



BREAKING THE MONOPOLY OF THE MAINSTREAM: AN INTERVIEW WITH RYSZARD LEGUTKO

Posted on August 1, 2021 by Ryszard Legutko



It is a high honor indeed to publish the first English version of this interview with Professor Ryszard Legutko, which he gave to the Polish newspaper, Dziennik Polski, on Friday, July 30, 2021. Professor Legutko, of course, needs no introduction, being the author of the well-known works, the [Demon in Democracy](#) and [The Cunning of Freedom](#). The journalists interviewing Professor Legutko are Wojciech Mucha and Marcin Mamon.

Dziennik Polski (DP): In your appeal to the Rector of the Jagiellonian University, you write about the "academic ethos." How do you define it? Does setting up an office that has as its banner the equal treatment of all students undermine this ethos?

Ryszard Legutko (RL): We've had a problem with the academic community for as long as I can remember, that is, since the beginning of my work at the Jagiellonian University. We used to explain to ourselves that it was the fault of communism, people's fear of the Party, because you can't play games with the regime. Academics were not the bravest of professional groups. When the regime became a thing of the past and Poland became free, we thought that the ethos would be rebuilt. But it didn't happen. This ethos is based on trust, application of the rules of impartiality, objectivity, fair-play. If the ethos is strong enough, then no additional regulations are needed. I imagined that since the communist system collapsed, a "live and let live" approach would prevail.



Ryszard Legutko. Photo Credit: Alicja Dybowska.

DP: Are you saying, they don't let you live?

RL: I was defending the Jagiellonian University when I had an unpleasant experience at one of the American institutions when a student group and professors there, fighting - of course - for openness and pluralism, had my lecture cancelled. Later, in an article published in America, I wrote that such a thing would not have happened at my Almae Matris. But even then, it wasn't entirely true, because several speakers, whose views were questionable, had already been denied entry.

DP: In your letter to the rector of the Jagiellonian University, Professor Jacek Popiel, you criticized the Office that is supposed to deal with equal treatment of the whole community of undergraduate and

doctoral students at the University. What is it that you don't like?

RL: Yes, I was very concerned. One of the things that has changed in universities is certainly the corruption of language. There are supposedly warm, friendly words, but they actually turn out to be sinister. When we hear about the "Equality Office," it is clear that it is about tracking down dissidents. Pluralism? It's nothing more than maintaining a monopoly of power. In all the places I know, all such structures work the same way. For example, at the American university I visited, it was demanded that any candidate for a guest lecture be approved by two "equality" bodies: one student and one faculty.

DP: These are global trends. We assume, they won't change.

RL: Polish academics love authority figures, so I refer you to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of July 22nd and the article, entitled, "The University as a Risk Zone." According to it, universities are becoming a place where all kinds of unorthodox ideas are tracked down. The danger does not come from politicians. It's the professors and students themselves who do it -- even though no one is forcing them. No one forced the Jagiellonian University to ape bad practices and introduce structures that work the same everywhere and are a disaster. Mimicry is a terrible affliction of our universities.

DP: Professor Popiel, the Rector of the Jagiellonian University, claims that you and Barbara Nowak, the school superintendent of Małopolska region, do not realize the importance of the problems in Polish education. According to him, we are facing increasing discrimination based on gender, religious or political identity. As he said in the pages of our newspaper: "However, we can't compare the reality of 20 years ago to today; the consciousness of three or two decades ago to the sensitivity and needs of the younger generation." Or maybe you just don't see these changes, you don't know that we have to move with the spirit of the times?

RL: Indeed, something has changed, but for the worse. The mania to track discrimination with tools to invent discrimination in every sphere - this is one of the problems. Genderism was created several decades ago. Before that, it did not exist. For the past decade or so, it has become the ideological orthodoxy of the entire Western world: the media, corporations, international institutions, governments, and, of course, universities. It is utterly improbable that a single theory, and one of dubious quality, has gained such reach and power. It generates social engineering, changes culture, and revolutionizes social structures. And yet it is only a novelty. Universities should keep distant from such things, treating them with the skepticism typical of a scientific attitude.

DP: Are you implying that the Jagiellonian University is no longer skeptical?

RL: Universities were the first to start incorporating new trends, instead of discussing their pros and cons. I would say that they do it with fanaticism. With this attitude, it is clear that "discriminations" will always be tracked down, identified, and then condemned. There are even countries, like Canada, where the wrong use of a pronoun is punishable by imprisonment. And the threat of ostracism or losing one's job is virtually everywhere. The Jagiellonian University, in its passion for imitation, has already created a complete set of instruments to follow the same practices. Now we have to wait for the sad results.

DP: Poland is trying to catch up with this revolutionary progress. But we don't want to believe that this is already a common thing, that the steamroller will level everything.... So where to look for normality?

RL: Certainly not in this formula of a university "with a risk zone," to use the title of the aforementioned article. There are various centers and lecturers who have preserved the academic ethos, but it must be admitted that there are not many of them. The Left with its strategy of constant social engineering is currently on the prowl, also thanks to international institutions.

DP: This wave is overtaking the scholars themselves, and it is hard not to see them becoming part of it. Not many dissenting voices are heard. They say about you – he's eccentric.

RL: There are very disturbing cases at our universities - suffice it to mention Professor Ewa Budzyńska from Katowice. Could anyone of us have thought 10 years ago that a Polish professor would be repressed for saying that the family is based on a union between a man and a woman? And this is exactly what is happening. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong, but have you heard about any protest of any faculty council or university senate concerning said issue? Rectors of Polish universities have several times criticized Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski's homilies for wrong words about genderism, but not once have they defended Professor Budzyńska, or condemned the students' aggression against members of the Constitutional Court.

DP: In Poland, however, someone will at least write a letter. Open letter or otherwise...

RL: We have to act, because the situation is getting more and more dangerous. My former Faculty Council wrote that I do not fit into the "university consensus." What kind of word is that anyway?

Consensus at a university? Who saw that coming! That's a straight path to conformity. It's amazing that in this day and age, when everyone talks about pluralism and diversity, so many ideologies are embraced by consensus - not just genderism, but in other aspects as well: immigration, climate, energy, education, so-called women's rights. And since there is a consensus, there is no reason to discuss and argue. But those who do not fit into the consensus should be condemned and maybe even punished.

DP: Douglas Murray, in his book, *[The Madness of Crowds](#)*, wrote that with the end of grand narratives – religion, nation, philosophy – people are looking for, and plunging into, new battles, such as, gender, race or identity. Could it be that we are about to wake up in a world with no fixed rules, because everything will be questionable with multiple narratives?

RL: In my opinion, we are not dealing with a multiplicity of narratives, but with a mono-ideology, analogous to the communist times; only that, on the other hand, there is a great arbitrariness in it. During the communist era there was also talk about the "only right ideology;" but let us remember that everything could change depending on who was in power: on Monday [Gomułka](#) was the great Secretary of the Polish Socialist Party, and a few days later, he was the greatest pest of the system. Today it is similar - the new ideology is revolutionary but it is also progressive; so it breaks its own rules in the name of progress.

DP: It's true. Hilary Clinton in the 1990s supported her husband's "Defense of Marriage Act" to prevent gay marriage. Today she is in the forefront of the fight for so-called LGBT rights.

RL: Yes, because ideology is advancing. Once there was talk of civil unions as an insurmountable limit of freedom; today it is already an obligation to demand same-sex marriage and adoption of children; and whoever does not do it discriminates and is a dangerous homophobe. Not only has discrimination been multiplied in this way, but also the number of sins, thoughtcrimes and enemies. Paradoxically, there are many more of them today than during the communist era. Today the Left is in power, and the Left has always specialized in tracking down enemies and thoughtcrimes – so now it has gone wild. The more it fights for tolerance, the greater the range of enemies, and the more difficult it is to say something without risking condemnation.

DP: Why is this so?

RL: Modern man is becoming dumber and dumber, because ideology has detached him from European culture, which he does not know and does not understand. When I talk to European politicians, supposedly educated people, I see that the world before 1968 does not exist for them. They live only in today's idiom and contemporary patterns. A man, as he was described by classical philosophy, great literature, and Christianity, does not exist for them either. That is why they are so arrogant – because they try everything on this primitive creation, created by their primitive ideology. That is why they think that it is possible to interfere in everything, to deconstruct and construct everything – the family, human sensitivity, national identity, history, etc. They have no respect for human beings, for the output of human thought and experience. In this they also resemble the communists who despised culture and created new ones by political means.

DP: You are talking about elites. Let us give you an example. Dziennik Polski was successfully published on paper 20 years ago, and today probably 80 percent of our readers choose the digital version on their smartphones. It is easy to imagine, that in a flood of other content, an interview with you or an earlier one with the rector of the Jagiellonian University are less digestible than a gallery of pictures you can scroll through with your finger. The same is true of the entire conservative formula and, more broadly, of in-depth content in general. The professor himself says that we are getting dumber, so why bother with elites.

RL: We are becoming dumber because we have lost the ability to learn from others and from the past. We know everything and can only make pronouncements. It is best not to read Polish Nobel Laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz's *In Desert and Wilderness* because it's a wrong book, drenched in the sin of racism. His *Trilogy*? Also wrong, because it is nationalistic, xenophobic, sexist, etc. Under communism, literature, art, and history were used to justify current views. The same is true today. Besides, it is symptomatic that former communists feel perfectly comfortable in today's world and have smoothly entered the so-called mainstream, where they feel among their own people. And let's not forget that education is constantly changing in the West, because ideological subjects enter schools. Not yet in Poland, but this is what the biggest international institutions demand, with the approval of some of our compatriots and politicians.

DP: Today's young people are not particularly concerned about the past or the future. All that matters to them is the present because it seems most attractive. Why should they waste their time reading? The Left says openly that school cannot be "history, religion and damned soldiers."

RL: That's much better than the Left's "gender, LGBT, abortion and safe sex" educational agenda. As far as young people are concerned, of course, there are new challenges. It's important to remember that ultimately everything, or a great deal, depends on the teacher and the parents. If there is a good teacher and he puts in the effort, if the parents do let go of their laziness and convenience to mold their children, then maybe this monster won't turn out to be so threatening. Attitudes must be changed. We must not accept the dogma that we are governed by some historical necessity, that the world is developing inexorably toward universal stupidity, and so my children must also be stupid. Rather, we should adopt an attitude of a kind of serfdom toward the world, and reject the attitude of a slave. We may not have influence on the world, but we do have influence on our immediate environment. And we should take advantage of that, regardless of what various "wise men" tell us.

DP: What is to be done?

RL: *Shto dielat* (laughs). I don't have a detailed agenda. I have never liked adjusting to reality. Maybe this is not a very good tactic from the perspective of a politician, but I have also never managed a newspaper company like you do – which affects people's lives in a way – where adaptation is often necessary. I'll use the analogy again. I remember a time when everyone thought that communism was self-assured and not because there were Russian tanks, but it was said that this system was characterized by historical necessity. Let us reject such thinking today, even if we are sometimes overcome by despair. Can one be a conservative while reading on a smartphone and not on paper? Obviously, a smartphone cannot dictate to me who I am and who my loved ones should be.

DP: And the conservative counterrevolution that offers hope for ordering the world is nowhere in sight...

RL: Conservative parties are still successful, though not in many places. In England, the formations are theoretically conservative, but not really in practice. That's why so many people in the West look at Poland and Hungary with hope. It is possible that the right will be strengthened in Western Europe by the entry of conservatives into government. Maybe eastern Europe will also hold on. Politically it is extremely important to break the current monopoly of the mainstream, which has taken over the EU and most of its institutions. Can it be done? If I thought it couldn't be done, I would withdraw from politics.

DP: But, at the same time, as you yourself said, in our reality: "the Polish-Polish war makes everything more difficult." How to end such a war and realize community goals? Is it at all possible?

RL: For the time being there is no such possibility, which I say with great sadness. The European Union fuels this war and will not rest until it liquidates all dissident governments and movements. That is why it is so important to balance the forces in Europe and introduce guarantees of pluralism. Perhaps this would calm the dispute in Poland. But the dispute that is taking place in Poland has a long and unfortunate tradition. For several centuries, sovereignty-independence forces have clashed with forces seeking the protection of a stronger protector. Unfortunately, it often ended in victory for the latter. If they were to win this time again, we will lose our sovereignty again and we will dream of Independence, as so many times in the past. The words of Jan Kochanowski, the Polish Renaissance poet, that a Pole "is stupid before the loss and stupid after the loss" will be confirmed.

The *featured image* shows, "The Destruction of Pharaoh's Army," by Philip James de Loutherbourg, painted in 1792.

