

# **The Philosophy of Atheism**

**By Joseph Lewis**

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*(Address Delivered February 20, 1960,  
Over Radio Station WIME, Miami, Florida)*

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

This is Joseph Lewis speaking.

Although as a child I was instructed in the religion of my parents, I never came under the spell of religious training long enough to so warp my mentality as not to be able to see any other viewpoint.

I was never trained to espouse the cause of Atheism. I came to accept Atheism as the result of independent thought and self-study.

I came to my conclusions after a full analysis and an impartial consideration of the various religious creeds and the different systems of philosophy. In my study of the different fields of thought, I found no philosophy that contained so many truths, and inspired one with so much courage, as Atheism. Atheism equips us to face life, with its multitude of trials and tribulations, better than any other code of living that I have yet been able to find. It is grounded in the very roots of life itself. Its foundation is based on Nature, without superfluities and false garments. No sham or shambles are attached to it.

Atheism rises above creeds, and puts Humanity upon one plane. There can be no "chosen people" in the Atheist philosophy. There are no bended knees in Atheism; no supplications, no prayers; no sacrificial redemptions; no "divine" revelations; no washing in the blood of the lamb; no crusades, no massacres, no holy wars; no heaven, no hell, no purgatory; no silly rewards and no vindictive punishments; no christs and no saviors; no devils, no ghosts, and no gods.

Atheism breaks down the barriers of nationalities and, like, "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Systems of religion make people clannish and bigoted.

Atheism is a vigorous and a courageous philosophy. It is not afraid to face the problems of life, and it is not afraid to confess that there are problems yet to be solved. It does not claim that it has solved all the questions of the universe, but it does claim that it has discovered the approach, and learned the method, of solving them.

It has dedicated itself to a passionate quest for the truth. It believes that truth for truth's sake is the highest ideal, and that virtue is its own reward.

It believes that love of humanity is a higher ideal than a love of God. We cannot help God, but we can help mankind. "Hands that help are better far than lips that pray." Praying to God is humiliating; worshipping God is degrading.

It believes with the great Robert G. Ingersoll, when he said, "Give me the storm and tempest of thought and action, rather than the dead calm of ignorance and faith. Banish me from Eden when you will, but first let me eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge."

Atheism is a self-reliant philosophy. It makes one intellectually free. He is thrilled to enthusiasm by his mental emancipation and he faces the universe without fear of ghosts or gods. It teaches man that unless he devotes his energies and applies himself wholeheartedly to the task he wishes to achieve, the accomplishment will not be made. It warns him that any reliance upon prayers, or "divine" help, will prove a bitter disappointment.

To the philosophy of Atheism belongs the credit of robbing Death of its horror and its terror. It brought about the abolition of Hell.

If Atheism writes upon the blackboard of the Universe a question mark, it writes it for the purpose of stating that there is a question yet to be answered. Is it not better to place a question mark upon a problem while seeking an answer than to put the label "God" there and consider the matter solved? Does not the word "God" only confuse and make more difficult the solution by assuming a conclusion that is utterly groundless and palpably absurd?

"God," said Spinoza, "is the Asylum of Ignorance." No better description has ever been uttered. Shelley said God was a hypothesis, and, as such, required proof. Can any minister of any denomination of any religion supply that proof? Facts and not merely opinions are what we want. Emotionalism is not a substitute for the truth.

If Atheism is sometimes called a "negative" philosophy, it is because the conditions of life make a negative philosophy best suited to meet the exigencies of existence, and only in that sense can it be called "negative." Some ministers of religion ignorantly call Atheism a "negative" philosophy because Atheism must first destroy the monumental ignorance and the degrading superstition with which religion, throughout the ages, has so shamelessly stultified the brain of man.

A negative attitude in life is sometimes essential to proper conduct. Life itself very often depends upon negation. It is a negative attitude when we are cautious about overeating. It is a negative attitude when we do not indulge our appetites or give vent to our impulses. And on many occasions, I have seen illustrated editorials sermonizing upon the fact that the hardest word in our language to pronounce is the word "No!" It is only when we have the courage to say NO to certain temptations that we can avoid the consequences that are the results of following those temptations. Progress, also, very often consists in negation.

Man finds himself in a universe utterly unprepared and poorly equipped to face the facts and conditions of life. He must overcome the illusions and the deceptive forces that are forever present in Nature. When the light of intelligence first came into the mentality of man, he found himself in a world that was a wilderness; a world reeking with pestilence and populated with shrieking beasts and brutal and savage people. No wonder that man's distorted intellect gave rise to a series of ideas concerning God, that makes one shudder at

its hideousness. His primitive imagination conceived gods of a multitude of heads, of grotesque parts, of several bodies, of numberless eyes, and legs, and arms. In order that man may think clearly and rationally upon the facts of life, all these concepts must be destroyed. That is only one of the tasks of Atheism. "To free a man of error is to give, not take away," said Schopenhauer.

Some of our present-day religionists, emancipated to the degree that they no longer accept deities like "Jehovah," cry for a new concept of God. They want something to put in the place of what has been taken away. Do they want also a substitute for hell?

Will anyone be so good as to tell me what we need a new concept of God for? Haven't we had gods enough? Hasn't it been task enough to get rid of the conglomeration that has already plagued the human race? I plead that we no longer contaminate heaven with these hideous creatures and frightful monsters of religious hallucinations.

Ministers also take delight in saying that Atheism is dogmatic and destructive. If Atheism is called dogmatic it is because dogmatism is the law of nature. A fact is the most stubborn thing in the world. Matter insists upon occupying space all by itself and motion will continue in motion, regardless of the opinions concerning it.

Atheism is destructive in the same sense that Columbus was a destroyer, when he corrected the erroneous conception, induced by false theological ideas, of the flatness of the earth, when he sailed across the ocean and proved the rotundity of the planet upon which we live.

Atheism is destructive in the sense that Galileo was a destroyer when he corrected the erroneous conception, induced by false theological ideas, concerning the existence of only one moon, when he discovered satellites of Jupiter.

Is a physician destructive when he cures a patient of disease?

And so throughout the history of intellectual progress is this attitude true. Call it negative, call it dogmatic, call it destructive, call it what you will. It is the main spring of progress.

No wonder the great Buckle was prompted to say:

"Every great reform which has been effected has consisted not in doing something new, but in undoing something old."

What hypocrisy it is on the part of ministers of religion to call Atheism a negative philosophy, when their own Ten Commandments are a series of "Thou shalt nots."

But Atheism is also an aggressive and a militant and a constructive philosophy. It is interested in the HERE and NOW. It finds problems enough here that require immediate solution and it does not fly to others that it knows not.

Atheism cannot sit idly by and watch injustice being perpetrated, nor permit the exploitation of the weak by the strong. Its ideal is the establishment of justice, man-made justice, even though it be.

If man waited for God to feed him he would starve to death.

Atheism believes in education. It believes in telling the facts of life, in revealing the truths as they are discovered, regardless of whom it shocks. It is ever ready and willing to accept the new and discard the old. Atheism does not believe that man's mission on earth is to love and glorify God, but it does believe in living this life, so that when you pass on, the world will be better for your having lived.

That is the ideal that now inspires more hearts to help humanity in its upward march, than ever before in the history of the human race. That is the ideal that inspired Bruno, Galileo, and Copernicus; that inspired Voltaire, Humboldt, and Garibaldi; that inspired Mark Twain, John Burroughs, and Luther Burbank. That is the ideal that inspired Eva and Pierre Curie the discoverers of radium, Henri Durant the founder of The Red Cross, Albert Einstein, and Thomas A. Edison.

If man wants help he must abandon his appeals to God. They will prove only "echoes of his wailing cries."

Atheism does not place any trust in God. The inscription on our coins is a lie. It was not too long ago that a person who denied the existence of a personal God, who refused to accept the Bible as a divine revelation, who branded as absurd that Christ was miraculously conceived, who characterized as a delusion the resurrection, and who stigmatized as a myth the immortality of the soul, was characterized by ministers of religion as being an "Atheist." Thomas Paine was called a "filthy little atheist" upon evidence that he did not even approximate this. To call oneself anything but a Freethinker or an Atheist, after the denials of these religious premises, is to belie one's own words.

Atheism has given to the human race the intellectual monarchs of the world. When the great Darwin discovered the law of the origins of species, he was called an Atheist because he disproved the special creation of Man. When the Chemist went into his laboratory and discovered the indestructibility of matter, he was called an Atheist because he proved the impossibility of a Creator. When the Astronomer pointed his telescope to sky and explored the regions of unlimited space, he was called an Atheist because he found no God within the confines of space, no heaven within the region of his explorations. When the Geologist determined the age of the earth through its rock and soil and formations, he was called an Atheist because he, too, destroyed a belief in the special six-day creation, and exposed the falsity of the biblical cosmogony. When the Historian went back to ancient and prehistoric times, and discovered civilizations of high ethical and moral culture, of intellectual achievements that are still an amazement to us, he was called an Atheist because he exposed the myth of Adam, uncovered the mistakes of Moses, and branded with the epithet of fraud the commands of Jehovah. When the

Physician sought to alleviate the pain and suffering of Man, he was called an Atheist because he refused to accept disease as a special visitation of a vengeful God.

Every scientist who refuses to be held back by narrow theological limitations, and searches Nature for her secrets, becomes an Atheist, the Millikans and the Osborns, to the contrary, notwithstanding. That electrical wizard, a Prometheus himself, the late Charles P. Steinmetz, said that Atheism was the ultimate philosophy of the scientists.

Does it not seem strange that ministers of religion, who claim to be the Vicars of God and to know the Divine Will, do not reveal to man the knowledge that Infidels discover? "Where there are three students of nature there are two Atheists," is an old saying.

When religion expresses a nobler sentiment than that contained in these words of Robert G. Ingersoll, then, and only then, might it assume a superior attitude. He said:

"Call me infidel, call me Atheist, call me what you will, I intend to so treat my children that they can come to my grave and truthfully say, 'He who sleeps here never gave us one moment of pain. From his lips, now dust, never came to us an unkind word.'"

Compare that statement with the words of Jesus Christ, and then decide whose mantle you prefer to wear, when he said:

"For I come to set man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: he that loveth his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."  
(Matthew 10, 35, 37).

In our own day, we see a revolution taking place in the ranks of religion. We see the liberating force of the great Freethinkers of the past having their effects upon our generation by the breaking of the chains of superstition that have enslaved mankind to a degrading religion.

Our fight today is no longer against Theism. The arguments that were used by Freethinkers more than a century ago are now being used by the liberal minister against his more orthodox brother. Who can deny that progress has been made when ministers themselves repudiate Theism? Who today can expose himself to public ridicule and defend Theism in the face of its history and its record? It has perverted the mentality of man and has caused him outrageously to abuse his own life. In the name of God and for the love of God, Hell, in all its fury, was let loose upon the earth. No wonder Theism is being repudiated and disowned. The liberal minister will have none of it. Like Caesar, "but yesterday it might have stood against the world, but now lies it here and none so poor as to do it reverence."

Even in our theological colleges, we see the impossibility of trying to harness a man of intelligence with the bridle of Theism; and as the result of this impossible combination, there is a widespread repudiation of religion and all that it stands for. We are witnessing a period of intellectual honesty that does credit even to ministers of religion. There is a positive and an aggressive advance towards the ideals of Freethought.

And the time is not far distant when a minister, who takes money for prayers for the repose of the so-called soul of man, will be charged with misrepresentation and fraud just as others are now being apprehended for similar schemes of deception.

When a minister today makes a public declaration that he can no longer believe in the Virgin Birth, the resurrection of Christ, in the inspiration of the Scriptures; acknowledges that Moses was very often mistaken, and can find no justification for the existence of a personal God, the brass band plays, and the flags wave for his "great courage," while as a matter of fact these things have been so obvious to us that we look with pity upon people who still believe them.

We have no applause for those who have stolen the thunder from the leaders of the Freethought only to cloak it in a garment of so-called "liberal religion." We are encouraged at the progress they have made, but unless they come the full way, they must be watched with the same vigilance and fought with the same force as the Calvins and Knoxes. Halfway measures will never do. They invariably prove futile.

What a complete revolution has taken place when people must make apologies for their religious beliefs, and give symbolical interpretations to the incomprehensible ravings of insane men -- when they must deny and reject the beliefs that were but a few decades ago tyrannically imposed upon the people and for which unnumbered thousands suffered the penalty of torture and death!

Is the modern trend to perpetuate religion, or is it doomed to occupy the same place in history as the institution of slavery? And how apt is that comparison of religion with slavery! Throughout the ages religion has imprisoned and chained and stultified the brain of man, just as the institution of slavery has bound and manacled and torn the limbs of man! When efforts were made to abolish the hateful institution of slavery, there were many who by their compromises only prolonged its existence.

And the efforts of those today who are compromising with religion and making apologies for its past crimes, are only prolonging its existence and making more difficult the task to eradicate this blot from civilization. They are interfering with the removal of the worst obstacle that has ever blocked the intellectual progress of Man. A rose may smell as sweet by any other name, and religion will be just as obnoxious under any other title.

There are some who claim that religion can be humanized, but how can we humanize something that does not admit of humanization? How can we humanize ignorance, superstition, and brutality? Can we humanize the thumb-screw, and the rack, and the *auto*

*da fe?* If we could humanize religion then the dream of the alchemist will have come true. If we could humanize religion then truly base metal can be converted into gold.

Thank you for listening.  
Good night.