



Middlebury College

Keegan Callanan
Assistant Professor
Director, Alexander Hamilton Forum
Department of Political Science
kcallanan@middlebury.edu

Munroe Hall
Middlebury, VT 05753

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Dear students,

On Wednesday at 4:30 PM, the Alexander Hamilton Forum at Middlebury will host a lecture by Ryszard Legutko, Professor of Philosophy at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. Prof. Legutko is an accomplished scholar of classical political philosophy. His most recent book is *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies*. It has been hailed as “**the indispensable book about the current crisis of liberalism**” by Harvard University’s Adrian Vermeule, Ralph S. Tyler Professor of Constitutional Law. Notre Dame’s Patrick Deneen calls it “**the most insightful work of political philosophy written during this still young, but troubled century**” – a work of “**scintillating brilliance.**” This book is the subject of Prof. Legutko’s talk at Middlebury.

In addition to his work as a scholar, Prof. Legutko is a Member of the European Parliament representing Poland. He has served in the Polish government as Minister of Education and Secretary of State. With Britain’s Syed Salah Kamall, Prof. Legutko now leads the third-largest group in the European Parliament, representing millions of people across Europe.

As a young man, Legutko defied the dictates of the Soviet-backed tyranny in Poland when he served as editor of an illegal scholarly journal, *Arka*. He risked much for liberty and has a unique perspective on what it is like living under a tyrannical regime.

You will not be surprised, then, to learn that Prof. Legutko has recently addressed audiences of faculty and students at major U.S. universities without any controversy, and that he will speak to students at Colby College on Tuesday evening.

Some would prefer that we not have the chance to hear and to question Prof. Legutko and other heterodox scholars.

The Hamilton Forum takes a different view. We treat all Middlebury students as **independent thinkers** with a right to and capacity for free and open inquiry. We are committed to viewpoint diversity and freedom of thought. We believe that through the competition of ideas, each of us can better understand our own deepest convictions and make progress in the pursuit of truth. We believe that Middlebury students deserve to hear a **multiplicity of perspectives**, including the views of influential scholars with whom we might disagree strongly.

In short, the Hamilton Forum has no ideological litmus tests.

That's why, this past year, the Hamilton Forum hosted the most prominent Marxist economist in the country, Richard Wolff. We also hosted a learned critic of President Trump's judicial nominees; he denounced Brett Kavanaugh in the strongest possible terms from the Hamilton Forum's podium. For next fall, we have invited one of America's foremost civil rights leader.

This week, Prof. Legutko will speak on the relationship between liberty, democracy, and totalitarianism. Does western liberal democracy provide a one-size-fits-all model for the rest of the world? Should it? Is it possible for a people to maintain its traditional way of life and values while embracing western-style democracy? Are there totalitarian temptations in free societies? These are the sorts of questions Legutko will tackle in his lecture.

Perhaps you have already seen a number of quotations from Prof. Legutko being circulated around campus. Some are doctored and others accurate, some in context and others not. For my part, I find in these quotations the words of a man who has been sharply critical of the methods of activists in the EU, and who holds the same position on same-sex marriage once held by President Obama, President Clinton, and Secretary Clinton.

Although this is not the subject of his talk, it is up to you to decide whether you would like to pose frank questions of Prof. Legutko on the topic of same-sex marriage and gay rights. This could lead to an interesting exchange about the role of western values in Poland, the most Catholic country in Europe, a land at the edge of the West, and a nation not fully persuaded that western-style liberalization spells Progress. No questions are out of bounds at Hamilton Forum events. **Tough and incisive questions are the coin of the realm.**

I look forward to seeing you on Wednesday.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Keegan Callanan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Keegan Callanan