

Bob Avakian Speaks to "Cult": A Ridiculous, Ignorant, and Irresponsible Accusation

We Are Applying a Scientific Method and Approach to Understanding, and Transforming, the World To Emancipate Humanity

February 14, 2022 | revcom.us

Among some "progressives" and self-proclaimed "leftists," as well as certain academics, students, and others, the accusation is thrown around that I am a "cult leader" and that those who follow and work to apply the leadership I am providing—the new communism I have brought forward—constitute a "cult." This is plainly ridiculous. It is readily refuted by the actual reality of what we are all about. It is also highly irresponsible—all the more so in the extremely intense and continually intensifying situation in today's world, with (as I have put it, in a recent work) the prospect of something terrible—or something truly emancipating: an actual revolution.¹

Any sincere examination of what the new communism is about will make very clear that it is the exact opposite of "cultism": *It is based on, continually emphasizes the importance of, and involves the comprehensive and systematic application of a consistently scientific method and approach to understanding reality and transforming it in an emancipating way.*

Science is an *evidence-based* process. It involves and requires accumulating evidence about different phenomena in nature and society, and then applying rational thought and logical reasoning to identify the patterns and synthesize the lessons from what the evidence acquired in this way reveals. Science does not allow for, and is completely opposed to, any notion of determining what is (supposedly) true on the basis of the mere opinions, wishes, etc., of anyone. One of the necessary components, and essential qualities, of a scientific method and approach is *critical thinking*—which, among other things, means not accepting things on "faith," or simply because they are asserted by someone who is supposed to (or even someone who actually does) possess a great deal of understanding about something, or many things. Once more, science is an *evidence-based* process, and relies on evidence as its basis for determining what is true or not true—what does, or does not, correspond to actual objective reality.

A *cult* is a group of people who uncritically base themselves on dogma which they do not subject to, and which cannot withstand, critical scientific examination. This generally involves blindly following a "leader" who supposedly possesses (or is "blessed" with) "knowledge" and "wisdom," and/or other "special qualities" which "ordinary people" are not capable of attaining.

The accusation that to be a revolutionary, based on the new communism, somehow constitutes being part of a "cult": This flies in the face of the actual reality, and is a despicable insult—not simply, or mainly, against me, as the alleged "cult leader," but beyond that an insult to all those who, at great personal sacrifice, are also taking part in, and making important contributions to, the process of applying, and further developing, the new communism precisely as a scientific method and approach to the struggle for the emancipation of humanity from all systems and relations of exploitation and oppression.

It is true that we revolutionary communists definitely do emphasize the great importance of the work I have done, and am continuing to do, in leading the process of developing and applying the new communism as a framework and guide for human emancipation. But, again, this is based on science, not "cultism." It is based on a scientific evaluation of what is represented by the new communism—the breakthrough this involves, precisely in terms of a scientific method and approach to understanding the world and transforming it in an emancipating way.

Of course, an important part of a scientific orientation and approach is the recognition that everyone—including those who make crucial advances in a particular sphere of human endeavor—will make mistakes. The notion that anyone is immune from making mistakes, or somehow possesses some kind of "supernatural" or "magical" powers, is an extremely harmful anti-scientific absurdity. Learning from one's mistakes is an important part of the scientific method. That is why in a number of works of mine, including my Memoir, I have examined mistakes I have made, as well as mistakes made by previous leaders of the communist movement, and the lessons that should be drawn from this.² This stands in sharp contrast, for example, to an institution like the Catholic Church, which claims that its leader, the Pope, cannot ever be wrong—is "infallible"—in matters of faith and morals.

The Role of Individual Leaders and Their Relation to the Self-Emancipation of the Masses

It is a profound truth, and fundamental principle, that in the final analysis the emancipation of the oppressed and exploited of the world (and ultimately all of humanity) must, and can, come about only as a result of the increasingly conscious struggle of those masses—of millions, and ultimately billions of people throughout the world. But to

do that, those masses need leadership—leadership that is based on the most consistently scientific method and approach. In recognition of and accordance with this, my fundamental orientation and objective, and the orientation and objective of all those who are proceeding on the basis of the new communism, is precisely to enable exponentially growing numbers of people to themselves take up and apply the basic scientific method and approach of the new communism to guide the struggle for emancipation.

In this connection, let's look at what is actually rational, and irrational, thinking. It is a fact that people generally have no difficulty recognizing that, in many different fields, people come along who stand out as “head and shoulders above others”—for example in sports, music and other spheres of culture, or the natural sciences (hence, for example, the popular use of “Einstein” as a reference to someone who stands out in that kind of way). So, if one's thinking is not distorted by prejudice, and instead one is proceeding rationally and logically, why should it be hard to recognize that the same applies to the understanding of human society, its historical development and its radical transformation? Why should it be surprising, or be seen as somehow upsetting or threatening—rather than a very positive thing—if leaders emerge who stand out in this dimension, and specifically in their ability to contribute to the cause of emancipating humanity?

When someone makes important breakthroughs in a particular field of human endeavor, that is something that people broadly should know about. And especially when what is involved is the cause of human emancipation, why should that be any less the case? In fact, it is very important for people not only to know about this but to actively engage it and themselves become part of applying it.

Of course, it is true, and important, that the determination of whether someone constitutes that kind of outstanding figure depends on the content of their body of work and what it represents in regard to human emancipation. In other words, once again it is a matter of *science*—a scientific evaluation of this.

This leads me to another important truth about all this:

This whole “cult” accusation—what does seem to be a concerted effort to paint us/me with the brush of “cult/cult leader”—is spread especially by people who do not share, and in some way feel threatened by, the orientation of emancipating the oppressed of the world, and ultimately humanity as a whole, through a revolution whose goal is to finally abolish all exploitation and oppression, of everyone, everywhere. Judging from the content (or lack of substantive content) of this accusation, it is clear that many, indeed most, of these people have never seriously engaged my body of work (or may not even have read a single work of mine) and are also ignorant of the other important works that can be found at revcom.us. They are obviously not interested in, and apparently are not capable of carrying out, principled engagement about the profound and urgent situation

confronting humanity—and specifically the big question of reform vs. revolution. And so, unable to deal with the substance of what I/we are actually saying and working for, they replace any attempt to do that with the crude slander—accusations of “cult”—relying on and promoting ignorance, intellectual laziness, cowardice and malice.

Previously, I have issued the challenge to liberals and progressives to seriously engage some basic facts and fundamental analysis about the nature of this country and the system that rules in this country and dominates the world—the system of *capitalism-imperialism*—and then see if they are able, or are willing, to offer a defense of this country and this system.³ Here, I repeat that challenge. (See footnote 3 for reference to the article with that challenge.) And specifically to those who have spread, or have accepted as valid, the accusation that I/we are “cultists,” I am issuing a further challenge:

Go to the website revcom.us, read and watch a significant sampling of written works and films on that website, including articles and other works of mine, and then see if you can make a reasoned defense of this accusation of “cultism.” Or, if not, then have the integrity and decency to not only refuse to accept or repeat, but on the contrary actively take on and refute, this accusation and emphasize the importance of people doing what is called for in this challenge—to seriously engage what the new communism is actually about.

And beyond that:

If you find yourself having to honestly acknowledge that what you have engaged on this website revcom.us is in fact a scientific analysis of the nature of this system of capitalism-imperialism... the horrific suffering it causes for masses of human beings throughout the world... the very real and increasing danger it poses to the very existence of humanity... *and* the possibility and urgent need for revolution, guided by the new communism, to overthrow this system and replace it with a radically different and emancipating system—*then become part of this revolution and work, together with others, to increase and strengthen the organized forces for, and actively prepare the ground for, this revolution.*

FOOTNOTES

1. “*SOMETHING TERRIBLE, OR SOMETHING TRULY EMANCIPATING: Profound Crisis, Deepening Divisions, The Looming Possibility Of Civil War—And The Revolution That Is Urgently Needed, A Necessary Foundation, A Basic Roadmap For This Revolution,*” by Bob Avakian, Revolutionary Leader, Author of the New Communism. The audio and the written text of this major work by Bob Avakian are available at revcom.us.
2. *From Ike to Mao and Beyond, My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist, A Memoir by Bob Avakian*, Insight Press, Chicago, 2005.
3. “*In Light of the Urgency Spoken to in ‘Something Terrible, Or Something Truly Emancipating’: A RENEWED CHALLENGE: SEARCHING FOR AN HONEST LIBERAL OR PROGRESSIVE.*” This article by Bob Avakian is also available at revcom.us.