

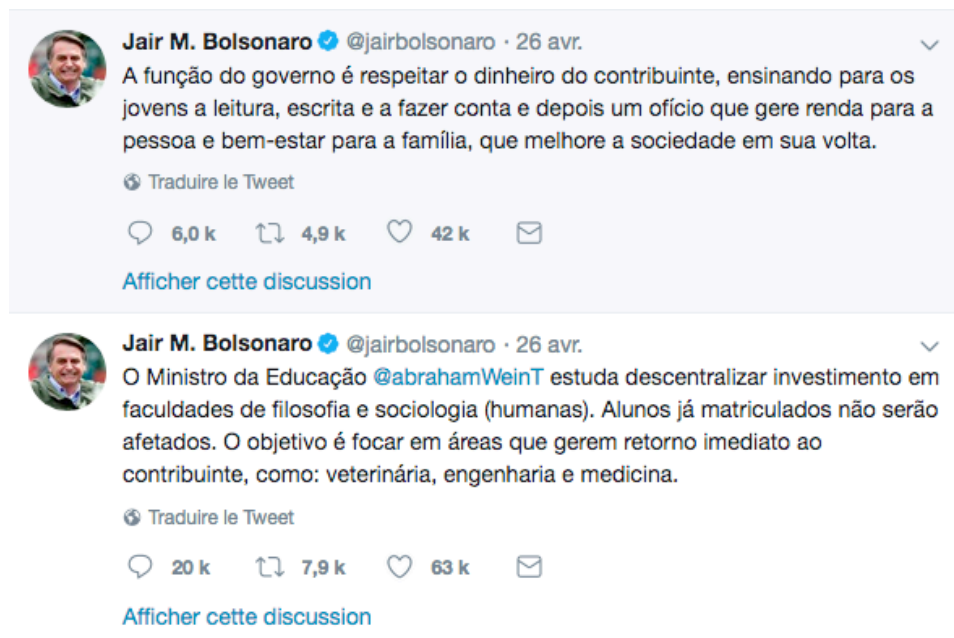
Sociology and philosophy under threat in Brazil

Education is an economic resource and a democratic value

On April 26, 2019, the president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, confirmed on Twitter what his Minister of Education, Abraham Weintraub, had announced a day earlier: his government plans on cutting federal funding for academic programs in sociology and philosophy. In those fields, future students would have to pay for their own education. While the Minister modeled his action after Japan's in 2015, the President insisted that higher education should focus on the three R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic, and that instead of the humanities, the Federal State should invest in areas that bring "immediate returns" to the taxpayer, such as veterinary, engineering, and medical schools.

The international signatories of this public statement warn against the serious consequences of such measures that have actually led the government of Japan to back down after a national and international uproar. First, education in general, and higher education in particular, cannot bring immediate returns; it is a national investment in the future of new generations. Second, modern economies do not only require specialized technicians; our societies need citizens with a broad, general, intellectual training. Third, in our democratic societies, politicians must not decide what constitutes good or bad science. The evaluation of knowledge and its usefulness should not be conducted in the name of conformity to ruling ideologies.

The social sciences and the humanities are no luxury; critical thinking about the world and an in-depth understanding of our societies should not be reserved to the wealthy. As academics in various fields, we are thoroughly convinced that our societies, including Brazil, need more education, not less. Collective intelligence is an economic resource, as well as a democratic value.



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