

Olavo de Carvalho and Hemispherical Conservatism

by [Miguel Nunes Silva](#) (February 2025)



Les artistes mit Gemüse (Max Beckmann, 1943)

The conservative renaissance which was ushered by the abuses of progressive political hegemony in recent history, and incarnated in phenomena such as Brexit, Trump, Bolsonaro or Orbán, has fostered much cross cultural and international dialogue. Conservative activists and politicians throughout the cultural West have moved quickly to establish a network of contacts in order to share experiences and find support as well as sanctuary away from the worst aspects of the persecution carried out by the progressive totalitarian reaction.

Different nations present themselves with differentiated problems and local adaptations of conservative tenets. Hungary, as a small nation-state seeks, to prevent all illegal immigration whereas a western European country might require a certain measure of immigration to sustain industry. Poland maintains a strong connection to the Catholic Church whereas Switzerland takes secularism much more seriously, while remaining a traditional society.

The presence of the Brazilian Right online is ubiquitous in the Portuguese language. It is therefore inevitable to observe a philosophical cross pollination of conservative concepts between countries such as Portugal and Brazil, all the more aided by their respective permeability to the Anglo-Saxon world, be it the British sphere in Portugal or the American sphere in Brazil.

Lisbon has been geopolitically close to London since the Hundred Years War and culturally since the Glorious Revolution. Brazil, in turn, was inspired to independence by the American Revolution. This goes to make the point that, unlike Eastern Europe or Asia, European continental influences from France, Germany and Russia were never particularly

dominant in the Atlantic rim, even if France's Latin credentials did favour its cultural exports to the Lusophone world, at times.

Regarding conservatism, Edmund Burke wrote his foundational thesis on the topic of revolution to condemn it whereas revolution constitutes itself as seminal in the Americas. Burke was, of course, being critical of the revolution in France and not in Britain nor America yet his approval of 1776 was contingent on London having broken the presuppositions with which settlers had been attracted to the New World, under the patronage of the Crown. As for the Glorious Revolution, Burke regarded it as counter revolutionary, reinstating the parliamentary traditions which Stuart absolutism had endangered.

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental divide between the New World and the Old when it comes to the concept of revolution. It is necessary to preface the topic with this context so as to understand the fundamental incompatibility between conservatism in the Old World and in the Western hemisphere.

American nations are the product of revolutions inspired by Enlightenment principles. In the USA, the founding fathers took inspiration from John Locke and John Stuart Mill to formulate their legitimacy for revolution and a break with the British Crown. As observed by Tocqueville, the revolutionaries went on to cement the new nation in a new legal system which was totemized. Setting the stage for other Atlantic rebellions, freemasonry and other transnational networks of influence helped spread the new ideals of reason and individual rights. Conversely, most of the old world was far more traditional and absolutist, with the continental influence being felt the most in the crushing of the 1848 Spring of the Peoples by the Holy Alliance.

It is important to keep these events in mind when trying to understand Brazil's contemporary populist Right. As mentioned,

Brazil's independence was inspired by the revolution in the 13 colonies. Incidentally, Portugal too was driven into constitutionalism and economic liberalism, to a great extent, through anglophone (British) influence. Both states also counted on actual English mercenaries in order to accomplish their respective insurrections.

Because 1776 was nationhood year zero in the Americas, the passing of time has transformed the positivist universalist ideals of the American civic saints, into political philosophy classics. As such, the subsequent revolutions and statehoods to emerge, were regarded positively so long as they emulated the fundamentals of Philadelphia. This same empathy was not extended to the Marxist uprisings in Cuba and Venezuela because communism was fundamentally collectivist anti-individualist and heralded the precepts ... of Petrograd.

The short History of the new hemisphere therefore created a peculiar political paradigm wherein liberty is regarded as 'conservative' and tyranny is regarded as 'progressive'. Brazil being a South American catholic country, was typically characterised by an extremely progressive academia and intelligentsia which meant that, for a long time, conservative thinking was relegated to the margins of Brazilian society. On one hand, the image of the US had become associated with Monroe Doctrine based imperialism in the continent and on the other hand, Brazil's modernist coup of 1889 replacing the country's constitutional monarchy with a republic, was French inspired, rather than anglophile. At one point, bonapartists in Brazil even looked into the viability of breaking Napoleon free from St. Helena.

Olavo de Carvalho came on to the scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a right-wing firebrand polemicist who was particularly good at communicating political philosophy to the middle class. His articles, books and lectures quickly gained a following and promoted a new form of conservatism, independent from Church structures—whom he saw as permeable to

socialist perversion. He correctly diagnosed many of the most pernicious aspects of the Latin American Left and denounced mercilessly the regimes of Havana and Caracas for all their corruption, mismanagement and oppression.

His original inspiration was René Guénon and the traditionalist Right. Interpreting spiritualism and mysticism as an attempt to preserve the innocence of Mankind, he saw the future of the Right as a syncretic cosmic movement which safeguarded the instinctive humility of the pre-modern world: a certainty that traditional morals and individual responsibility would lead to good outcomes, irrespective of quantifiable scientific data. As with authors such as de Maistre, Olavo saw modernity as a force for the positivist brutalisation of Man as a commodity, and rationalism as the harbinger of barbarism. Take away faith and renounce the better angels of our nature, and we end up rationalising our most hedonistic instincts.

While speaking on Brazil's special mission in the world by virtue of its Portuguese Marian heritage, Carvalho would later get acquainted with the conservative tradition of North America, eventually moving to the US and even befriending Steve Bannon. Under the influence of the Republican Right, and in proper New World fashion though, he followed the regional paradigm by associating conservatism with ...liberal Enlightenment philosophy, echoing the originalist constitutionalists of the United States. Olavo referred to Leo Strauss as an "*unusual genius*" and was of the opinion that

American nationalism is, in essence, a conservatism committed to keeping the constitutional tradition and the legacy of the Founding Fathers, alive [\[1\]](#).

Indeed, in the then loosely right-wing newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, Olavo led the Brazilian chorus cheering for George W. Bush, at the height of Operation Iraqi Freedom:

(...) when the hidden cemeteries of the iraqi prison system were revealed and the body count began, I realised—and wrote—that George W. Bush's decision had been morally righteous and even mandatory: any country that kills 300,000 political prisoners must be immediately invaded and subjugated, even if it does not constitute any risk to neighbouring nations or the supposed 'international order'. National sovereignties should be respected but not to the extent of a domestic right to genocide. [\[2\]](#)

This point was precisely one that Aleksandr Dugin alluded to in his debate with Olavo: the two differed on the true origin of 'globalism' and its evils to conservatism and tradition, in post modernity. Carvalho insisted that it was the remnants of technocratic materialism in post Cold War China and Russia that fed the globalist erosion of traditional values. Dugin countered that said erosion actually emanated from Western Atlanticism, and the nihilistic outcome of liberalism taken to its logical conclusion. Olavo does not seem to have realised that by adhering to the limited sovereignty paradigm, he was stepping into exceptionalism and that exceptionalism was precisely what furthered the impetus to standardise the world; i.e. globalism. By going 'straussian', Olavo incurred in what [Claes G. Ryn would condemn as neo-jacobinism](#): a deturpation of historiography via universalist moral readings made a posteriori and anachronistic to the context of events. In other words, following in the footsteps of the neoconservatives meant interpreting Natural Law as a philosophical means of justifying revolution and violating sovereignty ...thus contradictory to Carvalho's own opposition

to globalism. Timothy Fuller [wrote of the temptation](#) of *"transforming the commitment to the rule of law into a commitment to social engineering"* and this is precisely the rabbit hole that the hemispherical Right often allows itself to go down.

This is what makes conversations between cousins on both sides of the Atlantic so frustrating and cross-purposed: when seeking to establish academic and intellectual collaborations, one realises that the intent in the Americas is, ultimately—perhaps unintentionally—to promote liberal values. Indeed, Jair Bolsonaro's party in Brazil is still called the Liberal Party. The hemispherical worldview can be so myopic as to allow olavists to go to the extreme of classifying authoritarian regimes as 'leftist', including traditional Islamic ones. To them, the Emirates or Saudi Arabia are as leftist as North Korea... The key to Carvalho's thinking is the dichotomy collectivism/individualism which posits that all forms of collectivism are derived from the Marxist globalism attempt to uniformise the human species and that classical humanism is the answer to preventing a universal materialist nightmare. This self-centred perspective blinds the New World to the perfectly natural conservatism of more collectivistic cultures which are not under the control of globalists; because individualist values do not locally rule the day, does not make any given society totalitarian.

This normative prejudice is equally inspired by the legalistic sacrament that Tocqueville pointed to. Because the New World cannot rely on ethnicity, language or religion as elements of group identity, it turns to Laws and Constitution. In turn, this means that the form of government is necessarily perceived to be ideological: democracy is right-wing, dictatorship is left-wing; Pinochet or Salazar are taken with a massive parentheses. The reality is that policy is ideological, not the form of regime but this is difficult to put through to citizenry whose emotional patriotic attachment

is invested in the system of Law. In addition, Carvalho seems to now enjoy a somewhat mythical presence in the conscience of Brazilian conservatives, being patriotically regarded as Brazil's contribution to the civic saints of the hemisphere pantheon, along with the northern Founding Fathers.

Equally as dangerous, this also prevents the olavists from understanding Realpolitik. Perceiving the form of government as inherently ideological leads to being unable to differentiate between state and regime and for olavists, as well as for certain neoconservatives, state and regime are one and the same. Consequently, it would seem that foreign policy must follow normative, ideological guidelines, discriminating foreign partnerships according to regime compatibility, and ignoring objective national interest. This is further extended to second order reasoning by failing to consider that a dissimilar regime may be acting rationally and would actually be open to a mutual gains negotiation.

This explains the close bonds between the American and Brazilian Rights, since they share values to a significant extent and speak the same philosophical language. Unfortunately, this will constitute a handicap for future dealings between the populist Right in the Americas and the one in Europe, not to mention dissimilar regimes throughout the globe.

^[1] <https://olavodecarvalho.org/>

^[2] id.

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