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1-14-2015

January 14, 2015: Heidegger and the Jewish Question

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Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2015). January 14, 2015: Heidegger and the Jewish Question. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/900>

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Title: Heidegger and the Jewish Question

Date: 2015-01-14T06:11:00.002-05:00

1/14/2015—An exchange in the December 4, 2014 issue of the New York Review of Books shows once more how we need to understand the philosopher Martin Heidegger in order to confront the condition in which humans find themselves today. Specifically, Peter Gordon had written in the October 9, 2014 edition a story about new publications of Heidegger's notes. Bruce Henley wrote a letter to the editor in December noting "Martin Heidegger's bizarre metaphysical equivalence between mechanized food production and death camps." Gordon responds and notes Heidegger's opposition to the "racial breeding" of the Jews. Since I rely so heavily on Heidegger, it may seem I come to his defense. Well, yes and no. Heidegger's action in the 1930's were not courageous, insightful or even honorable. He clearly hoped that Hitler and the Nazi movement would represent a third way between America and the Soviet Union. He joined the Party and became Hitler first Rehtor—University President. But he resigned his post by 1934 and during 1935 to 1936 wrote his Contributions to Philosophy, some of which would have gotten him shot if it had been made public. Contributions is now available in English and there is no excuse to ignore what it tells us. Heidegger criticized racial politics and the manipulations of mass media—pretty clear references to the regime. He may have felt the same way about the racial orientation of the Jews—I don't know. But in the 1930's it would have been impossible not to think in racial terms considering the emphasis in German society. Heidegger was not supporting the final solution—undoubtedly he was horrified by it. And this is the point about industrial farming. Heidegger saw the roots of mass murder not in individual guilt but in the foundation of technology itself. Here is the quote, from a lecture in 1949: "Farming is now a motorized food industry, in essence the same as the fabrication of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockade and starvation of the peasantry, the same as the fabrication of the hydrogen bomb." People who find this outrageous are not understanding Heidegger's point. He is saying that these matters are beyond individual guilt. Technology is destroying the world. I would have thought that in the world of global warming that may kill millions, if not billions, Heidegger's point would be better understood.