

Excerpts from

SCIENCE AND REVOLUTION

On the Importance of Science and the Application of Science to Society, the New Synthesis of Communism and the Leadership of Bob Avakian

An Interview with Ardea Skybreak

A Scientific Approach to Society, and Changing the World

Q: I thought we would start by briefly asking some questions about science and the scientific method. So I actually wanted to start with kind of a provocative question: What does science have to do with understanding and changing the world? And, just quickly for some background on that, I think most people, including most natural scientists, don't think that you can, that you need to, or that you should take a scientific approach to analyzing society, or analyzing the "social world," much less changing it. So I wanted to ask you: Why is that notion wrong, what does science and the scientific method have to do with understanding and changing society and the world?

AS: Well, I think that's a very important question because, as you say, even many people who are scientists in the natural sciences and who apply very rigorous scientific methods when trying to deal with the natural world (biology, astronomy, physics, and so on), when you talk to them about **society**—the problems of society, the way societies are organized—all of a sudden it seems like their grasp of scientific method goes completely out the window! Many natural scientists actually start to revert then to a kind of crass **populism**, to just kind of talking vaguely about the "will of the people," or about elections, or some other things that really have little or nothing to do with analyzing in a scientific way the main features of a given society—how it's set up, how it functions—or with analyzing in a scientific way what's wrong in a society, or how societal problems could be solved in a scientific way. Not everyone is like that, but it's striking—the degree to which many advanced thinkers in the natural sciences seem to forget or drop everything they know about scientific methods whenever they try to think about the problems of society!

I think it's very, very important to understand that science as a method has not been around in the history of humanity for all that long. So people generally are simply not accustomed to trying to understand and transform reality in a scientific way. For most of the history of human beings on this planet, the understanding of both the natural and social world was derived more from a sort of basic trial-and-error approach, trying to figure things out catch-as-catch-can, and trying to solve problems that way—often making up all sorts of mystical and supernatural explanations to fill in the gaps in people's understanding. So, you know, people used to think lightning was the anger of the gods, or something like that, because for

a long time they didn't have a scientific understanding of what actually caused lightning.

So I think it might be worth starting a little bit by talking about **what is science**, to demystify it a little bit. I mean, science deals with material reality, and you could say that all of nature and all of human society is the province of science, science can deal with all that. It's a tool—science—a very powerful tool. **It's a method and approach for being able to tell what's true, what corresponds to reality as it really is.** In that sense, science is very different than religion or mysticism, or things like that, which try to explain reality by invoking imaginary forces and which provide no actual evidence for any of their analyses. By contrast, science requires proof. It requires evidence. It is an evidence-based process. That's very important. **Science is an evidence-based process.** So whether you're just trying to understand something in the world, or trying to figure out how to change reality—for instance, you might be trying to cure a disease, or you might be trying to understand the dynamics of a rain forest or a coral reef ecosystem, or you might be trying to make a revolution to emancipate humanity, you know, the full range of material experience—science allows you to figure out what's really going on and how it can change.

I read somewhere that Neil deGrasse Tyson, in popularizing the importance of science, said something like—I'm paraphrasing here, but he said something like: Science allows you to confront and identify problems, to recognize problems and figure out how to solve them, **rather than run away from them.** And I think that's an important point, too. Science is what allows you to actually deal with material reality the way it really is. Whether you're talking about the material reality of a disease, of a natural ecosystem, or of a social system that human beings live under, science allows you to analyze its components, its history, how it came to be the way it is, what it's made of, what are its defining characteristics and underlying contradictoriness (and we'll come back to that) and therefore also what is the basis for it to change, or to be changed, if your intent is to change it. Whether you want to cure a disease or make a better society, you need that scientific evidence-based process.

One thing about science is that **it asks a lot of questions** about how things came to be the way they are, and about how things have changed over time. I've always been very interested in what's called the historical sciences—for instance, biological evolution, but there are also other historical sciences, including the science of human society—which deal with how things change over time. And then, of course, if you're studying how things change over time, you can study how things can change some more, including in directions that human beings might be inclined to have it go. All of reality has evolved, has changed over time, and it's still changing all of the time, whether you're talking about the natural world or the social world. If you want to change life, if you want to change the way a society is organized, if you want to change the world, if you want to change anything in nature or society, you need a scientific method, because that's the only way to deeply and systematically uncover how reality really is, on the basis of systematic observations and interactions, manipulations, and transformations of reality. That's how you learn how things really are, how they got to be that way, and how they can be changed. Again, it's an evidence-based process, it's not just “what you think” or “what I think.” We need evidence, accumulated over time. This is what

reveals what reality is made up of, how it came to be a certain way, how it may be changing right now, or how it may be possible for human beings to further change it.

Here's an important point: Without science, you can only say what you as an individual think reality is, or maybe you can say what a whole bunch of people think reality is, or maybe you can say what a government, or religious authority, or some other authority might tell you reality is like, but that doesn't make any of it true. **Without science you are at the mercy of being manipulated, of having your thinking manipulated and not being able to tell what's right from what's wrong, what's true from what's false.** If you really want to know what's what, what's true, and what to do, you need science—not fantasies or wishful thinking, but concrete evidence and a systematic process, a systematic method of analysis and synthesis. The analysis breaks down experience and knowledge over time; synthesis brings it back together in a higher way, in a more systematic way, getting the bigger lessons, the core lessons out of the accumulated experience.

So this is one of the reasons why you need scientific revolutionary theory if you really want to change a society at its roots. You know, we talk about radical change in society. Well, the word “radical” comes from the Latin meaning “root”; it means get to the root of the problem. Don't just stay on the surface of what the problem appears to be, on a superficial level or at just one moment in time. Get underneath it, get deeper, the way a good scientist does, to understand what are the deeper rules of the system, what are the deeper ways the contradictions inside a system make it work certain ways that cause problems, or that can bring forth possibilities.

Q: Well, if I could interject just for a second, this strikes me as really important and critical in terms of what is science and what's involved in a scientific approach to reality; what you're saying about the importance of science being evidence-based and the different points you were making about that, I think are very important there. One thing I wanted to interject is to kind of zero in on this question: I think a lot of people would recognize, including a lot of natural scientists—and obviously you, yourself, were trained as a natural scientist, and so maybe you would have some particular insights on this—but a lot of even natural scientists would probably look at what you were saying and respond, OK, I see how that process can be applied to the natural world, to the natural sciences—patterns, looking for evidence, synthesis—but then they would kind of recoil at the idea that you could actually apply that to human beings and human society. Or maybe another way to go at it is that some people would say, Well, OK, but human beings and human societies, that's just too complicated to be scientific about or to apply science. So maybe we could zero in a little bit on what does it mean specifically to take a scientific approach to human beings and human society and their development, and why is that correct?

AS: Well, look, for one thing, in any system, whether it's in the natural world or human society, there's both complexity and simplicity. The idea that human beings or human societies are just too complex to analyze with science is ridiculous. It's the exact opposite. How could you possibly deal with the complexity of human social organizations and

interactions over various historical periods and up to today, and all the contradictions within that, all the complicated patterns and things, and the different forces, and so on, and different objectives of different peoples and different periods of history—how could you deal with all that without science? How could you even begin to make sense of it and understand it? And it's not true that natural systems are somehow simpler, you know. If you want to understand the dynamics of complex ecosystems—like, for instance, a rain forest, which has many different layers of trees and shrubs in the undergrowth and so on, and which is characterized by very complex dynamics in terms of the many different kinds and levels of interactions among and between the incredibly diverse plant and animal species—I mean, you could spend a lifetime, and many people do, just trying to get a beginning understanding of a lot of these complex dynamics. Or, if you wanted to better understand coral reef ecosystems, or desert ecosystems, or the differences between different ecosystems and which ones might be more vulnerable to being disrupted and which ones might be relatively more stable, or assess relative species diversity or how to preserve diversity... so many questions worth exploring further... Look, I'm not trying to get into all that right now because I know you want to talk mainly about human social systems, but what I am saying is that in both the natural and social world, material reality is very complex, and that while we as human beings always have some shortcomings in our understanding (things that at any given time we don't quite get yet) we **also** have tremendous abilities and a lot of accumulated knowledge. Our brains are capable of actually investigating and exploring all sorts of questions, from many different angles, and we're actually capable of summing things up over a period of time, accumulating historical experience and knowledge that way. This is one of the things that's very particular to human beings: our great ability to accumulate understanding over generations, over centuries, over millennia, and to understand some of the patterns of organization of societies or of natural systems or whatever we turn our minds to.

And we humans are also capable of doing some very important projections into the future, not just the future tomorrow, or of a month from now, but also trying to understand what could be happening to this planet, for instance—the entire planet—from an environmental standpoint, looking ahead generations, not just tomorrow. Similarly with social systems, we actually have the ability to analyze different patterns of social organization throughout past human history and up through today, and we can also project ahead to the way things could be in the future. We can therefore also make some conscious decisions about what we want to work on now—in which direction do we want to try to push things, because we do have conscious initiative to do that. So, for instance, when you talk about a human society, about human social organization, you can see that a society is basically a way that human beings come together—work together, or oppose each other or whatever—but come together to essentially work on meeting the requirements of life of people in a given time. It might be done well, or it might be done poorly, but this is what a human society is, it's a form of organization. Right? And, you know, we've all lived in this capitalist-imperialist world for so long, those of us who are alive today, that sometimes it's hard to remember or to think about the fact that human societies haven't always been organized this way, and they don't have to be organized this way. **Capitalism-**

imperialism is not the only way to organize a human society, and I would argue strenuously that it's certainly not the best way. But in any case it's not the only way, and that is worth understanding and thinking about. The fact is we can apply science to try to understand some of those earlier social systems. For instance, many societies in the history of human beings were organized on the basis of slavery, the exploitation of slaves, the domination of slaves who were literally the property of the slavemasters, and the slavemasters made them build the economy that way. And I won't get into all the details of it, but that's a very different kind of society than the ones that mainly prevail today, on a large scale at least. There's still slavery in the world, by the way, including sexual slavery, which is a very big problem. But the fundamental and dominant forms of organization of societies in the world today are mainly not organized on the basis of slavery. But for a long time in the history of human beings, that was a dominant form of social organization.

Another significant form of social organization was the system of **feudalism**, and there are certainly still remnants of feudalism in many parts of the world today, we see it everywhere. But in feudal systems you had lords and masters, you had nobilities, you had aristocracies, and you had oppressed and dominated people like serfs and peasants, who would typically be growing the crops and having to turn much of it over to the lords of a region or whatever, and they had to pay terrible taxes and tributes to the lords, and they were just barely one notch above being outright slaves. It was even very common for a serf to have to turn over his daughter to the local lord of the region, to basically have sex with and do with whatever he will and there was nothing serfs could do about any of that under the existing rules of the feudal system. Feudalism in turn is a very different system than what's called **bourgeois democracy**, the kind of more typical **capitalist-imperialist system** of social organization that dominates the world today. I'm not going to try to get into any of this in detail right now, but I will say that it is worth thinking about the fact that scientific methods can be—and have been—applied to analyzing the patterns of social organization of all those different past social systems; and if we can do it for the past, we can also do it for the future.

Some people will say, well, OK, systems such as slavery, the feudal system, and maybe even the capitalist system, are not good ways to organize society, but what we should really do is just go back to an early communal system. Such people argue that we just need to organize on a small scale in our local areas, so that people can work together in small groups, and make all the decisions together, and can create “genuine democracy” and make collective decisions about how to meet the needs of the people, and promote local agriculture, local production, and so on. The problem with such views is that they are simply not rooted in the actual reality of the world today! Look, I would agree that there's a lot we could still learn from hunter-gatherer societies that prevailed for most of the history of humanity, that there's a lot we could still learn from some remnants of those societies in the world today, and that there's a lot we can learn from people today who have all sorts of ideas about how better to organize things, in a more rational way, on a relatively small and local scale, in terms of such things as agricultural production, waste reduction, promoting use of local products, and so on. So yes, there are things that we can learn from some of the social

experiments that people are doing, trying to figure out how to get away from some of the problems of modern society that cause natural and social dislocations, pollution, the destruction of soils, and so on and so forth. **But let's get real, OK? We need to talk about the scope and scale of the human species spread out throughout this entire planet. Billions and billions of people. You're not gonna resolve the problems of society by going backwards to some kind of idealized, romanticized primitive communalism!** So if that's not going to cut it, if that's not going to be able to meet the key and critical problems of today, and certainly not with sufficient scope and scale, then what? Look, a slave-based system, a feudal system, a capitalist-imperialist system, these are all just material ways of organizing human societies and they can all be analyzed by science and critically evaluated. But you can also apply the same scientific methods to figuring out how to build completely new and different societies that would not only be better, but also be able to **encompass the whole planet**. Because I'm really not interested in talking about philosophies and methods that cannot, ultimately, encompass and benefit **all** of humanity.

One of the things you get from Bob Avakian [BA] which I really appreciate is that he's promoted this concept that we need "emancipators of humanity" and that we need to move in the direction of making this world, this entire planet, a good place to live in and function for all of humanity, where we can get away from the idea that some groups of people, and some categories of people, or some whole countries, are lording it over others, and exploiting and dominating and oppressing others. That's the whole idea of this revolutionary communism, and one of the things you really get from BA is the need to always think and proceed back from the need to emancipate all of humanity. Otherwise, you can easily fall into things that go off track. BA has talked about how **the goal is not for the last to be first and the first to be last**, it can't be about revenge, about the oppressed taking revenge on people. I agree that's not the kind of world we should be striving for. And my point here is that without science you're going to be lost, because without a scientific method to analyze the patterns, to really understand **why** things are the way they are and how they could be different, and **on what basis** could they be different, you're going to go off track all the time.

You know, one of the hallmarks of good science—because there is bad science, too—but one of the hallmarks of good science is really having a critical spirit and promoting critical thinking—which, by the way, is another hallmark of BA's work. He's really stressing the need for everyone to get into this—it doesn't matter what your level of education is... I would like to talk about this. Science is not something that should only be done by an elite, or by people who have gone to graduate school or gotten Ph.D. degrees or something like that. I firmly believe—and I can provide evidence of this—that **people who are not even trained in basic literacy can actually function as scientists**. You know, you can train people in scientific methods, in even just a weekend you can start to do that. If you want to get people doing science in the natural world, you can spend a weekend doing some good science in a rain forest or in a desert, and I guarantee you it will be real scientific work, real

scientific investigation. And I don't care if you don't even have a sixth-grade education. If you are a healthy human being, you can take up and apply scientific methods, whether to the problems of nature or of human society. And one of the things I'm very concerned about is that we promote scientific understanding and scientific methods very, very broadly, **so that everyone can learn to use these methods**, and it's not just the province of a few or a province of the elites.

A Scientific Outlook, A Boundless Curiosity About the World

Q: Well, you just touched on something I wanted to ask you about. Very frequently the way science is portrayed and is viewed—and I think this relates to the point that you were just making about science being portrayed as the province of the elite—it's also often portrayed as cold, boring, lifeless, dry, maybe even some people think of it as being dogmatic or rigid, or something a relatively small number of people are practicing, kind of cut off from the world. And so I wanted you to respond to that view and portrayal of science.

AS: Oh boy, don't get me started! [laughs] I mean, at the risk of sounding ridiculous, some of the most passionate and lively people I've ever known have been scientists, including in the natural sciences. Science itself is not... how can anybody think of it as being dry or lifeless, or whatever, when the whole point of science is to have boundless curiosity about the world, about everything, about the way things came to be. Where did we come from? Where did life on earth come from? How did it come together? Why is this bird building its nest in this way in this tree and what is it doing? And what is this cat doing running across the road? I'm not trying to get into a lot of questions right now, but the point is that a good scientist is constantly asking questions about everything. It's what is often so wonderful about little kids, how little kids want to know everything about everything: **why** is this like this, **why** is this like that, **how** did it come to be that way, what **is** this? And so on. And unfortunately that natural scientific curiosity that pretty much every kid has, often gets kind of sucked out them, beaten out of them—if not physically then just through the stultifying educational system, and through the way this society is, and what it encourages and discourages.

Why do so many people think of science as something scary or dry or lifeless? Frankly, it's for a number of reasons. One, they often haven't been taught correctly in schools what science **is**. Science is sometimes taught as if it's just a bunch of dry precepts or formulas—just a bunch of end-point conclusions people are supposed to remember—but that's not science. Science is a **process**. It is a lively **method of investigation**. Think of science as a way that allows you to ask a whole lot of questions, about everything and anything, and that gives you a method and approach to enable you to systematically and methodically investigate things, to act sort of like a detective out in the world, to deeply investigate natural reality, or social reality. There's nothing lifeless about it! It's all about trying to understand things, including because

of the basic principle that if you want to change anything you'd better first understand it, and not understand it just in a superficial way. You need evidence, accumulated over time, and not just in scattered little bits and pieces. You need to discover **the patterns, including the patterns of how things relate to each other**: if you want to understand the interactions between, say, oak trees and the squirrels that disperse their acorns; or between some of the flowering plants and the bees or butterflies or birds or even monkeys that may act as their pollinators; or between sharks and their prey, just to use a few examples—if you want to understand any of this, you need to uncover the evidence of the underlying patterns and the underlying dynamics and you need science to do this. Life is full of dynamic interactions—not just in that broader natural world, but in the human social world as well. So if you want to change anything, you first really have to understand why things are the way they are, how they came to be that way, and which way they are moving. And if you don't like the way it's going, and it has to do with human society, **then do something about it**, by using human conscious influence to try to change the course or direction of things. That's what gets done whenever scientists come up with a cure for a disease, or figure out something like how a badly damaged river ecosystem might be reinvigorated by periodically releasing water from the dam that caused all the damage.

Well, these are some examples of science applied to the natural world, and I could give you millions of similar examples. Science is all about understanding the nature of things, understanding patterns, **and understanding transformation**—the way things get transformed even on their own, how things move, thanks to their internal dynamics and the effects of outside influences... you see, everything is always moving, material reality is always moving. Whether you're talking on the scale of the cosmos, the planets, the galaxies, or whether you're talking, on a more micro scale, about ants in an anthill or cells in your body or subatomic particles, **everything in material reality is always moving and changing, nothing ever stands still**. And when it comes to social life, human beings should be using the same methods of science to understand how societies got to be the way they are, and to analyze—scientifically—what's wrong with them; to analyze—scientifically—how could they be better; and to determine what would be a strategy for moving in the right direction—again, on a scientific basis.

The New Synthesis of Communism, Solid Core, and Elasticity

Q: Well, we're definitely gonna get more directly into the new synthesis of communism that BA has brought forward that you mentioned, pretty soon. But in terms of the method that BA models in all of his work, including at this Dialogue, one thing that was called to mind for me by what you were just saying is the relationship between the point you're making about constantly going for the truth and another key dimension of this new synthesis of communism, which is the approach of solid core with a lot of elasticity. So, I wondered if you wanted to also talk about how this Dialogue was an example of applying

solid core with a lot of elasticity.

AS: Well, I think this relationship between solid core, and lots of elasticity on the basis of that solid core, is a real hallmark of Bob Avakian's entire body of work, of the whole new synthesis. It is in evidence in everything he does and writes and talks about, and it was in evidence at the Dialogue. I mean, one of the things you can count on with Bob Avakian is that he will tell you what his most developed and advanced analysis and synthesis has brought him to understand. He will share that with the world without hesitation, regardless of how popular or unpopular it is, and he will back it up with evidence. And anybody who wants the proof can look into his works and how he got to certain things, certain conclusions about the nature of the system and the way forward, and so on. But one of the things that he's understood, in the course of studying deeply the experience of the first wave of socialist revolutions, and the positive and negative experiences of the past, is that he's come to appreciate even more deeply the need for a scientific method that you might think of as neither too rigid nor too loose. [laughs]

Good science, you know, does not just go out into the world with a big question mark without any kind of developed theory. In order to advance science, you go out into the world with a framework of certain analyses that have accumulated over time. You make your best possible analysis and synthesis at any given time. And then you go out and test it further against reality. That's what scientists do. And, in the course of that, you discover that some things that you thought were true are in fact very much true—you see some patterns that maybe you expected—and you often also get some surprises, you learn some things you didn't expect, you find out you were wrong in some instances, and you learn from that as well. That enables you to make an even more advanced analysis and synthesis. And you go on from there. That's how good scientific knowledge advances. And Bob Avakian models that in everything he does, in my opinion. That's why I think **there's really no one like him in terms of taking a really consistently good scientific approach to societal issues and the positive transformation of society.**

And what you saw at the time of the Dialogue—you're looking at a guy who's really a **statesman**. People say sometimes, "Well, we need to change things, but there's no leadership." Well, you want leadership?—**there's** leadership. There is leadership that is not hesitating. There is leadership that has the confidence that has been built up on analyses and syntheses of world experience, and the experience of this country, and the experience of the communist movement and revolutionary movements, on the whole human history of experience, which has been studied and analyzed for decades. He's got a lot under his belt that way, and he has no hesitation at sharing with the people what he has learned, in a very coherent way. **That** is leadership, and that is **the solid core** of his leadership.

At the same time, it's very much part of his scientific understanding of things that communism and the transformation of society—this is not a religion, this is not a dogma, this is not catechism, it is not a set of precepts or rules, it's not the Ten Commandments. It's a living science that must always be open to learning from some new directions and new

experience and new information, new data coming in, which can both reinforce and further substantiate what you already understand, and also call some parts of it into question and allow you to develop it even further. It's not a static process. Science is a very dynamic process, correctly understood. So, one of the things that you see is... why is he even bothering to do something like this Dialogue? Why is he speaking to such a diverse audience? It's not like most people there were communists. Most people there were not won over to everything—he's not preaching to the converted. Again, **it's not a religion. He's bringing science to the people**, and he's calling on people to engage it and to bring some of their own experiences to bear and bring new insights into further deepening the truth and further deepening analyses.

But what he's also not doing is making the opposite mistake that people can make. On the one hand, there's **the mistake of dogmatism and a religious approach**—acting like, instead of a science, communism is just a bunch of precepts or a catechism that you should recite and that has that kind of rigidity. No. Real life, real nature, and real human society is much too dynamic to be forced into these dry little precepts and cubicles! **But the opposite mistake people can make epistemologically is to act as if nothing can ever really be known, nothing is ever certain.** Acting like, just because it's right to question everything you can never be sure of anything, that there's never anything you can ever base yourself on to go forward, to learn more—basically arguing for all elasticity all the time, so that there's no longer any solid core to anything at all. It's like what prevails a lot in university circles these days: a tremendous amount of philosophical **relativism**, where people will literally say to you things like: “Well, there's your truth and then there's my truth, we can all have our truths, and you can have your narrative and I can have my narrative, and who's to say what's right or wrong.” In my view, such extreme relativism is not just idiotic, it's unconscionable.

If you never have any scientific certitude about anything, you're going to have a lot of disasters and you're not going to move forward. For instance, in the natural sciences, if you're trying to solve a huge environmental problem, or cure a serious disease, or send a probe into space to explore Mars, or whatever, you'd better be starting off with a certain solid core of scientific certitude, to the best of your ability, even while recognizing that some parts of your understanding and approach may not be perfect. In fact, you can almost always predict that you will be learning some new things that will call some parts of your understanding and approach into question. But you'd better start off with an initial scaffolding or template which involves a certain core of certitude, of scientific certitude, that has been built up over time through the accumulation of historical experience and the subsequent scientific sifting through and “triaging” of that historical experience. This allows you to say, OK, we're going out into the world applying these scientific hypotheses and theories, and we're going to further test them and develop them and no doubt learn many new things along the way. But if you don't set out with some scientific certitude, with some solid core to put out in the world, you won't be able to accomplish anything. If you don't think there's anything you can reliably base yourself on... you might as well be floating in a

vacuum! If you're trying to figure out how to cure cancer or some other terrible disease, you can assume that there will likely be some flaws and shortcomings in your understanding at any given time, but you'd better be willing to apply the best accumulated understanding to date and use this as a basis to further experiment and try to transform reality, and then to further sum up and analyze in order to enable even further advances in solving the problems.

Bob Avakian models that kind of scientific approach. He doesn't tell you everything in the past was perfect. Or that everything in his own understanding was perfect. Or there won't be any mistakes made in the future. He never tells you that. He tells you that we have to learn to apply a scientific method and approach in order to systematically analyze and sort out what is true from what is not true to the best of our ability at any given point in history and in an ongoing way.

And, of course, if you're talking about social transformation, you have to attach your scientific method to a moral conscience. You have to actually be proceeding back from certain objectives. If you're a natural scientist, maybe your objective is to figure out the effects of deforestation of a rain forest, or something like that. If you're a social scientist and you're a revolutionary communist, your objective is to actually move towards a better world, a world that transcends class divisions and accomplishes what's been called the "4 Alls." The "4 Alls" refers to a formulation by Marx where he said that reaching the goal of communism requires the abolition of all class divisions, of all the production relations on which those class divisions rest, of all the social relations that correspond to those production relations, and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that correspond to those social relations. You're moving in that direction of a communist society, and you're understanding some of the contradictions involved today in the process of seizing power, in the process of building a new socialist society on a completely different economic footing and with different objectives and different social relations being fostered and fought for. **You're moving in a certain direction.**

So, today a revolutionary communist should be proceeding back from that longer term goal of bringing into being the kind of society that would be truly emancipatory for the majority of humanity. And that should be what you're continually double-checking: Is the work going in the right direction? Is it moving towards, rather than away from, those stated objectives? The work may go down some wrong paths, and you can hopefully recognize that soon enough and correct course and learn from those mistakes. Any good scientist will tell you that you can even learn a lot from your mistakes and your wrong directions, as long as you consistently apply scientific methods to their analysis and summation. But if you don't apply consistent scientific methods, you are much more likely to get devastated by mistakes and misdirections.

Bob Avakian has said that all truths are good for the proletariat, that everything that is actually true can help us go in the direction of communism. And that's really true. You can learn. And in the Dialogue you can see him actually struggling with the audience to understand that. He knows he's talking to an audience that harbors a lot of misconceptions, a lot of prejudices—it's an audience that is full of intelligent people but and shortcomings in your understanding at any given time, but you'd better be willing to apply the best

accumulated understanding to date and use this as a basis to further experiment and try to transform reality, and then to further sum up and analyze in order to enable even further advances in solving the problems.

Bob Avakian models that kind of scientific approach. He doesn't tell you everything in the past was perfect. Or that everything in his own understanding was perfect. Or there won't be any mistakes made in the future. He never tells you that. He tells you that we have to learn to apply a scientific method and approach in order to systematically analyze and sort out what is true from what is not true to the best of our ability at any given point in history and in an ongoing way.

And, of course, if you're talking about social transformation, you have to attach your scientific method to a moral conscience. You have to actually be proceeding back from certain objectives. If you're a natural scientist, maybe your objective is to figure out the effects of deforestation of a rain forest, or something like that. If you're a social scientist and you're a revolutionary communist, your objective is to actually move towards a better world, a world that transcends class divisions and accomplishes what's been called the "4 Alls." The "4 Alls" refers to a formulation by Marx where he said that reaching the goal of communism requires the abolition of all class divisions, of all the production relations on which those class divisions rest, of all the social relations that correspond to those production relations, and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that correspond to those social relations. You're moving in that direction of a communist society, and you're understanding some of the contradictions involved today in the process of seizing power, in the process of building a new socialist society on a completely different economic footing and with different objectives and different social relations being fostered and fought for. You're moving in a certain direction.

So, today a revolutionary communist should be proceeding back from that longer term goal of bringing into being the kind of society that would be truly emancipatory for the majority of humanity. And that should be what you're continually double-checking: Is the work going in the right direction? Is it moving towards, rather than away from, those stated objectives? The work may go down some wrong paths, and you can hopefully recognize that soon enough and correct course and learn from those mistakes. Any good scientist will tell you that you can even learn a lot from your mistakes and your wrong directions, as long as you consistently apply scientific methods to their analysis and summation. But if you don't apply consistent scientific methods, you are much more likely to get devastated by mistakes and misdirections.

Bob Avakian has said that all truths are good for the proletariat, that everything that is actually true can help us go in the direction of communism. And that's really true. You can learn. And in the Dialogue you can see him actually struggling with the audience to understand that. He knows he's talking to an audience that harbors a lot of misconceptions, a lot of prejudices—it's an audience that is full of intelligent people but people who do not know much of anything about how society is structured and organized, or what it would take to actually remake society on a much more positive basis. There's very little science, there's very little materialism in society today. I don't care how educated people are, most people don't

know anything, frankly, when it comes to understanding society and how to transform it. I don't hesitate to say that. And Bob Avakian is modeling the solid core, in that he's saying, Look, I've been at this for decades, I've been applying scientific methods. There's a lot that I've learned, there's a lot I can share with you about how this system is constructed, about these outrages like police murders and all these other outrages. Why do they happen? Why do they **keep** happening? Why will they continue to happen until we get rid of this system?

He has a lot of solid core material, a lot of scientific certitude that he can bring to bear. And, at the same time, he has these very wide arms, that are open to bringing together people who have a lot of different perspectives and to drawing from broad insights and experience, including, in this case, his very warm and productive rapport with Cornel West, who proceeds from a different philosophical epistemology, but who shares many of the same concerns.

There is much we can learn from these diverse frameworks, but they have to be sorted out and they have to be harnessed and directed. The elasticity shouldn't just be a random mush. It should constantly be brought back together with the solid core to direct it and channel it. A good scientist does try to direct and channel things in positive directions in order to resolve problems. And that is part of what you're seeing—you're seeing it in the course of the Dialogue. There's a great deal of confidence and certitude of the scientist who's done a lot of work, and who knows that his work is very advanced, and who knows that many of his critics have never really engaged the material with any real substance. And, at the same time, he's opening his arms out very widely, both in encouraging critical thinking and in learning from a lot of different experiences in the past and in the present, all for the purpose of leading in a direction that would actually be good for the majority of humanity.

Another thing you could get from the Dialogue, in terms of what Bob Avakian was modeling, was something of a feel for the kind of society he's arguing should be brought into being. I think people are often surprised when they read or in other ways encounter Bob Avakian. People often come with all sorts of societal prejudices, misconceptions and stereotypes, about communists being some kind of dry and humorless dogmatists, but then they encounter Bob Avakian and discover that he is completely different from what they expected. And this is precisely because of the kind of scientific method and approach he takes to the transformation of society and working towards the goal of emancipating all of humanity. He's very lively, and he has a tremendous generosity of spirit. And he's very funny. That's always something you hear people say—I never knew he was so funny! At the same time, he's dead serious, he's absolutely dead serious about what he's about. And his rage, his anger, his outrage at the injustices of society, the depth with which he feels every one of those police murders of Black youth, for instance, he's not putting on a show, this is something that is profoundly felt. Everybody comments on that—that his sense of outrage is very real, his seriousness and determination to do away with all this is very real. And, at the same time, he can combine that hard core seriousness and science with an approach that is lively and generous and full of humor and that embraces life in all its many dimensions. And that, I think, says something about the kind of world that he's arguing to bring into being, and the methods for doing so.

An Explorer, a Critical Thinker, a Follower of BA: Understanding the World, And Changing It For the Better, In the Interests of Humanity

Q: I thought a good note to end on would be: What does BA's leadership and new synthesis of communism have to do with how you understand and approach the world?

AS: [Laughs] People sometimes inquire about what kind of people will work with BA or follow his leadership. And I guess that's part of what your question is trying to get at. Well, I would say, just look around. I think you'll find an impressive and diverse mix of creative people of conscience with many different backgrounds, skills, and personalities. Speaking for myself, I guess I'd say that I'll always be a critical thinker. I just don't know any other way to be! [laughs] I'm sure I'll always be curious about just about everything, both in the natural world and in human society. I am both challenged, and sustained, by the diversity and complexity of the natural world and the social world. I think I am, at heart, an explorer. Exploring the unknown, discovering what has not previously been understood, breaking new ground: in my own view, this is a lot of what makes life worth living.

But I also don't want to *just* understand the world. I want to help *change it*, for the better and in the interests of all of humanity. And that's where BA's new synthesis of communism comes in for me. Because thanks to BA's new synthesis of communism, and especially as it is concentrated in his application of scientific methods and approaches, I feel that I have gained, over the years, a much deeper appreciation, not only of the great complexities of the overall process of revolutionary transformation, but also of the very real *possibilities* for such transformation. How you could actually do it. How you could actually win. How you could actually bring into being a new society that would be worth living in.

If it weren't for the new synthesis of communism, I might have gotten discouraged. In my own work on the woman question, in my work on popularizing the science of evolution, and in many other areas where I have tried to make some contributions, I have repeatedly drawn great insights from the new synthesis epistemologically and methodologically, and I have tried to apply this in my work, to good effect, I think. In all of my life's work, I think it's clear that I am very committed to spreading basic scientific understanding and methods among the people as broadly as possible, helping many, including from the most oppressed and the least formally educated, to actually enter into and participate in the scientific process in their own right. And I am also committed to bringing to bear all my training and life experiences to bringing a more consistently rigorous scientific approach into every nook and cranny of the movement for revolution and to forging the pathways that go towards a new society, a new socialist transition towards communism. And BA's new synthesis of communism, and the whole method and approach that most clearly characterizes and concentrates it, has inspired and provoked and challenged my work in many positive ways over the years, and in many dimensions.

Again, more than anything else, it is **the method and approach** concentrated in the new

synthesis, and in particular its epistemological dimensions: its rigorous pursuit of the patterns that reveal material reality as it really is, regardless of how unexpected and how uncomfortable those discoveries might be; and its scientific grasp that it is always the contradictions that exist within a thing or process that provide the **material basis** for change; and that therefore you will find that the material basis for the radical, revolutionary transformation of society and the world resides primarily **right within the handful of the key underlying contradictions**, the ones that constitute the core underpinnings and defining characteristics of the prevailing system, which today is the system of capitalism-imperialism that currently dominates the world. All this has not only provided the framework within which I feel one can “ask the right questions,” increasingly, but also pursue those questions to their resolution. It has, in a very real sense, provided me personal sustenance and air to breathe. And I feel that it has enabled me to make at least some significant contributions to the overall process of scientific discovery and transformation in various spheres. Not just for my own enlightenment, or because of my own curiosity, although it does assist in this as well [laughs], but also to help advance the process of radical transformation of society that is needed so urgently and by so many. BA’s new synthesis of communism has challenged me in positive ways, and enabled me to make contributions that I would not otherwise have been able to make. And, speaking not only for myself, but for many others who have been inspired in their own work and in their own contributions by BA’s new synthesis, that once again is a sign, an indication, of what I think of as really good scientific leadership.