



# A TRIBUTE TO OLAVO DE CARVALHO

*Posted on March 1, 2022 by Valdemar Munaro*



This noble and generous space gives me the opportunity to render a simple homage to the intellectual gift and service rendered to all, especially to us Brazilians, by our dearly beloved Olavo de Carvalho, who recently passed away.

The pantheon of writers and intellectuals brings together, according to Allan Bloom, giants and dwarfs. It is on the shoulders of giants that dwarves can glimpse things that are impossible to see because of their height. Giants, as such, resemble trailblazers who blaze trails in the jungle for others to tread, pathways previously untraveled. Intellectual giants are not many, nor are they frequent, which is why we must love them, study them, listen to them, scrutinize them, and thank them, because they make us transcend the myopia that makes us see clearly only that which is close, and barely that which is distant, in order that we might behold what our mediocrity makes impossible to see.

Olavo, as many have said, including our president, is certainly among the few giant Brazilian thinkers. His work goes beyond the limits of passions, opinions and/or fads that usually imprison us. One can say that he was and is a Brazilian intellectual surprise, a miracle, for the same reason that we are inundated by, and inured to, the usual cultural mediocrities that are incapable of generating his like. It is undeniable that his educational and philosophical activity raised our rational investigative quality and opened gaps in our long-crystallized discussions and thoughts. In this, he was an authentic author of our time; polemical, yes, but, in view of our "captive" condition, he shook the habit which we had become accustomed to, given the wintry and gloomy educational milieu long established in our country.

We know that all great writers embody a portion of substantiality and another of accidentality. The accidental elements, in Aristotle's understanding, are those penchants or aspects that only exist so long as they are grafted to the substance that sustains them. Accidentals are like leftovers from banquets, bagasse from trade craft. They are real, but have no life of their own; they subsist and exist to the extent that they are united to substantiality. So that in Olavo's work, for example, there is a journalistic and political side or aspect that belongs to his more accidental activity and says less about his substantial core. This is located in his masterpieces and in the veins of his work elaborated through the courses he taught over the last twenty years of his life.

No author, just as no human person, is admirably integral, perfect, complete. Even in the works of Dante, Thomas Aquinas, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Machado de Assis and

many others, we can find scraps, straw, and not only grains. In them we also have flashes of secondary literature, although the substance is there, for it is always the noun that gives existence to adjectives, not the other way around. Even the great Homer took naps, as St. Jerome once had to explain when asked about his reading of Origen's heretical works. Olavo had a polemical and irreverent side; but this did not make up the central part of the content of his work.

Endowed with a lively and sagacious intelligence and a prodigious memory, Olavo possessed a vast knowledge of almost everything that constitutes human knowledge. His formative years went through stages of self-learning, discipline and study methods, as well as extraordinary and personal reading and investigation. He looked for places where he could find knowledge and wisdom. Who helped him initially were not the universities, but Father Stanislaus Ladusãns (born in Latvia and a Jesuit, member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters), who taught free philosophy courses in Rio de Janeiro. This points to something else: It is not always universities that form intellectuals and scientists. In the Middle Ages, for example, it was not the University of Paris that formed or raised Thomas Aquinas or Duns Scotus to the level of great philosophers and masters, but rather it was precisely Thomas Aquinas and Scotus who raised the level and fame of that university. Human personalities are usually most filled with wisdom and science not in spaces and places of noise and publicity, but in the innermost silence of their own cell or home. The examples are countless to assure us that universities are not always places of formation and generation of "intellectuals" and illustrious writers.

Olavo spoke with ease and confidence about almost all areas of human knowledge. He broached subjects, prolix or not, related to literature, ethics, philosophy, religion, sciences in general, history, theology, cinema, arts and aesthetics, politics, economics, psychology, problems related to the world order, living or dead authors of the contemporary scenario, and so on.

Not even in great authors of the history of philosophy, such as Fraile, Reale, Copleston, Abbagnano, Urdanoz, Brehier, Gilson and others have I found so much lucidity and comprehensive synthesis in understanding the thought of the most representative philosophers of each period as I found in the lectures presented by Olavo in his *Essential History of Philosophy* and in other related works. Olavo also scrutinized, especially modern and contemporary, the picture of contradictions and deceptions that many of the doctrines of those authors contain. He dared, without fear, to denounce the swindles and charlatanism of thinkers and/or philosophers, such as Descartes, Luther, Hobbes, Machiavelli, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Darwin, Newton, Marx, Engels, Freud, Nietzsche, Auguste Comte, Antonio Gramsci, Foucault, Heidegger, the members of the Frankfurt school (Lukács, Marcuse, Horkheimer,

Adorno, Habermas, Fromm), Wittgenstein, Derrida, Deleuze, Sartre, Noam Chomsky, Richard Dawkins, and many others. Today he has become the greatest scholar and interpreter of Marxism, for he devoted part of his life to reading and analyzing the complete works of Marx, Lenin, and all their main minions.

However, his greatest, most forceful and impactful provocation, among us, was the public denunciation of the mediocre and rotten state in which Brazilian intellectual life found itself, both inside the universities and in the editorial offices and seminars of theological and philosophical education of many of our ecclesial institutions. We did not know or had no notion of the painful picture in which we were living in our cultural and formative life. His demolishing rocket was directed first of all at the class represented by the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC). Just to have an idea, have a look at the polemic of the editors of the magazine *Ciência Hoje*, published by Aristóteles em Nova Perspectiva. Their denunciation showed us that the teaching of philosophy and other areas of knowledge is integrally tied to the leftist ideological political dictate present and active in almost all the "humanistic" faculties in Brazil, especially in USP (cf. *Jardim das Aflições* - *The Garden of Woes*), Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (read *O Imbecil Coletivo I* and *II*—*The Imbecile Collective*). The same denunciation showed how disfigured and depressing is the picture of our universities, our schools, our publishing media, our newspapers and means of communication, almost totally contaminated by Marxism—and, above all, by intellectual dishonesty. Not even theology was free from this imbroglio. Impregnated by "liberation," it has penetrated the soul of our students, future prelates and pastors. According to him, this theology, rooted in Vatican II, has now become a prisoner of the same trend. Examples are the best-known Brazilian theologians of that period: *Leonardo Boff* and *Frei Betto*. For a long time, they were questioned; but Olavo disqualified them from the intellectual point of view and reaffirmed his thesis that the damage caused by this theology to the Church has not yet been evaluated or sufficiently measured.

Because of his work as a writer and professor, we have been able, through his encouragement, to have access to works that were previously not even mentioned in the publishing and university circles. Today we have the chance to read authors, such as Eric Voegelin, Mortimer Adler, Russel Kirk, Roger Scruton, Leopold Szondi, Northrop Frye, Bernanos, Newman, Conrad, Victor Frankl, Andrew Lobaczewski, René Girard, Thomas Sowell, Xavier Zubiri, A. D. Sertillanges, Chesterton, Theodore Dalrymple, Louis Lavelle, B. Lonergan, Mário Ferreira dos Santos, Otto Maria Carpeaux, Vicente Ferreira dos Santos, Ângelo Monteiro, Meira Penna, Gustavo Corção, Leo Strauss, and many others. In his courses, Olavo called our attention to the up-to-date value of the philosophy found in the works of Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Husserl, Leibniz, Schelling (and many others), of the great authors of literature and historians (such as Walter Scott), contemporary

and modern writers, be they from Brazil or the world. Our country was closed to the vast work of valuable writers who were simply disregarded because they were not, and are not, leftist.

According to Olavo, Brazilian and world thought has been contaminated by what Julien Benda called "betrayal," that is, political emotion that has penetrated the minds of our intellectuals and given way to the "leimotiv" stamped in Marx's philosophy: "the world is not to be known and contemplated, but rather to be transformed." Thus, the terrain of science is no longer a laboratory of research and knowledge, but a political battlefield. Our educational life has been swallowed up in the primal anxiety of "transforming" the social, political, cultural, economic, and religious world. We are, therefore, drenched in "revolutionary yearnings." Because of this, according to Olavo, there is no longer, among us, any possibility of honest and scientific intellectual debates, since passions have blunted and distorted our reasonable rationality, ending up prevailing over the objectivity of facts and results. The discussions linked to politics, closely linked to their militancy, have become a substitute for the honest, free and loving search for knowledge. We are among the last places in the world in educational rankings. Such is the tragedy that has befallen Brazilian education, our universities, our political, religious and intellectual world. To serve as an example, a recent comment was made by a professor who evaluated the end-of-course work (based on the works of Olavo de Carvalho) of a philosophy student: his research should not have been done on this author because he did not belong among the ranks of faculty professors in the current the university philosophical academy. Of course, the argument is shoddy, crude and dishonest. In fact, if it were correct, we should exclude philosophers who were not university professors, among them, Marx, Engels, Rousseau, Saramago, Gabriel Marcel, Kierkegaard, and many others. As it turns out, militancy over logic, truth and rationality still prevails here and elsewhere.

If the central content of Olavo's work is the affirmation of the unity of knowledge, in the unity of human consciousness, it follows that this essential unitary principle, is the condition without which we would become disintegrated from ourselves and the world we inhabit. The disintegration of our being, therefore, begins in the absence of true perception of our self and of the reality in which it is embedded. In other words, every time we elaborate knowledge, doctrines or ideas in which we ourselves are not inside them, it means then that we place ourselves outside the very doctrine we generate and, in this way, we establish in our intellectual activity what Olavo called "cognitive parallax;" that is, a fictional knowledge or philosophy that leads the thinker who produces it (with his disciples, consequently), to the schizophrenia of himself—to madness, stupidity, psychopathy.

What can save our minds from crazy fictions is always the honest and sincere effort to return to the

observation of the real world of things and of our real selves. It is our intelligence that feeds on being, and not the other way around. All idealisms are fictional and end up leading their leaders and protagonists to attempts of forcibly and violently implementing them in people's lives. Experience shows that such idealisms have led their agents and victims to the sad, terrible and shocking experiences that the historical totalitarianisms of the last century have witnessed. As Eric Voegelin put it, the "spiritual illiteracy" of the intellectual elites of the modern and contemporary world engendered and legitimized the advent of psychopaths who, elevated to some power, were able, without moral scruples or remorse, to kill and hurt whomever they pleased. The man who eliminates God from his existence will eventually put himself in his place and act as if he were divine.

In spite of all the divergent opinions, I want to express my gratitude for the pages Olavo wrote and for the intrepidity with which he carried forward the defense of values and principles that are the nutrients of those souls that wish to grow and live in righteousness, wisdom, and truth. Many Brazilians found in Olavo the intellectual nourishment that the universities did not offer. He nourished them and helped them to live better. Linked to the great metaphysical tradition of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and the Judeo-Christian principles, Olavo de Carvalho's philosophy retains the pillars of wisdom that had already been cultivated and sought by the Greeks, but that were found in the great Christian heritage. His texts and lectures contain those values and principles that have sustained noble and great civilizations. In this sense, he collaborated a lot for the good of our Brazil and the world. Brazil is not only soccer, carnival, samba, or any other brand. Now, above all, it is also Olavo Luiz Pimentel de Carvalho. We are proud of him.

The great African Augustine began his Confessions with the famous sentence referring to God: "Fecisti nos ad te e inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te." Translated this means "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Augustine's claim is that God did not make us for the intractable, nihilistic abyss, but to be with Him. Our origin will therefore also be our destination. We carry in our soul the source of our origin, so we know what our destiny will be. Olavo was aware of his origin and knew his destiny. In a recent interview he said that he was not afraid of death. Thank you, Olavo, for the trust you transmitted to us and for the good you did for us. May the Risen Christ keep you forever in His company.

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*Valdemar Munaro is professor of philosophy at Universidade Franciscana, in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do*

*Sul, Brazil. The Portuguese version of this tribute was published by [Percival Puggina](#). Translation into English by Felipe Cuello.*

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