

Duquesne University

Duquesne Scholarship Collection

Hallowed Secularism

The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian
Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly
Excellence and Professor of Law

12-10-2011

December 10, 2011: “But what if history has no logos?”

Bruce Ledewitz

Duquesne University, ledewitz@duq.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism>



Part of the [Constitutional Law Commons](#), and the [Law and Philosophy Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2011). December 10, 2011: “But what if history has no logos?”. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/601>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly Excellence and Professor of Law at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hallowed Secularism by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact beharyr@duq.edu.

Title: "But what if history has no logos?"

Date: 2011-12-10T06:06:00.002-05:00

12/10/2011—I have been trying to show my fellow secularists, and religious believers, that there is common ground between us. This feeling people have that religion vs no religion is a chasm is quite false. But what could this common ground be? I admit that there is a big difference between believing in God and an after life and not believing it. But I don't mean by common ground that believers and nonbelievers really believe the same things. I mean that believers and nonbelievers may be oriented toward reality in similar ways. Here is a story that illustrates the point. It is the story of the disintegration of the neo-Kantian school of philosophy in Germany after WWI. But it is actually our story today, since we are heirs of this disaster. Prior to WWI, the basic Enlightenment view in Germany was one of progress and potential in human life and history. The slaughter of the war made this view untenable. (The Civil War may have had something of a similar effect in the U.S.) I am reading an intellectual biography of Ernst Cassirer, entitled *The Last Philosopher of Culture*. Cassirer was heir to the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism associated with Hermann Cohen, who died in 1918. It was this school's tradition in the person of Cassirer that lost out in the 1920's to positivism on the one hand and what the biographer, Edward Skidelsky, calls "irrationalism" on the other (he means Heidegger and I don't think this is at all a fair view of him). Intellectually, this helped pave the way for the Nazis. The Marburg school "displayed a quintessentially Hegelian confidence in the rationality and benevolence of the historical process". (37) And that is true of most people in America today, indeed most people in the world. The Weimar Republic came to grief because it could not answer the question—"But what if history has no logos? What if it is just the record of the crimes, follies, and vices of mankind?" I want to bring this question to the Center for Inquiry. When we say, "In God We Trust" we are not just recognizing the historical commitment of monotheism—though we are doing that, which is the objection. We are also stating a commitment to the rationality and benevolence of the historical process. And if we don't want to go the way of Weimar, that may be a commitment worth pondering. And I think worth making.