

Spiritual Genetics: Urantia Book Perspectives on Personality

Transcript of a talk given by Steve Dreier
at the Urantia Book Fellowship IC'05 Conference

Transcribed by MaryJo Garascia

Introduction

I'd like to begin by reflecting a bit on personality. We have a word problem, which we usually have with words from The Urantia Book; words are used often in such different ways you sometimes wonder whether it's going to be possible to communicate at all. You remember the revelators' statement about love. It's a pity, they say, that we don't have some other term to use because the way you folks use this term, in so many different ways—it's so remote from what we mean by it, when we talk of the love of God. But it's the word you have, so it's the word we have to use.

And the same thing is true with personality. In the discussion of personality, you might routinely hear descriptions like "He has a good personality;" "She has a bad personality"—comments that, in a cosmic sense, are totally without meaning; completely without meaning, in the sense of The Urantia Book. There are no good or bad personalities; there are personalities.

So, what do we mean by personality?

Well, personality is a quality of reality that each one of us possesses. It comes directly from God the Father—the Universal Father. Everything else we have—our bodies, our minds—come through delegated processes. Our bodies are produced through an evolutionary process which is intelligently guided, managed by personnel who have been delegated that task. Our minds come from the local Universe Mother Spirit, or Infinite Spirit if you like.

And all of this work is done, and then when it reaches an adequate point of maturation, God acts, the Universal Father acts. And at that moment—and at that moment only—a person is born, comes into existence. When we say "God is our Father," we are not talking figuratively. This is no metaphor or analogy. This is a literal statement of fact. It's always been so, and it will always be so.

There are traditions we have—as in Genesis, for example—where God created the first two human beings. Most traditions don't go nearly far enough. God DID create the first two human

beings—the same way he's created each of us. He created the first two, and every one since then, and everyone that will ever be. And not only human beings, but angels and midwayers and Melchizedeks and any being who is a person—who possesses personality.

And we are all woven together, held together in a vast field of personality which centers in the Universal Father who is the Source of each and every personality—brothers and sisters without question. And not only amongst ourselves, but amongst the midwayers, and the angels and the Melchizedeks and every other personality you can think of, right up to the Eternal Son. All God's children—literally. This is profound revelation, profound.

But what is personality?

Well, the revelators say it's one of the unsolved mysteries of the cosmos. We can't define it for you. It's an unsolved mystery. But we can tell you a lot about it. Why? Because it's observable, like every other reality is observable, and so if we look at it carefully, we can determine a number of its characteristics and we can talk about those. Let's consider some of them.

Unique

Each personality is unique, one-of-a-kind, no duplicates.

Inherently, we know this. Each of us, as persons, has the direct experience of personality and we know that we are unique—there's only one of us. There never will be a duplicate. In fact, from the point of view of personal experience, it doesn't make any sense to talk about a duplicate. It may not mean much, this uniqueness—I mean it doesn't seem to affect daily life very much. You know—you don't go around thinking "I'm unique."

But you know, the interesting thing about it is: it's a genetic thing. Maybe there's a better word for it, but it's a genetic thing. It's spiritual genetics. God is unique. "I am God, there is none beside me. I am God alone." There's only one God – the Universal Father – he is unique. He IS our Father, and we genetically inherit from him his qualities. And one of them is uniqueness. It's just one of the little bits of evidence that this thing is literal. So, we are unique.

Changelessness

Another characteristic of personality is that it is changeless.

The word I prefer is "immutable," but it's a funny, odd word. It's changeless; it never changes; it cannot change. Now, it can cause change. Personality can cause change and personalities can observe change and they can do all kinds of things with respect to change. But a personality is

the unchanging subject of all change—the unchanged changer. And it will always be so. It's another genetic inheritance factor. "I am God. I change not," says the Universal Father. And this quality of changelessness is something we inherit from the Universal Father because we are his children. And so does every other personality—every one.

Self-Consciousness

A third quality—one might say privilege—of personality is self-reflection, self-consciousness.

We not only exist, we're not only conscious, but we are conscious that we are conscious. We do it routinely. We have self-awareness. At this point, it may be a little different from the first two qualities I mentioned. This is another genetic quality. It's another birthmark. It's another sign of where we come from. God as the Universal Father is totally self-aware; the only being, the revelators say, in the whole of creation, that possesses a full, complete, and perfect appraisal of himself—complete self-awareness. We are self-aware, but not that self-aware!

At this point, we have inherited a characteristic, but not in its fullness. Now, with respect to uniqueness and immutability (changelessness), we've inherited the full portion; but here, a more limited portion, and properly so—with good reason.

Self-awareness obviously allows us to examine ourselves, to consider what we're doing, why we're doing it and it becomes even more complicated than that. For example, as we're sitting here we can all say to ourselves "Well, I am conscious as I see all this stuff all around. But even more than that, I'm conscious that I am conscious. I am aware that I'm aware that I can see all this stuff." And while it might be a little stretch right now, you can take it a third step if you like: "I'm conscious that I'm conscious that I'm conscious." And you can do that, too. And as is the certain case from there, it's tortoises all the way down. That is, it goes on infinitely. It may be hard to hold right now, but there is a property of infinity there—an infinite regress, you might say.

Why is it there? I mean, isn't it enough to just be conscious of consciousness? Won't that do? Isn't that sufficient? So, I'm really just conscious when I act; I'm aware that I'm acting, and so I can make judgments. But why do I need this rubric thing that goes off into infinity? I don't know. I don't know.

But I would add a little story I heard from a man awhile back, who said: "I went by this lake, in the Midwest, pretty lake, and I walked out there one evening and there was this enormous bird resting on the lake. I'd never seen anything like it before. I was sure it wasn't native to this area. It was a huge bird-- enormous beak, powerful neck, big wings." And he thought to himself: if

it's not native here, it's on its way. It's coming from someplace. It's going someplace. And it's resting here in the evening.

Then he thought to himself: there's a place where this bird is going that is fitted to this creature ... a great sea, a great ocean someplace. And even if I never see it, even if I never see it myself, I know it's there. That bird is evidence that it's there.

And when I come across these properties of personality that I observe, but I can't explain, that's what I think. There's a great sea out there someplace. Right now, it's inconceivable. But we're on our way from here to there, rested and alive. And those properties that we experience about ourselves are there because we're fitted for that place.

So, we'll do something with those properties some time. I can't imagine what yet, but it's just interesting to know that they're there. Our consciousness, our consciousness, our consciousness. So, we have three genetic markers that prove—by faith, by the way, can't prove this to any scientist, but they're proved by faith—that we have a direct relationship with God.

Moral Awareness

And then there's moral awareness.

Moral awareness comes with personality. All personalities are morally aware, which is simply to say they recognize the reality of distinctions like right and wrong. Most of the time this property is used with respect to human institutions—customs, conventions, tradition. We often establish our standards about right and wrong based on how we've been raised, where we've been raised, what we've been taught. Sometimes it's our purely personal wants and desires that establish our moral convictions; that way we decide what's right and wrong.

It's an interesting thing. Animals don't do it. Only persons do it. When we get around to noticing this ability, in growing up with it a little and becoming a little more adult in its use, we might even stop thinking in terms of right and wrong and start to think in terms of good, better, and best. Good, better, and best. What's moral becomes not only what's good—not if there's something better. And what's moral is not what's better, not if there's a best that you can see. Try explaining that one to your cat. (laughter). And even there, it's still a basically human reference—we call it morality.

Spiritual Morality

And there's another level of it that we can call "spiritual morality." Spiritual mortality.

This is good, better, and best as God sees it. And we are endowed with that ability as well. We

can do that. Why can we do it? Because God does it and because we've inherited, as his children, the same abilities. Now, can we do it to the extent that God does it? Of course not. But I have a feeling we can do it to an extent that far eclipses anything we can even faintly imagine; that far-off sea beckons us.

And we learn it by doing it, by practicing, by believing it, by acting on it. In most people's lives, those moments when they make the decision to follow the best instead of the better—those are the high points of life. That's when you feel you are alive. It's when the experience of self-respect sits at the absolute heights because you have the conviction, the sense, the experience, of being in tune with the cosmos—doing the right thing. Those are among the most precious moments of personal existence.

Jesus knew them regularly. We know them perhaps not as frequently, but we will know them and continue to know them with greater and greater frequency.

Freedom

But we have still another endowment...it's freedom.

This is the first one I started out with. Personalities come with freedom built in. This means that they are capable of creativity. That is, they can make something out of nothing. They need no cause; no cause at all to produce an effect, except their own decision to produce that effect. That's all that's required. It's a level of cosmic dignity of unimaginable profundity and of course it's another genetic indication of our relationship to God. God is creative in the absolute sense. We are creative in a finite, and at the moment, circumscribed sense. And a good thing, too...a good thing, too.

If we were totally creative and we could manipulate let's say, physical reality at will, the temperature in this room would be jumping up and down (laughter) about as fast as you could follow it. The sun would be going up and down about as fast as you could follow it because we'd be all different senses about whether the sun should be up or down. So, it's limited.

Primarily, this creativity is limited to our inner life; that's where the choice is made. And then, of course, we can express them in the outer life because we are the unchanging changers; we can change things. So we have these creative experiences in the inner life, in the imagination, in the inner experience. And then we move to act in the outer world—we change things.

The problem with creativity—and there is a problem—is this: It's a problem with change. Change can be constructive or destructive. Freedom is freedom. Freedom to change is freedom to change constructively or destructively...either way. Which is probably why the facility is

limited right now. How to change things? How to use the unique, unchanged, self-aware, spiritually conscious creative personality to change things? That's a decision we have to make, each one of us.

Love

And then, there's love.

We all know some of the things The Urantia Book says about love. "The desire to do good to others." "The secret of beneficial association between personalities." And many other things, including "God is love." Love is something that transpires only between personalities. It's a privilege of personality. The fact that we can love and be loved, it's a gift of God in personality.

In life, the things that matter most, I think, are mostly other persons ... other persons, either directly or indirectly. Either directly through immediate relationships or indirectly through the things that you do that enrich the lives of other persons.

What purpose would the various work that we do—the various occupations that we have—what purpose would they serve if they were not in relation to persons? Like a conductor, you know, or a composer who composes a piece of music but there are no musicians—what would that mean? In general, the things we treasure most, the things we value most, the last things we would want to part with in life, are persons. Everything else can go—it doesn't matter. What matters, when it comes right down to it, are persons. And where do these persons come from—these persons that we value most?

A Gift from God

Well, they come from God. God's given us ourselves as persons and he's given us every other person as persons. Everything we have that matters most comes from God. Everything.

Now, when you realize this—when you sit down in a quiet moment and you understand, you've answered these basic questions: Who am I? How did I get here? What is my purpose? Who is everybody else? Where am I going? You may have the same experience that I have, which is an experience of overwhelming gratitude. Overwhelming.

And I think—and say often out loud, "Everything I have that means anything to me—everything I have, I owe to you. I didn't ask for it, you just gave it to me. At one time I didn't even know what the situation was, but then I discovered it one day. And now, I want to do something for you."

It's a terrible way to say it, because it's not that kind of a transaction, but that's what it amounts to. It's a matter of self-respect. You sit there and think: I cannot possibly remain indifferent in this situation. I have received so much. I just WANT to give something back!

We haven't developed adequate language for it yet. That's a problem. You can find it in poetry, but even that's not right. It's just the limitation of words. "I want to be with you. I want to use these powers that you've given me that come directly from you in the way you think they ought to be used. Show me how to use them—how to maximize the potential resident in these."

And so, what have I said in all of this?

That one of the great truths that is in The Urantia Book is the goodness of God; it is the goodness of God that leads us into the light. That, and that alone. There is no trace of compulsion—not a trace. The Universal Father stakes everything on the power of goodness. Everything. And it's not a gamble. He knows there is no greater power in the cosmos. And he knows that when we wake up, when we begin to realize more deeply the treasures that he has bestowed upon us, the rest will take place naturally.

Now—there's a lot more to say about personality, and I hope that in the next fifty years we'll discover a lot more to say about personality. Here, we've just scratched the surface. We have a vision of personality that, while it exists in other places in the world, we're not the only ones who hold it; others have understood. It's not very widespread, and this one really needs to be widespread: Every person is a direct, creative, child of God. A created child of God ... every person. A person is holy. Every person—EVERY person. A world that does not recognize that is blighted in ignorance.

About 200 years ago, the philosopher Kant, Emmanuel Kant, who is fairly recognized as one of the seminal thinkers in Western thought, was trying to resolve some of the intractable problems of philosophy, and he developed what he called the "categories of thought," and in those categories he discovered some inherent things—the things that stood right at the top of the categories—right at the top. And in one of those categories, the imperative that stood right at the top was always—ALWAYS—treat another human being as an end, and never as a means. He put that right at the top of his thought.

A human being, a person, is never a means—never—always an end. And The Urantia Book says the same thing. Everything nonspiritual in human experience is a means to an end, excepting personality, which is an end in itself.

Now, this is just words. Kant said this over 200 years ago and it hasn't made a whole lot of difference in the way people behave. The Urantia Book says that this insight is critical. It's critical to begin to experience persons as ends, and never as means; never as means. All of the tragedy and the dysfunction that we see in the world is a consequence of treating individuals as means—means to some ends, and not as ends in themselves.

So, in my opinion, the fuller understanding and experience of personality is something more than just a bunch of words, obviously. A fuller understanding of personality will vastly improve human relationships. We've got to learn to treasure personality, whenever and wherever it is, remembering that a personality is unchanging.

Now, the personality, an individual person, may cause changes that are not particularly admirable, often out of ignorance and mis-teaching, or some other malady of society. But that change that the person causes must never be mistaken for the person. And Jesus never did make that error.

One of the great examples is the woman at Simon's house who broke the flacon of perfume and washed him with it. And Simon and the other folks said, well, you know, how can he let this low-quality, low-morality woman touch him? He's obviously not a prophet.

And in that discussion Jesus says: well, you know, it's not so much where a person stands; that's not what's critical. What's critical is where they're going. They're full of potential. The only critical thing is not where they are at this moment, but where they're going. And this woman was going forward. That's all you need to know. She's fine. Now, it's going to take awhile; she's not going to rise to the level of you, Simon, with all your culture and understanding, but you— she may surpass you pretty soon because you've settled down and you're not moving any more.

These are understandings that made him so extraordinarily effective, because he was never deceived by the appearance of things. He always tried to understand things in the context of their reality and then in any case when he dealt with a person, he knew he was dealing with something profoundly real—every time.

The Urantia Book has many wonderful teachings about personality. And just as we read through and examine those, I think we'll find added insight and added creative possibilities for living in this cosmos of persons—living AS persons in this cosmos of persons.

Let me say one more thing: I've said very little about Jesus. I've used a few examples. But you know, in another sense, that's all I've been talking about – you know that. That's all I've been

talking about. Of all human knowledge, the book says, the greatest is to know the religious life of Jesus and how he lived it, and that's all I've been talking about. I didn't have to mention his name. I don't mind mentioning his name, but it hasn't been essential. And he doesn't mind at all whether his name is mentioned or not. Doesn't mind one bit. That may be a useful observation ... I mean, it's useful to me. As a Jew with The Urantia Book, in Jewish communities, it's useful to me. (laughter)

So, friends, it's been a wonderful week and let's go from this place back to where we do our daily work and do it with an increased consciousness, an expanded consciousness—with a sense of the powers of personality and the clear understanding that we are God's children, each one of us, and not in any figurative sense either. Not in any metaphoric sense. More God's children—genetically—than we are children of our own earthly mothers and fathers, more so, more so—literally.

(applause)