

Dec. 17, 2015

Peninsula College and Wesley Cecil PhD

Present

Forgotten Thinkers: Jacques Barzun



Born 1907 in Cretiel France. Moves to US to attend school 1920. Graduates from Columbia University 1927 and Begins Teaching 1928 works at Columbia University until 1975. Works in a number of administrative roles including Dean of Graduate Studies. Also worked on the Great Books Course. Died 2012

A Few Key Works

1937 *Race: a Study in Modern Superstition*

1941 *Darwin, Marx, Wagner: Critique of a Heritage*

1945 *Teacher in America*

1950 *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*

1959 *The House of Intellect*

1961 *Classic, Romantic, and Modern.*

1964 *Science: The Glorious Entertainment*

1989 *The Culture We Deserve: A Critique of Disenlightenment.*

2000 *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life, 1500 to the Present*

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, race was already a weapon in the struggle between absolutism, aristocracy, and the middle class. The warfare spread to the arts and philosophy in the nineteenth century, by which time independent shoots in other cultures had also borne fruit, leaving the grand harvesting on a world-wide scale to our generation.

Viewed in the light of such facts, the race question appears a much bigger affair than a trumped-up excuse for local persecution. It becomes rather a mode of thought endemic in Western civilization. **It defaces every type of mental activity — history, art, politics, science and social reform.**

... in fact any good mind properly taught can think like Euclid and like Walt Whitman. The Renaissance, as we saw, was full of such minds, equally competent as poet and as engineers. The modern notion of "the two cultures," incompatible under one skull, comes solely from the proliferation of specialties in science; but these also divide scientists into groups that do not understand one another, the cause being the sheer mass of detail and the diverse terminologies. In essence the human mind remains one, not 2 or 60 different organs." FDTD

The only political ism surviving in full strength from the past is nationalism. This was partly to be expected from the liberation of so many colonies simultaneously, beginning in the 1920s. **But this nationalism differs from the old in two remarkable ways: it is not patriotic and it does not want to absorb and assimilate. On the contrary, it wants to shrink and secede, to limit its control to its one small group of like-minded-we-ourselves-alone. It is in that sense racist, particularist, sectarian, minority-inspired.**

If it were possible to talk to the unborn, one could never explain to them how it feels to be alive, for life is washed in the speechless real.

Next Lecture January 21st "Walter Kaufmann"

Lectures Available Online at <https://www.facebook.com/HumaneArts/> and Youtube