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## Obituary: Pierre Legendre

Pierre Legendre died at *Maison Médicale Jeanne Garnier* in Paris 15<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* on March 2, 2023, surrounded by family. In June, he would have been 93 years old. His training made me who I am today; the way I think, read, write, practice and exist in the world are in part thanks to him. I started speaking with him on December 20, 1979. We met at his office on a small street, *rue Barbet de Jouy*, in the 7<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, next to the Swedish embassy. The office comprised one larger room, stacked with books, and a small waiting room with a capacity of one person. There was no sign on the door. His name was printed on a bell one could press to enter. I felt that I entered into learning and an age long gone: into the symbolic order.

In recent years we met and spoke with each other at the home he shared with his wife Alexandra Papageorgiou-Legendre in the 3<sup>rd</sup> *arrondissement* in Paris. Our discussions, which often lasted four or five hours, were wonderful and unforgettable. Legendre was vigorous until his death and spoke of the spacious room in the penthouse apartment as his and his wife's university. He continued to pose essential questions, as he had throughout his life and continued to do until his death.

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Pierre Legendre was born on June 15, 1930 in Normandy – Villedieu-les-Poêles (Manche) – in a non-academic family. His father worked in a printshop, and his paternal grandfather was a baker. However, for over a half-century his home was the capital of France. His initial university training took place in Rennes, and he completed it in Paris. Broadly speaking, Legendre must first and foremost be considered a versatile intellectual and a highly original thinker. He possessed a broad and thorough academic education. Originally, he studied law, and became licensed to teach at French universities in 1957. His doctoral thesis – *La Pénétration du droit romain dans le droit canonique classique* [The Penetration of Roman Law into Classical Canon Law] – was published in 1964, the year he turned 34. He was active in an academic context for the rest of his professional life. Nevertheless, Legendre repeatedly criticized the changes that the university underwent during the over fifty years he worked within its walls. He pointed out that the demands on teachers and students, and academic standards, had been lowered far too much. According to him, it was essential that the university uphold the Humanist culture of letters and not least historical knowledge. Important topics that he studied in-depth are the history of religion and the history of law. Furthermore, he acquired an extensive knowledge of literature, the history of ideas and philosophy. Pierre Legendre is not seldom described as an anthropologist. Poetry, and the poets, were important to him.<sup>[1]</sup> The world of the cinema moved him. Over a long period of time, he conversed intensely with the Greek American film director Elia Kazan (1909-2003), as well as the German directors Volker Schöndorff (b. 1939) and Wim Wenders (b. 1945). The American theater director and documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman (b. 1930) was also important to Legendre. His collaboration with these celebrated filmmakers led him to write manuscripts for films, all of which have been published in written form.<sup>[2]</sup> In October 2016, he released a limited edition of his three films: *La Fabrique de l'homme occidental* [The Factory of Western Man] (1996), *Miroir d'une Nation, l'École Nationale d'Administration* (1999) and *Dominum Mundi, l'Empire du*

*management* (2007).

Pierre Legendre wrote his works in French and could read Latin, Greek, German and English. The library was his natural habitat. Once he let slip that he would prefer to die in a library. He was the incarnation of what one in Sweden would call a Humanist researcher of the old school. Legendre had a close and deep relationship with reading and writing. In true Humanist spirit, he had an active relationship with many cultural spheres and languages and was familiar with aspects of several African cultures. Furthermore, he was well versed in both Japanese and North American cultures, including Canada's. His work revolved around forgotten and denied elements in the contemporary understanding of Western culture. He analyzed the genealogical structures of Western civilization and their vicissitudes. To this aim, he employed a historical approach that harkened back at least as far as to Roman law, the origin of which is dated to 451 B.C. For many years, Legendre was active at *École Pratique des Hautes Études; section des sciences religieuses*.

Legendre was critical of the development of Western society, at times conveying pessimism, even despair. Far away, in relation to a distant future, one can perceive that he is surprisingly hopeful. However, this did not stop him from claiming that "in this world we are ruled by barbarians" (Legendre, 2009, p. 177).<sup>[3]</sup> In some ways the future can only be better, seems to be a conclusion that marks his thinking. He had an abstract faith that the young generation will oppose what he felt was the destruction of our civilization. To him, removing all boundaries was not a path to freedom; rather, it was the annihilation of democratic society.

Pierre Legendre had a thorough psychoanalytic training and was a psychoanalyst at *École Freudienne de Paris*; he was A.E., that is *Analyste d'École*, as one said there. Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) founded *École Freudienne de Paris* in 1964, controlled its activities and disbanded it in 1980. Legendre became a member of 1974 and was analyzed by Thérèse Parisot (1924-1997).

In parallel with his academic training, Legendre studied psychoanalysis at *École Freudienne de Paris*. He had a private psychoanalytic practice and was active as a psychoanalyst for over four decades. His office, as mentioned previously, was near the Swedish embassy; past the age of eighty-five he continued to practice psychoanalysis, albeit to a lesser extent than before. Plenty of potential analysands wanted to be in analysis with him; very few were accepted. The psychoanalytic practice and the experience it gave him are essential references in his thinking and writing.

In both his writing and his clinical work, Legendre was preoccupied with understanding totalitarian systems of thinking. In the books *L'amour de censeur. Essai sur l'ordre dogmatique* [The Censor's Love: Essay on Dogmatic Order] (1974) and *Jour du pouvoir. Traité de la bureaucratie patriote* [Enjoyment of Power: Treatise on Patriotic Bureaucracy] (1976), he examined the effects of the dogmatic discourse on the individual subject. He investigated the imaginary structure of power and the love, conscious or unconscious, that the individual shows towards it.<sup>[4]</sup> His view was that there are no societies without a power structure, and that the notion of a society without a controlling power is a new form of totalitarianism.

Without doubt, Legendre was a constructive reader of Freud, and in this regard, he was inspired by parts of Lacan's dissemination of psychoanalysis at *École Freudienne de Paris* as well as the seminars that Lacan led until his death in 1981. Legendre's critical attitude towards every attempt to subjugate psychoanalysis under petrified dogmatism was present in his psychoanalytic thinking. Freud posed essential questions, and these are present in Legendre's works as well. Among the representations of psychoanalysis Legendre opposed, one also finds that of the so-called Lacanians. His condemnation of the ultrashort sessions used by Lacan towards the end of his life was unequivocal. This criticism also applied to several of Lacan's pupils, who imitated their hero. Legendre's critique of biologism and evidence-based psychotherapy was relentless. From his point of view, both are understood as expressions of dogmatic thinking, ever under the yoke of what one in Lacan's pertinent terminology can refer to as the imaginary order. Legendre was a creative advocate of Freud's notion that the difference between individual psychology and social psychology is for the most part fictive. What is required, according to Legendre, is a sensitive analysis of how society is

present in the individual. No Scientist, neither in the humanities, nor in the social sciences or in the field of psychology and psychiatry, studies the so-called reality outside him- or herself in a completely neutral and evidence-based way. He emphasized the rise of obscurantism and its psychoticizing effect on the individual in Western societies. Reflective conversation, rational arguments, critical analysis, and the use of sound judgment have been broadsided by rampant obscurantism and magical thinking. This forecloses important questions, and Legendre did not think that this would lead to either global democracy or universal peace.<sup>[5]</sup> This is a threat to society as well as the individual. Culture and civilization do not always advance at a uniform pace.

Politically, Legendre was hard to pin down. It might seem that the generally accepted scale from right to left lacks the nuances required to define Legendre's political position. He was mercilessly critical of boundless neo-liberal society and its ideology, as well as the communist system that is defended by dogmatical Marxism. Legendre opposed all ideological and political innovations that seek legitimacy from an oversimplifying notion of constant progress, and the necessity of tearing down taboos and what many people far too readily accept as oppressive laws, boundaries and rules. However, he did not propose any political solution of his own to the challenges Western society faces today, as he saw them. He emphasized that we do not fully understand ourselves, nor our culture, our political thinking, our ideas or our legal decisions, and least of all our history and its impact on contemporary society.

Legendre had experience of being an outsider, something that contributed to his understanding of the suffering this can entail. But being an outsider did not hinder him from finding a place.<sup>[6]</sup> In the spirit of Freud, he felt that there is a constructive potential in suffering; it constitutes the basis for thinking. In this type of work, one must push oneself to the limit and show courage.

For a long period of time – something which is evident in the book *Le crime du caporal Lortie* [The Crime of Corporal Lortie] published in 1989, among others – Legendre was interested in fatherhood and its symbolic anchor points. He was responsible for a series of books that analyze various phenomena and conflicts in contemporary society from the perspective of his original thinking.<sup>[7]</sup>

As mentioned previously, Pierre Legendre regularly spoke with several learned conversation partners. Among them are his Greek-born wife, the psychoanalyst Alexandra Papageorgiou-Legendre (b. 1941) as well as experts on law Gabriel Le Bras (1891-1970), Francis de Zulueta (1878-1958), Eduard Meijers (1880-1954) and Doudou Gueye. The undersigned heard Legendre's account of his dialogue with Jacques Lacan. They used to meet on Saturday mornings and speak about questions related to the psychoanalytic understanding of how institutions function (Legendre, 2009, p. 137). Lacan also asked him to read his unpublished texts. Lacan needed Legendre's academic eye.

Pierre Legendre (2009) described himself as “a man who belongs to both the past and the distant future” (p. 130). Thus, he insisted that he did not live in the present time, writing: “I even make an effort to avoid being contemporary”(ibid).<sup>[8]</sup> A part of modern history that was always present in his thinking is the massacre of six million Jews during the brutal Nazi reign in Germany. He used the term post-Hitlerian society, and repeatedly emphasized that while Hitler and Nazism had been defeated in military terms, they had left behind a significant structural remainder. It lingered on and is still present in Western Neo-liberal society. It shape-shifted and camouflaged itself, but lives on.

He explored the concept of religion and demonstrated the complexity and diverseness of this phenomenon. He clarified how it transcends the standard definitions. Faith is a fundamental question for humanity that no one can avoid. He insisted that there never has been, nor is there or ever will be, a society that firstly lacks rules and laws, secondly lacks religion, or thirdly lacks politics in some form.

## **The Obituaries; What Has Been Written on Legendre's Death**

Many obituaries were published in conjunction with Legendre's passing. They emphasize that France has lost a national treasure, he is portrayed as neglected in his native country and more appreciated abroad, as a thinker who questioned the present era, as a writer who warned us of what is happening in contemporary society, as a learned poet, as a legal authority who was not recognized in his time, a conservative rebel, an intellectual adventurer with an unlimited philosophical scope, an important thinker who reflected over Western society and the State. His intellectual legacy is described as one of the most stimulating of the age.

I remember him as a learned intellectual who always pushed himself to the limit, and never lost touch with mental suffering, solitude and poetry.

## **Works by Pierre Legendre**

*La Pénétration du droit romain dans le droit canonique classique*, thèse de doctorat [PhD thesis], Paris, Imprimerie Jouve, 1964.

*Histoire de l'Administration de 1750 à nos jours*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, collection "Thémis", 1968; New expanded edition, *Trésor historique de l'État en France. L'Administration classique*, Paris, Fayard, 1992.

*L'Administration, du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, collection "Thémis", textes et documents, 1969.

*La Summa Institutionum*, "Iustiniani est in hoc opere" (Manuscrit New York, Pierpont Morgan 903), Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1973 (*Ius Commune. Sonderhefte*, 2).

*L'Amour du censeur. Essai sur l'ordre dogmatique*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, collection "Le champ freudien", 1974; New expanded edition, 2005.

*Jouir du pouvoir. Traité de la bureaucratie patriote*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, collection "Critique", 1976.

*La Passion d'être un autre. Étude pour la danse*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, collection "Le champ freudien", 1978; Ny utökad upplaga, Éditions du Seuil, collection "Points", 2000.

*Paroles poétiques échappées du texte. Leçons sur la communication industrielle*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1982.

*Écrits juridiques du Moyen Âge occidental*, London, Variorum, 1988.

*Leçons I. La 901e Conclusion. Étude sur le théâtre de la Raison*, Paris, Fayard, 1998.

*Leçons II. L'Empire de la vérité. Introduction aux espaces dogmatiques industriels*, Paris, Fayard, 1983; New expanded edition, 2001.

*Leçons III. Dieu au miroir. Étude sur l'institution des images*, Paris, Fayard, 1994.

*Leçons IV. L'Inestimable Objet de la transmission. Étude sur le principe généalogique en Occident*, Paris, Fayard, 1985; New expanded edition, 2004.

*Leçons IV, suite. Le Dossier occidental de la parenté. Textes juridiques indésirables sur la généalogie*, in collaboration with Anton Schütz, Marc Smith, Yan Thomas, Paris, Fayard, 1988.

*Leçons IV, suite 2. Filiation. Fondement généalogique de la psychanalyse*, by Alexandra Papageorgiou-Legendre, Paris, Fayard, 1990.

*Leçon VI. Les Enfants du Texte. Étude sur la fonction parentale des États*, Paris, Fayard, 1992.

*Leçons VII. Le Désir politique de Dieu. Étude sur les montages de l'État et du Droit*, Paris, Fayard, 1988.

*Leçons VIII. Le Crime du caporal Lortie. Traité sur le Père*, Paris, Fayard, 1989; New edition, Flammarion, collection "Champs", 2000.

*De la Société comme Texte. Linéaments d'une Anthropologie dogmatique*, Paris, Fayard, 2001.

*Sur la question dogmatique en Occident. Aspects théoriques*, Paris, Fayard, 1999.

*Nomenclator. Sur la question dogmatique en Occident, II*, Paris, Fayard, 2006.

*La Fabrique de l'homme occidental* (film manuscript), followed by *L'homme en meurtrier*, Paris, Mille et une nuits-ARTE Éditions, 1996.

*Miroir d'une Nation. L'École Nationale d'Administration* (film manuscript), suivi de *Les Collages qui font un État*, Paris, Mille et une nuits-ARTE Éditions, 2000.

*Dominium mundi. L'Empire du Management* (film manuscript), Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2007.

*Leçons IX. L'Autre Bible de l'Occident : le Monument romano-canonique. Étude sur l'architecture dogmatique des sociétés*, Paris, Fayard, 2009.

*Le visage de la main*, Les Belles Lettres, 2019

*L'Inexploré, conférence à l'École nationale des Chartes*, Ars Dogmatica Éditions, 2020.

*L'Avant dernier des jours. Fragments de quasi mémoires*, Ars Dogmatica Éditions, 2021.

*Les Hauteurs de l'Éden*, Ars Dogmatica Éditions, 2022.

### **Works produced under the direction of Pierre Legendre**

Travaux du Laboratoire européen pour l'étude de la filiation, Bryssel, Éditions E. Van Balberghe et Y. Gevaert; diffusion exclusive en France, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (CID, 131 boulevard Saint-Michel, 75005 Paris) :

vol. I, 1995; *Autour du Parricide*.

vol. II, 1998; *Du Pouvoir de diviser les mots et les choses*.

vol. III, 2004; "Deux en une seule chair". *Scénographie du couple humain dans le Texte occidental*.

### **Les Quarante Piliers, série "Matériaux"**

Hadrien France-Lanord, *Paul Celan et Martin Heidegger. Le sens d'un dialogue*, Paris, Éditions Fayard, 2004.

Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Mourir pour la patrie et autres textes*, Paris, Éditions Fayard, 2004.

Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Laudes regiae. Une étude des acclamations liturgiques et du culte du souverain au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Éditions Fayard, 2004.

Ashis Nandy, *L'Ennemi intime. Perte de soi et retour à soi sous le colonialisme*, Paris Éditions Fayard, 2007.

Clemens Porschlegel, *Penser l'Allemagne. Littérature et politique aux XIXe et XXe siècles*.

### **Les Quarante Piliers, série "Summulae"**

Sous la direction de Laurent Mayali (ed.), with contributions by Johan C. Yoo, Jesse H. Choper and John P. Dwyer, *Le Façonnage juridique du marché des religions aux États-Unis*, Mille et une nuits, 2002.

Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *Pourquoi le théâtre? La réponse indienne*, Mille et une nuits, 2004.

Pierre Legendre, *Ce que l'Occident ne voit pas de l'Occident. Conférences au Japon*, Mille et une nuits, 2004.

Jean-Robert Armogathe, *L'Antéchrist à l'âge classique. Exégèse et politique*, 2005.

Michael Stolleis, *L'Oeil et la Loi. Histoire d'une métaphore*, Mille et une nuits, 2006.

Pierre Legendre, *La Balafre. À la jeunesse désireuse... Discours à de jeunes étudiants sur la science et l'ignorance*, Mille et une nuits, 2007.

### **21<sup>st</sup> century articles on Pierre Legendre's works**

Avitabile, *La Filosofia del diritto in Pierre Legendre* (publications de l'Université de Rome "La Sapienza"), Turin, Giappichelli, 2004.

Goodrich, L. Barshack, A. Schütz (éd.), *Law, Text, Terror. Essays for Pierre Legendre*, London, Cavendish Publishing Ltd-The Glass House, 2006.

Sasaki, *Les Batailles nocturnes et l'éternité. Foucault, Lacan, Legendre* (in Japanese), Tokyo, Ibunsha, 2008.

Berni, *Pierre Legendre, L'Antropologia dogmatica di un giurista eterodosso*, Publications de l'Université de Sienna, 2008.

*Introduction à l'œuvre de Pierre Legendre. Collectif sous la direction de Katrin Becker et Pierre Musso. Med bidrag av Katrin Becker, Livio Boni, Peter Goodrich, Paolo Heritier, George Mein, Pierre Musso, Osamu Nishitani, Andreas Rahmatian, Serene Richards. Éditions Manucius, 2023.*

### **Bibliography:**

Legendre, P. (2009). *Vues éparses – Entretiens radiophoniques avec Philippe Petit* [Scattered views – Radio interviews with Philippe Petit]. Fayard/Mille et une nuits.

### **Notes:**

[1] In his books, Legendre often refers to Sophocles (497-406 B.C.) and Ovid (43 B.C. – 18 A.D.), the surrealist poets, as well as Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926). He also collaborated with the author, publisher, philosopher and critic Jean Piel (1902-1996) at the journal *Critique*. See also the appendix regarding Legendre's references.

[2] Pierre Legendre was a versatile author who also wrote film manuscripts, as previously mentioned. He provided the manuscripts for *La Fabrique de l'homme occidental*, *L'homme en meurtrier*, Paris, Mille et une nuits-ARTE Éditions, 1996, *Miroir d'une Nation. L'École Nationale d'Administration*, Les Collages qui font un État, Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2000 as well as *Dominim Mundi. L'Empire du Management*, Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2007.

[3]»*Nous sommes gouvernés dans ce monde par des barbares.*«

[4] Power is compared with a mirror: »*la métaphore du pouvoir absolu, le miroir*« [the metaphor of absolute power, the mirror] (Legendre, 2009, p. 138).

[5] He wrote: »*.../ c'est un combat, et nous verrons où il mène; certainement pas à la démocratie universelle et à la paix universelle*« [it's a battle, and we'll see where it leads; certainly not to universal democracy and universal peace.] (Legendre, 2009, p. 133).

[6] Legendre (2009) wrote: »*... je n'ai jamais manqué d'appuis, simplement je n'ai jamais fait partie de réseaux...*« [...I've never lacked support, I've just never been part of a network...] (p. 170).

[7] The series is published by the Paris-based publisher Fayard under the title *Leçons*. Legendre's *Le crime du caporal Lortie* is the eighth volume.

[8] The quote reads: »*Je suis un homme du passé et de l'avenir lointain. Je n'habite pas le présent. Je m'efforce même de ne pas être de mon temps*« [I'm a man of the past and the distant future. I don't live in the present. I even try not to be of my time.] (p 130).

## **Bio:**

**Per Magnus Johansson** is a psychoanalyst trained in Paris. He is also a psychologist, psychotherapist, and specialist in clinical psychology. From 2007 to 2013 he was the chairman of the Ethics Board of the Swedish Psychological Association.

Since 1999 Johansson published fifteen books. He has written the history of psychoanalysis in Sweden. Two books were published in 2014. In *Psykoanalys och humaniora* [Psychoanalysis and the Humanities] the

relationship between psychoanalysis and the humanities the analyzed. Johansson emphasizes the importance of literature in understanding the essence of psychoanalysis. *En psykoanalytikers väg – Le cheminement d'un psychanalyste* [A Psychoanalyst's Journey – Le cheminement d'un psychanalyste] is a dual language book with parallel French and Swedish text. It explains his path in relation to the university and to psychoanalysis, and discusses the relationship between psychoanalytic theory and psychoanalytical praxis. In 2016 Johansson published a book about the development of the university in collaboration with Thomas Karlsruhn. He published a book on Marx and Freud in 2018, co-authored with Sven-Eric Liedman, professor in the history of ideas. In 2020 Johansson's book on the relationship between August Strindberg and Sigmund Freud was published. In March 2023, Johansson published *Corona*, a 500 page book consisting in daily notes from the ongoing [COVID-19 pandemic](#). Finally, he has published 400 articles in English, French, and Swedish in cultural and scientific journals and has been a regular contributor to the cultural sections of the major Swedish newspapers during the last 15 years. He is presently a columnist of one of these newspapers.

Johansson defended his PhD thesis in 1999. Today (2023) he is an Associate Professor and a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion at the University of Gothenburg. Johansson is the founder and editor in chief of *Arche*, which in 2018 received the prize for the best cultural journal in Sweden. In 2006, he received the decoration *Officier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques* from the French department of Education and Sciences.

In 2012 he became honorary member of the Swedish Psychoanalytic Association (SPAF), a component society of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA). In 2014 he was elected member of The Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in Gothenburg.

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