowledge of the Creator. Their hair length gave apparent evidence of previous growth. As they breathed, the earth’s ready-made atmosphere gave evidence of meteorological and compositional equilibrium. If creation with maturity is deceptive, whether for rocks, atmosphere, stars, or our first parents, then so are all biblical miracles.

Consider the New Testament miracle of wine-making, found in John 2:1–11. If a chemist could go back in time, could he or she perhaps measure the molecular components that had never actually been converted from sugars? Perhaps the wine could be identified as the product of a particular local vineyard, even though it had never been pressed from harvested grapes. The point here is that created wine contains detailed chemical information, just as starlight contains spectral details. Mature creation is a deception only when one assumes outright that apparent age is false. The Genesis account of God’s supernatural creative activities in six literal days, complete with visible starlight, is fully consistent with a mature creation. In placing the visible stars above, the Lord clearly declares His supernatural work (Psalm 33:6–9).

Cosmologists realize that the mature creation viewpoint cannot be refuted, as the following quotes illustrate. The spokesmen are not sympathetic to mature creation, yet they grasp the credibility of the option. I thank John Byl for collecting the following references.²⁶

“A modern cosmologist who was also a theologian with strict fundamentalist views could construct a universe model which began 6000 years ago in time and whose edge was at a distance of 6000 light years from the solar system. A benevolent God could easily arrange the creation of the universe ... so that suitable radiation was travelling toward us from the edge of the universe to give the illusion of a vastly older and larger expanding universe. It would be impossible for any other scientist on the Earth to refute this world picture experimentally ... all he could do would be to disagree.”²⁷



Figure 3. The ‘nearby’ Large Magellanic Cloud Galaxy, about 160,000 light years distant. An exploding star observed here, named Supernova 1987A, is a challenge to the mature creation view (NASA).



Figure 4. Andromeda Galaxy is one of the most distant objects visible to the unaided eye at 2,500,000 light years. A single light year is about six trillion miles (NASA).

It should be noted that a time dilated universe also cannot be refuted experimentally.

“There is no question that the theory [mature creation] is free from self-contradiction and is consistent with all the facts of experience we have to explain; it certainly does not multiply hypotheses beyond necessity since it invokes only one; and it is evidently beyond future refutation. If, then, we are to ask of our concepts nothing more than that they shall correlate our present experiences economically, we must accept it in preference to any other.”²⁸

4. Vern Poythress has written on this topic.²⁹ He is not a literal six-day creationist, yet he lends support to the mature creation concept. Poythress suggests that God could have made a universe, perhaps 6000 years ago, which is *coherently mature*. This is not to be confused with Howard Van Til’s *fully gifted creation*, which is an alternate name for theistic evolution.³⁰ Poythress defines *ideal time* as an apparent age originally built into all parts of nature, including the heavens. He suggests that scientific inquiry into details such as stellar spectra is entirely valid, whether or not the spectra originated from the surface of stars or were created directly in flight. Another name for Poythress’ ideal time concept is *prochronic time*, meaning “outside of time”.⁶

In the Poythress view, it is entirely proper scientifically to explore images of exploding galaxies. We are locked into our viewpoint of elapsing time while God exists entirely above and beyond time. He simultaneously and continually sees past, present, and future. Processes which in the mature creation viewpoint did not actually occur, such as a supernova explosion, remain real events in the mind of God. This argument and the concept of time in general, deserve further reflection and study.

Some adherents of mature creation may themselves adopt objection four, and as a result, reject all conclusions from modern astronomy. Although reservations concerning geology and astronomy are understandable, these disciplines are important components of the Creation worldview. Creationist interpretations of data are needed, but neither geology nor astronomy should be neglected by creationists.

As an interesting side point, the option of apparent age is employed by Clemson University, South Carolina, to defuse classroom tensions. In some geology classes, apparent age is presented as a possible explanation of Earth history. Creationist-oriented students are encouraged to study traditional geology, allowing for the possible instant imprinting of creation details on a young earth. “With students no longer on the defensive, they are free to study geology without feeling like they are betraying their religious faith.”³¹

Two implications of a mature creation

Two serious implications follow from a consistent mature creation position. First, consider the possibility that Gosse and Poythress are correct in their models of a coherently mature creation (except for Gosse’s mistaken application of this to the geologic record). This then calls into question some of our scientific arguments for a young earth. Poythress suggests that, although creation is not ancient, there could be a consistent, built-in maturity. If this were true, it would not mean that creation research on Earth chronology has no value. After all, every item of data is subject to interpretation, and it is our task to point this out. However, no infallible, scientific young-earth or old-earth argument is known. That is, every old-earth argument has a young-earth rebuttal, and vice versa. What decades of research on chronology show is the difficulty in absolutely dating any aspect of the earth or the universe. There remains before us a wide spectrum of age interpretations depending on one’s perspective.

A second implication also is unsettling and controversial: Why does a large subset of data interpretation result in an age of 4.6 billion years for the solar system, and three times older for the universe, currently 13.6 billion years? I strongly emphasize that these ages are not actual. Yet they roughly converge from several distinct lines of data interpretation. The reason simply may be confirmation bias, also called canonical phase locking, the tendency to filter information so as to confirm a working hypothesis. If this is not the case, however, why were these particular ages built into the recent supernatural creation? Why not 4.6 million or 4.6 trillion years for the earth? Perhaps there are no answers to such questions. Five decades ago, Whitcomb and Morris also commented on the mystery of this initial, finite age for the earth.³²

Conclusion

This article discusses four challenges to a thoroughly mature creation including starlight in transit. I will conclude with five brief points in favor of a mature creation model. *First*, a mature creation takes a straightforward, transparent, literal approach to the Genesis creation account. Genesis 1 and 2, after all, give us literal narrative history.³³ *Second*, in explaining the observation of distant starlight, the mature creation view does not require the employment of abstract physics concepts including generally relativity, cosmology and gravity theory. Such disciplines are incomplete and may be modified in the future. *Third*, consider the alternative to created starlight. We are then led to use our present understanding of *natural* science to explain details of the *supernatural* Creation. Is this logical or consistent? Were the laws of nature including relativity and conservation of energy even in operation during the Creation Week? *Fourth*, those who favor a mature creation are in good company. It is a historically-rich position as demonstrated by many Bible scholars, past and present. *Fifth*, the mature creation is consistent and compatible with the nature of miracles from the Old and New Testaments.

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