

Agapic Dissidents & Political Altruism

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December 13, 2011

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"Why are you here? My city is in chaos because of you." One lone Everyman standing up to machinery, to force, to all the massed weight of the People's Republic--the largest nation in the world, comprising more than 1 billion people--while its all powerful leaders remain, as ever, in hiding somewhere within the bowels of the Great Hall of the People.
-Pico Iyer

To stand up for what you believe in, and to fight for what you love is the pure essence of being an individual. In the world's largest nation, during its largest social uprising in recent history, a single individual had forever manipulated the fate of his country. This is the role of the dissident, who expresses agapic love. To understand what an agapic dissident is, and how they are capable of bringing such a change, we will look at Thomas Jay Oord and his essay *The Love Racket: Defining Love and Agape for the Love-and-Science Research Program*, in conjunction with Charles M. Lichensteins *Introduction* article to *World Affairs* Volume 154. It will then be necessary to examine actual, real life instances of agapic dissidence. First and foremost, we will look at the Tiananmen Tank Man, as observed by Pico Iyer, and his essay, *The Unknown Rebel*. Then we will look at Rosa Parks, and her miniscule actions, which gave rise to large advances for the rights of African Americans. Next, Julia Butterfly Hill—whose ability to live within the confines of a tree, has led to one of the most well-known acts of environmental activism— and her interview with Brian Awelah, will be analyzed. It will then be necessary to look at the outcomes of agapic dissidents within the realms of a population, and conceptualize how political altruism is synthesized and manipulated.

Although agapic love has been well reviewed by those such as Thomas Jay Oord, no one has yet to link agapic love to political dissidence, and specifically how this can affect the recent rebellions on governments worldwide. To begin, it is important to understand what agapic love is. To do this, we look to Oords' definition of agape in his article, *The Love Racket: Defining Love and Agape for the Love-and-Science Research Program*. In this article, Oord argues an "adequate definition of agape as intentional

response to promote well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being” (919). One of the important parts of this quote is the idea that there has to be some element, which can generate ill-being. In other words, for there to be true agapic love, there needs to be a chance that one of the outcomes, is detrimental to the lover. When we look at the first part of the quote, we see that an intentional response that promotes well-being, we see that there is a positive outcome as well. Also, it is important to note that the person, who shows agapic love, purposefully takes on the challenges presented, and knows that there is a chance for an ill-fated outcome. When a dissident becomes agapic, the risk of an unfavorable outcome rises.

Webster’s Dictionary defines a dissident as a person “disagreeing especially with an established religious or political system” (Merriam-Webster.com). When we combine this definition with a section of Charles M. Lichensteins *Introduction* article to *World Affairs* Volume 154, we can create a working definition of dissidence.

The coalescence of a dissident Chinese exile community in the United States, spurred by the arrival in this country of a number of the leaders in the [Tiananmen] Square—students, intellectuals, former party cadres, even some representatives of workers’ organizations—who were able to escape the official crackdown. (123)

From this, we can look specifically at who the dissidents are, and why there are indications of agapic love. These dissidents were the people who had escaped from the mayhem of China, and they disagreed with the established system. But how do these people differentiate between those who were rioting, protesting and causing chaos? For the rioters, they showed signs of disagreement and an intentional response where risk was involved. They did not however, do this to *directly* promote wellbeing, which can follow more along the lines of benevolent terrorism, rather than agapic dissidence. For the students, intellectuals, former party cadres, and representatives of workers’ organizations, they disagreed with the government, but did not fall into a rage, and they intentionally took the risk of being apprehended by the Peoples Liberation Army. The difference between the rioters and the students mentioned, is that

the students went to a place where it was capable for them to make a direct impact on their situation. One of the persons who came to this country is now part of an executive committee for the Democracy for China Fund, where progressive work has promoted wellbeing. Now, to better understand who agapic dissidents are, it is necessary for us to look at others, who have risked their own lives, for the betterment of others.

The Tiananmen Square uprising is chockfull of cases of rebellion and disagreement with the government, so it is an applicable issue for us to examine, and search for agapic dissidents. As discussed earlier, the Tiananmen Square riots were not signs of agapic dissidence. This is not, however, to say that there were no instances where individuals did in fact perform agapic dissidence. The most notable and well known case is the Tiananmen Tank Man.

A small, unexceptional figure in slacks and white shirt, carrying what looks to be his shopping, posts himself before an approaching tank, with a line of 17 more tanks behind it. The tank swerves right; he, to block it, moves left. The tank swerves left; he moves right. Then this anonymous bystander clambers up onto the vehicle of war and says something to its driver, which comes down to us as: "Why are you here? My city is in chaos because of you." (Iyer, 192)

This man's identity is still unknown, and nothing is known about his fate. What we do know is that this person unselfishly put his life on the line, in order to make direct impact, and stand up for what he believed in. He voluntarily stood in front of machines of war, with nothing but shopping bags in his hands, and love for his countrymen in his heart. The aftermath of this occurrence was wide spread publicity, which brought an onslaught of millions of new people who had taken sides with the Tiananmen Tank Man.

A second case of agapic dissidence is Rosa Parks' social revolution. Rosa Parks is one of the most well-known and well taught cases of dissidence within the United States. Mordechai Gordon and his essay, *Toward a Pedagogy of Dissent*, call Rosa Parks one of the famous dissidents. The reason she is so

famous is because her actions lead to the civil rights act, which gave countless African Americans their rights. So what did Rosa Parks do?

On December 1, 1955, during a typical evening rush hour in Montgomery, Alabama, a 42-year-old woman took a seat on the bus on her way home from the Montgomery Fair department store where she worked as a seamstress. Before she reached her destination, she quietly set off a social revolution when the bus driver instructed her to move back, and she refused. Rosa Parks, an African American, was arrested that day for violating a city law requiring racial segregation of public buses. (archives.gov)

Rosa Parks had deliberately risked her freedom. She knew that there were consequences in refusing to move, but she had chosen to take the risk, because she did not believe in segregation. This single act did not immediately bring upon the Civil Rights Act, but it had motivated others. So we now have a contradiction. In our definition of agapic dissident, we have discovered that there needs to be a direct impact among what the dissident is arguing against. For Rosa Parks, we do not have this. When Rosa Parks was arrested, no one was directly empowered with freedom. What did happen was people began to stand up, and fight for what they believe in. Because of this, it is now appropriate to alter our consensus of an agapic dissident to someone whose acts, empower others to pursue the dissidents' beliefs.

With this now in mind, we can look at Julia Butterfly Hill and discover how her long lived tree-sit had provoked others to bring about a change in environmental stewardship.

Julia Butterfly Hill brought international attention to the plight of the world's last remaining ancient forests when she climbed 180 feet up a 1000-year-old redwood tree and refused to come down. Her historic 738-day protest of the environmental destruction caused by clear-cutting culminated with a negotiated agreement that provided permanent protection for the tree ("Luna") and a nearly three-acre buffer zone. (Awehali, Mar/Apr2005)

The danger in this act is obvious; living 180 feet up in a tree, without being tethered on is a great danger. Another risk and danger was spending nearly two years in a tree. This required great effort of herself

and others to maintain her health. Julia's ability to spend such a significant amount of time with Luna (the tree that she lived in), did bring a direct effect on the cutting of the redwoods. They were capable of creating a three acre buffer, where trees were not allowed to be cut down. This does not however have a great toll on the entirety of the forest. In the grand scheme of things, three acres is not very much. But what were significant were the people that she had attracted to come and help fight deforestation of the redwoods, which would eventually lead to people fighting deforestation worldwide.

Because of our newfound addition to our definition of agapic dissidence, we need to revisit the Tiananmen Tank Man. Although he had made a direct impact on deterring the tanks, there was a greater impact on China. We can look to Iyer to start this line of thinking.

The man who stood before a column of tanks near Tiananmen Square— June 5, 1989—may have impressed his image on the global memory more vividly, more intimately than even Sun Yat-sen did. Almost certainly he was seen in his moment of self-transcendence by more people than ever laid eyes on Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein and James Joyce combined.

From this we see that this man has been viewed by billions of people, and his actions have become ingrained in our minds. We can accompany this to Iyers' statement, "Yet for all the qualifications, the man who stood before the tanks reminded us that the conviction of the young can generate a courage that their elders sometimes lack." From this, we see that because the Tiananmen Tank Man had been viewed by so many people throughout the world, his powerful display of agapic dissidence had given billions of people a courage that had been lost. This newfound courage gave people the ability to rise up, and fight for the freedom of China. We can parallel this with Rosa Parks and Julia Butterfly Hill in that they all brought attention to themselves. This attention brought feelings of pathos, which enables courage, and a mass uprising of what the dissident has been fight for. This now qualifies the idea that agapic dissidence does not lead to direct change, but it leads to others ability to further the dissidents' beliefs.

When Iyer discuss the idea of self-transcendence, he brings about a new wave in the purpose of an agapic dissident. The definition of self-transcendence is an act or condition of going/being beyond ego or egoity, usually as a result of love, service, or undivided attention for another. This relates extremely well to the idea of altruism, which is the devotion to others or to humanity, as opposed to selfishness (Webster Dictionary). For our agapic dissidents, it is clear that their motives are altruistic. Also, their motives have all been centralized to change or create a set of political ordinances, laws, or law makers. Because of this, it is essential that we determine what political altruism is, and how it relates to our agapic dissidents.

Marco Giugni and Florence Passy have compiled a book titled Political Altruism?. In it, they have defined altruism as “social behavior carried out to achieve positive outcomes for another rather than for the self” (qtd. in Passy 6). This is the same concept as stated above. They then use Bar-Tal to define the five characteristics of this human behavior. “Altruistic behavior (a) must benefit to other persons, (b) must be performed voluntarily, (c) must be performed intentionally, (d) the benefit must be the goal by itself, and (e) must be performed without expecting any external reward” (qtd in Passy 6). These characteristics can be given to our agapic dissidents; for the Tiananmen Tank Man, there was no benefit of standing of front of a tank that could easily have run him over, and there was no one telling him what to do, for Rosa Parks, there was no benefit other than expressing her point, and Julia Butterfly Hill was not expecting to get any sponsorship or rewards for her tree sit, she only wished to save the forests. Passy then begins to define Political altruism as something that is “performed collectively” (6). This creates a predicament. How can a single person perform a collective action? The answer lies in the media. As stated earlier, the agapic dissidents that have been presented have all had attention greatly attracted to them. Pico Iyer even stated that the Tiananmen Tank Man had more eyes laid upon him than Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein and James Joyce combined (Iyer). From this, we see that when

an agapic dissident becomes popularized after his/her actions, and the media takes hold, people throughout the world begin to join the cause, and make a collective movement.

Passy restates his assumptions that

Political altruism is a form of behavior based on acts performed by a group or/and on behalf of a group, and not aimed to meet individual interests; it is directed at a political goal of social change or the redefinition of power relations; and individuals involved in this type of social change do not stand to benefit directly from the success deriving from the accomplishment of these goals. (6)

From this we are capable of finalizing our idea of political altruism as a collective behavior. We are able to see that the agapic dissident needs to have a clear motive, one which will not directly benefit him/herself, involves some form of risk, and has altruistic motives, as defined by Bar-Tal. Then, the actions of the dissident are popularized and spread throughout a collective community which then take hold of the motive of the dissident, gain courage, and take action where no individual interests are met, and a political goal of social change or the redefinition of power has occurred. We have now finalized all definitions and concepts of an agapic dissident, and how it leads to political altruism, but we still have one more question to ask. Why are agapic dissidents' motives clear and direct?



The line drawn above is to represent a line of thought, or a process or cognition. At the tail end is where the thought begins. At the head is the outcomes we wish to achieve. Let us use the Tiananmen Tank Man for an example. At the tail end, the Tank Man has just rounded a corner with his shopping bags, and sees the tanks. He decides that he has had enough, and wishes to stop them (the head of our arrow). Because our agapic dissident is alone, there is no one that is capable of talking him out of standing in front of the tanks, or in a sense, curving our arrow, making it harder to accomplish the end goal. This creates a straight line to the end goals.

This metaphor tells us that when people act within a group, their motives are not clear. There are multiple motives, thoughts, and goals, which are bending, curving, lengthening and even changing the direction of the arrow. Thus, individual interests can be met and because of this, groups that act without the original evoker (the agapic dissident), cannot gain true political altruism. Dipak K. Gupta and his article *Understanding Terrorism And Political Violence : The Life Cycle Of Birth, Growth, Transformation, And Demise* verifies this idea of a group without a set motive, struggles reach its end goals. He states that “in the end, a group is just as strong as the commitment of its members to its collective goals” (43).

The original fuel for this paper was to identify what is need for an effective and conceptual change to our political system. There are events that are taking place during this time that are attempting to create a reformation of the political system here within the United States of America, and elsewhere within the world. The Occupy Wall Street 2011 movement is one in particular that has gained lots of press. This movement has had hundreds of thousands of people participate, and there has yet to be a single agapic dissident. There is no face to the Occupy Wall Street movement. No anonymous leader who gives rise to a clear goal. Because of this, political altruism will not be obtained. There may be amendments to the political issues, and there may be new standards set, but an entire reform cannot be completed.

In some respects, the Occupy movement can be seen more as a form of terrorism. Dipak K. Gupta discuss terrorism in his article *Understanding Terrorism And Political Violence : The Life Cycle Of Birth, Growth, Transformation, And Demise*. In it, he determines that a “terrorist without a cause (at least in his own mind) is not a terrorist” (32). Because of this, we see that the Occupy Wall Street is not doing what it wishes it could do. The cause is lacking because the anonymous leader is missing. Further research is needed to fully verify this.

The examples of agapic dissidents that were given, have accurately defined the idea of an agapic dissident. An agapic dissident is a person who disagrees, especially with the government, and puts themselves in harms way in order to benefit others. They contain the capacity to directly enable others to gain courage, and stand up for what the dissident believes. Rosa Parks disagreed with the government, and put herself in harms way, in order to stand up for what she believed. She was arrested, but had also brought attention to herself, which caused a mass of people to feel her desire for civil rights. This behavior of people joining an agapic dissidents cause has been labeled as political altruism, which is defined as a form of behavior in which a group has collective goals—which are determined by the agapic dissident—which are fixated upon amending, manipulating, and even creating political standards. When these goals are completed, they will not directly affect any of the individuals in participation, nor will any individual interests be meet. It should be said that if agapic dissidence does occur, it is not definite that political altruism will occur.

For all of these standards to be attained is in fact a rare occurrence indeed. So many factors must be meet. In Lichensteins example, “the arrival in this country of a number of the leaders in the [Tiananmen] Square—students, intellectuals, former party cadres, even some representatives of workers’ organizations—who were able to escape the official crackdown” (123) these individuals have been deemed agapic dissidents, but this event did not lead to political altruism. This is because there were no cases of public uprising, spawning from these dissidents.

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