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March 24, 2012: An Open Letter to David Niose, President of the American Humanist Association

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Title: An Open Letter to David Niiose, President of the American Humanist Association

Date: 2012-03-24T22:43:00.001-04:00

3/24/2012—Dear David: This blog post is in response to your op-ed in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette about the Reason Rally that was held today in Washington D.C. It sounds like it went well. Congratulations. Many people, especially many secularists like myself, applaud the effort to show that right-wing religious people are not the only game in town. But David, how could you allow a name like “Reason Rally.” Do you mean, as it sounds, that religious people are not committed to reason? Really? Maimonides? Aquinas? Newton? Not committed to reason? I know you are embarrassed by this kind of secular rhetoric because you wrote in your op-ed that secularists do “not claim to have a monopoly on rationality.” But that is exactly what the title of the rally suggests and it is what some secularists in fact believe—that they are critical thinkers who go where the evidence leads them whereas religious people operate on faith against evidence. This is really destructive rhetoric for three reasons. First, because secularists are not in the slightest more rational and evidence driven than anyone else. They have not even learned Freud’s first lesson about our infinite capacity for self-deception. Second, there isn’t any evidence about the matters we are talking about—the existence and nature of God. It isn’t irrational to think that there is an unseen order to the universe. It may be delusional to think otherwise. Here is how the great physicist Werner Heisenberg put it, with full recognition of the pitfalls of such thinking: Was it utterly absurd to seek behind the ordering structures of this world a “consciousness” whose “intentions” were these very structures? Third, when you allow yourself to think and talk this way, you make coalition building impossible. Do you really want that, when 76% of the population identify as Christian? I ask you in the name of a healthier future to help me in the task of finding common ground between believers and nonbelievers. Bruce Ledewitz