

## REVIEW LEGAL FORUM - SPECIAL SECTION

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On 5 and 6 December 2013 was launched in São Paulo, the headquarters of the Regional Prosecutor's Office of the 3rd Region, the Brazilian platform ASAP network ( *Academics Stand Against Poverty* ), composed of academics, researchers and students from various countries They seek, through the theory and practice, combating poverty, developing projects in the areas of assistance to the needy, trade, health, education, nutrition and climate change. The Legal Forum interviewed Thomas Pogge, platform founder, to know what your goals to bring her to Brazil.

### THOMAS POGGE

Degree in Sociology, with honors, from the University of Hamburg, Germany (1977); a Ph.D. in philosophy from *Harvard University* (1983), under the guidance of John Rawls; was Assistant Professor and Associate of Philosophy at *Columbia University* (1983-2006), Visiting Professor of the *Department of Clinical Bioethics of the National Institutes of Health* (2003-2004), *Fellow Professorial the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics of the Australian National University* ( 2004-2012) and professor of Political Science at *Columbia University* (2006-2008), and currently is Associate professor of Political Philosophy *Centre for Professional Ethics of the University of Central Lancashire* , Research Director *Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature of the University of Oslo* ; and *Leitner Professor of Philosophy and International Affairs* and Director of the *Global Justice Program* at Yale University.

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**1. FJ: Currently, some individuals studying only preparing for the labor market. Do you believe that the academic reality, somehow stays away from social reality? The ASAP is an attempt to keep them close?**

Students are in a period of insecurity, high unemployment. They always have a more limited perspective, focusing on career, finding a job. They are focused on reality, but that on themselves. Focus on the job outlook for medical students or law, but not in a larger perspective, for example, the future of humanity, the Global Justice - these issues have become much less important to them. In my generation, it was a wealthy generation - in 1960, 1970, everything was going well, there was a lot of progress - it was thought about the world, not on small careers. We were rich and we were thinking about the Vietnam War, the future of the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. Today people are focused solely on the part of reality that is relevant to your own career and well-being. And of course we want to change this, open the eyes of students to the world and make them aware of the fact that there are many problems that they may be ignoring. One of these problems is obviously safety (have weapons and highly dangerous technology proliferating, as the NSA - *National Security Agency* , espionage technologies, *drones* , biological agents, diseases).

There is also a global poverty crisis which constitutes a very serious problem, at least for the poor. Humanity half does not participate in global economic growth, it is being left behind, suffering from hunger and lack of shelter, drinking water; and it shows absolutely ridiculous and unnecessary these days. Another problem relates to climate change, the change of our natural environment, which in the next century, will present very severe consequences, much more severe than currently witnessed. And this is another problem which they should be aware, exercising political pressure to try to solve it.

## **2. FJ : In what ways Brazil 's poverty differs from that seen in the rest of the world? What brings you to Brazil?**

**Thomas :** One of the differences is that Brazil is a global and very rich country, not only in natural resources but in GNP (Gross National Product). He is now a middle - class country quite comfortable, with average GDP per capita is above 10 dollars. The country is doing very well globally, but certainly there is still a significant problem of poverty, and it shows, in part, similar to what occurs in other Latin American countries, where there is a high index of inequality. Latin America is at the top of world inequality. In some parts of Brazil has desperate poverty, with a domination of sharecroppers and miserable lives. Brazil is almost a picture of the world, global society. There is a significant divide between rich and poor, but this difference is less in countries like India and much of Africa. Another difference that I should mention is that in Brazil there are many patriots, so I think he has a greater chance of overcoming such problems, because many people are willing to look beyond their own interests. There is a sense of justice and patriotism. They think that the country should be much better, more just and united than it really is. Again, this differs from other countries where patriotism or sense of justice disappeared completely. Everyone is looking after you, trying to do as much as possible. But in Brazil there are people very committed, dedicated to social justice, as you could see the launch of ASAP in the Attorney General 's Office. It would be very difficult to verify enthusiasm by the public prosecutor regarding the ASAP initiative in other countries. It would be almost impossible to imagine it.

## **3. FJ: How a network of researchers and teachers can contribute to change the poverty picture on a global scale?**

**Thomas :** Our greatest contribution as academics and researchers are our ideas. New ideas. Sometimes things persist in the world because no one has different ideas. People are too lazy or say "has always been so, then we will continue doing so." An example is the *Health Impact Fund* . Everyone says if you want new drugs, you need to reward the creator, and if you want to reward you this means high prices. The first step is true, but not the second. You can reward you differently. But everyone ignores it. You have a new idea, which, if turned into reality, will make a huge difference to access to advanced treatments so that poor people can enjoy it. I want to do a pilot in Brazil. We have the product, we have the ideas for the pilot and want to ensure that poor people can enjoy the benefits of modern medicine. And there are many other good ideas, not just scientific, as ways to purify water, for example.

There are also ideas on how to reorganize society, draw the economy, the political system and the different way health system. absolutely important ideas. Scholars may also portray an accurate picture of reality. Provide an independent source of information, educating society about what is actually happening and why. Consequently, the analysis is crucially important for them. A third function is the fact that they are organized in a natural network, such as the

blood vessels of the human body. Academics are everywhere. There are in all countries of the world and are connected with each other. Philosophers are connected with other philosophers elsewhere, the political scientist, economist, etc. We can use this network to facilitate collaboration. We need not invent it, it already exists. Scholars can be the bridge that creates international collaboration.

#### **4. FJ : You can establish a concept of existential minimum?**

**Thomas :** There is no type of natural factor in this regard. You can always argue a little about the details. But I think that can be said for any company in particular, "that's the minimum you need to function in this society." If you are part of a particular company, you should use a shirt or dress a certain way. You can not go outside only with a piece of cloth tied on his body, right? It is not good. As for food, biologically we know what a person needs. But also depend on the work it carries out, for example, how heavy is your workload. Therefore, one can calculate an approximate minimum and say "These are the biological and social products that people need." One can then put a price, calculated in real how much it costs in Brazil to have adequate food, drinking water , clothing, shelter, health, education, etc. So you have a threshold that dictates what would be the extreme poverty in Brazil, if there is no access to that minimum.

#### **5. FJ : Do you think that the eradication of poverty is linked to the existence of a global justice? On what terms?**

It is connected in a conceptual sense. If poverty is avoidable, we did not achieve social justice. If poverty is inevitable, the world can be fair. But we can not have a just world if poverty is avoidable. We have to eradicate it. Currently, all poverty is avoidable, of course. Avoid it is easy. We need 2% of global income to eradicate poverty today. Justice requires that we establish the institutions, rules, practices and the landscape in which it is possible that all count on the minimum they need to live in a given society.

#### **6. FJ : As those who wish to join ASAP should proceed? There is an internship program in the project?**

We have an internship program for young people, but we want all (post-graduate students, faculty members and others) to participate, and the easiest thing to do would be to organize a leadership structure in Brazil. The ASAP Brazil should be semiautonomous. Carry out their own projects, their own decision-making processes, have their own leaders, as they wish. We have a kind of manual, where we explain in each chapter "is how this can be done." No need to do it this way, but we strongly recommend that they do so. We have experience, we did the same several times, so we know what works and what does not work and we can offer our advice. There will be a list of people who will sign up, and these people will keep things running and meet other participants in all regions. We hope to be representatives of ASAP in the larger cities and states, so that we can be present in these places and collaborate with individuals across the country. But we need time to do this, of course.

#### **7. FJ : What is the role of graduate students in the fight to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger?**

Thomas: I think there is a general answer to that. There are several things that graduate students can do, joining specific projects, offering help. For example, we have a project in the United States where undergraduate students studying network providers of Yale University, the origin of all inputs, such as t-shirts, mugs, cafeteria food, the furniture. All these things are produced by someone, and hopefully without the use of child labor, without

environmental damage, etc. This is just one example. But graduate students, as are trained, are able to perform more sophisticated things. I was a graduate student at Columbia University who was very intelligent and has become an integral contributor an essential project for analysis the World Bank poverty measurement process. We were criticizing him and had to do an extensive analysis of data, and this student did much of the analysis. Held a huge amount of work, analyzing all the data from each country. Therefore, there is no limit to what the graduate students can do.

**8. FJ : What advice would you give students who wish to act locally in the fight against poverty?**

Thomas: It depends on the locality in which you find yourself. I think the first thing to do is to know the poor. personally witness their conditions. An example we had was a project in India, where we are developing a website called "Know Your Rights India". We also have a project where undergraduate and graduate volunteer to help families whose rights have been denied. The family says "we want our rice at an affordable price." Every poor family has the right to consume rice at an affordable price. But they can not. The store owner says "I'm sorry, not this month. We have not". Then the family is expelled from the store and asks, "What can be done? This is how we are treated. ". A well And the student can learn from this experience. The student never had an experience that was treated the way these people are treated. So this rich family and student well-dressed can witness firsthand what being poor in India. How poor people are treated. I think it's an ideal program to join the two. But that's just an example. Obviously there could be many other ways to relate to the poor and try to understand their situation, their problems, trying to help them.

**9. FJ: The project has received financial support from institutions and Brazilian companies?**

Thomas: So far we have not received any support. And this is something that the members of ASAP Brazil should think. How can they get it? I believe this is possible through the social responsibility programs of companies. Small funds the Attorney General 's Office, perhaps. Small amounts of money can often get something. They can be the spark, then achieved by larger amounts. But you have to make it known among the people. It is what we call the money " *walk around* ", which allows you to contact people, companies and government agencies. So, I believe that can grow quickly. We can, of course, support with limited funds. We do not have large amounts, but we can contribute.

**10. FJ: How did you start this project? Why were you so interested?**

Thomas: I worked with this area for a long time. I did not think of building such a network. It was a guy in Australia who worked with me for three years, who wrote a book on Global Ethics, which at one point mentioned it. We think a little more, and said: "It is a good idea, we will do." We needed a good name. So I came up with this, and everyone enjoyed it. When I found the name, they all said, "now we can!" At this time we are growing very fast, and there is a great enthusiasm. Founded ASAP Spain last week, Mexico in August, Austria, Germany, Canada, India, UK, and others. And I hope to continue to progress.