

## THOUGHTS ON THE RELIGIOUS PSYCHOLOGY

Russell Stannard is a retired high-energy particle physicist born in 1931. He has written books in defence of Christianity against claims that the faith is against science. His book *Science and Belief* is referred to for this article.

Stannard says that Freud held that when we are children we feel helpless and begging to wish for protection and that wish stays with us so we believe we have a father figure in heaven who is always caring for us (page 110). This led Freud to see religion as a childish delusion.

Stannard objects that religion calls on people to make sacrifices so it is not all about comforting (page 111). But people have to intend to make the sacrifice. There is a comfort to be gained from hurting yourself and making sacrifices. That is easier than undergoing torture you cannot control.

I like Stannard's understanding of Jung's theory of archetypes. The theory is that we have a personal unconscious. We also have the collective unconscious. We all share it. Thus we are born with certain mental attitudes that are called archetypes. They are principles of organisation. Stannard says they can be likened to moulds for jelly. They are empty but they give shape and form to our experiences (page 113). Jung saw God as an archetype (page 113).

Stannard objects to the view that people follow religion because it improves our scope for survival. His objection is based on the notion that a faith that commands that we love our enemies and to forgive them (page 116). Its surprising how he would support and encourage a religion that he thinks wants us to give up our chances of survival by virtually enabling our enemies to liquidate us!

Stannard considers how determinism means that our choices are not real choices and wonders how we can believe in free will or think its possible. He looks at the attempt to say that not everything is deterministic. He argues that this is saying that a deterministic denial of free will has been replaced by another denial of free will that says that random chance is controlling us (page 119). He said it is like being unable to decide and letting a toss of a coin decide for you. My thought is that if every explanation of how we are free fails, then we are not free at all. We feel free but have no free will at all.

Page 120 outlines an experiment that showed that before people decide to press a button, something in them decided it unconsciously before they consciously did it. The experiment showing this was done in 1983 and since 2008 it was verified by further experiments. The decision we think we make then is an illusion - we are merely going along with something out of our control.

Stannard thinks about this and decides that we are deciding it unconsciously so it is our decision after all (page 121). He concludes that we act according to our wishes. He says free will means freedom and the ability to choose whatever we want to do (page 122). The reason he says it means this is because we do not have the experience of deciding to do something and then finding a compulsion arising that makes us do something different.

I would say that an unconscious choice does not show the same deference to knowing what you are choosing. It is not like an arrangement you would expect from an all-loving God who gives us free will so that we can use it to love him.