

Ajith – A Portrait of the Residue of the Past

**“Everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat,
all truths can help us get to communism.”**

– Bob Avakian¹

By Ishak Baran and KJA, December 2014*

*Dedicated to the memory of Clyde Young,² who
grappled with many of the same questions that confronted
the authors in writing this article*

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**The “Direct Practice” of Marx and Engels Was Not the Source
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The focus of this polemic is philosophy – particularly epistemology, the branch of philosophy concerned with issues of knowledge, truth, and how we obtain and evaluate knowledge.

It is a topic that might, at first blush, appear abstract, distant, detached from a world of endless imperial wars, Ebola epidemics, global climate change, and the pervasive brutalization and degradation of women. But the philosophical issues being taken up in this polemic, and the larger ideological struggle being waged, matter greatly and urgently. They have everything to do with putting an end to the madness and horror of our times. With the ability of oppressed humanity and all who yearn for a world worthy of our humanity to *understand* the world (yes, that question of epistemology) – precisely in order to *change* it... the question of revolution.

Revolutions did take place in the 20th century. Indeed, the first wave of communist revolution saw hundreds of millions on this planet rise up under visionary, vanguard leadership and overthrow the old order – first in Russia in 1917 and then in China in 1949. A third of humanity was part of a process of building truly emancipatory societies. This was the first and historic break out of the darkness of oppressive class society.³

But this first stage of revolution came to an end when a reactionary coup was carried out in China in 1976 shortly following Mao Tsetung's death. And this defeat came only some twenty years after new capitalist forces had taken power in the Soviet Union.

There is no socialism in the world today. Great changes have taken place in the capitalist world economy, the cities of the global south have mushroomed as people are driven from the land, and the environmental crisis has become a catastrophe. And billions suffer needlessly. Much of oppressed humanity is locked in a deadly dynamic where the only choices appear to be reactionary religious fundamentalism or American-style democracy, all within the framework of the capitalist-imperialist system. Meanwhile, communism has been vilified and slandered, officially adjudged a “failure” by the powers that be, and people are bombarded with the message that there is no alternative.

The question is objectively posed: is there a way out of the madness?

It is against this backdrop that over the last three decades Bob Avakian has been working on a great problem: to sum up the lessons of the first wave of communist revolution, its overwhelmingly positive achievements, but its problems and shortcomings as well, and to forge a way forward. Out of this study, and drawing from broad streams of intellectual, scientific and artistic thought and endeavor, Avakian has brought forward a new synthesis of communism. It takes in philosophy; internationalism; the dictatorship of the proletariat and the exercise of power in socialist society; and strategy.

This new synthesis is the liberatory alternative, the viable vision and strategy, for a radically different and better world – and for unleashing a new stage of communist revolution that can and must reach to a new generation of young activists, to intellectuals, to artists, and to basic masses.

I. SETTING THE STAGE: VANGUARD OF THE FUTURE OR RESIDUE OF THE PAST

The new synthesis has been sharply contended among communists. In May 2012, the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP,USA) issued a Letter to the Parties and Organizations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM)⁴ expressing the RCP's understanding of the content, origins, and history of the two-line struggle that was developing in the international communist movement (ICM). That letter pointed out: "The crisis of RIM and the ICM more generally arose because the understanding on which the movement was based, what we have called Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, is 'dividing into two': its revolutionary, correct, and scientific kernel is both validated and is advancing to new levels while secondary but nonetheless real and damaging errors in politics and theory have been identified and can and need to be struggled against as part of making the leap that is required."⁵

In the two years since the circulation of that letter, the struggle in the international communist movement has further intensified. On the one hand, there are many who, on the basis of engaging with and adopting the new synthesis of communism, are gaining a deeper understanding of the goal of communism, new confidence in the viability of proletarian revolution to achieve it, and a sharper appreciation of what needs to be done – and are thus better able to carry out all-round revolutionary activity. On the other hand, however, there are those who are recoiling in horror at the very advances Avakian has been bringing forward and are trying to drag the movement in an opposite direction, away from its scientific foundation.

In July of 2013 an 80-page article was published in the Indian journal *Naxalbari* entitled, "Against Avakianism."⁶

The author, Ajith, concludes his article by writing: "Avakianism is neither new nor in any way a synthesis. It is that same old revisionism and liquidationism. We must reject its claims and stand firm on Maoism."⁷ In reality, Ajith makes an all-round assault on revolutionary communism, not only as it has been advanced by Avakian's new synthesis but against the fundamental building blocks of Marxism itself. His article is the latest, and until now the most ambitious, effort to give a coherent presentation of the basic positions, worldview, and methodology of the section of the Maoist movement that is rejecting the further advance of communist theory and instead is resurrecting, dusting off, and insisting upon much of the wrong understanding that has dogged the Maoist movement since early on.

In his frenetic attack against Avakian, Ajith throws every element at his disposal into the stew: he presents an unscientific rendering of Marxist political economy;⁸ does his best to falsely attribute his own unbridled nationalism to Mao Tsetung; provides a fantasist history of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement full of purported facts that he knows most of his readers cannot verify; and makes error after error in countless fields. Some comrades have already spoken to some of the most important of these errors,⁹ and no doubt a great deal more could be written to clarify any number of points on which Ajith has pontificated.

Ajith's article is a clear concentration of taking secondary but nonetheless real and damaging errors of the Maoist movement, systematizing them and raising them to the level of overall political line and ideology.¹⁰

The task we have set ourselves in this article is to try to sort out what lies beneath Ajith's frenetic attacks on the new synthesis, because, as Shakespeare put it, there is a method in his madness. If we can sort out the substance of what underlies his method and approach, we can salvage something from an article full of distortion, obfuscation, and calumny, which can then contribute to a better understanding of the ongoing two-line struggle in the international communist movement.

Let's begin by indicating a number of the more central positions that Ajith puts forward in his attack on the approach and methodology for which Avakian has been fighting:

- As a philosophy or ideology, according to Ajith Marxism must not and *cannot* be held to scientific standards (which he denigrates as “scientism”). Relatedly, Ajith opposes the whole different approach in Avakian's work founded on breakthroughs in communist world outlook and epistemology.
- In Ajith's view, Avakian is wrong to say that Marxism does not fail the criterion of “falsifiability”; in other words Avakian seriously errs in asserting that the theoretical statements of Marxism afford the conditions to determine whether they are true or false.
- Ajith believes that “the ‘truth of Marxism’ can stand the closest to objective reality *because* of its class partisanship” [Ajith's emphasis]. Coupled with this, Ajith defends the concept of “class truth,” that truth can be defined not by correspondence to reality but by the class position of those putting forward a given proposition.
- In Ajith's view a special place in the communist movement should be given to individual proletarians and others from oppressed sections of the masses by virtue of their class position. Ajith claims that the RCP eliminates the role of class feelings. Ajith refuses to recognize the problems associated with the reification of the proletariat.
- Ajith holds that Avakian is uncritically adopting the outlook and principles of the 18th century Enlightenment. Avakian is mired in positivism and mechanical reductionism, according to Ajith, and fails to learn from the contributions of others such as the postmodernists and the Frankfurt school.
- Ajith accuses Avakian of theorizing an “ideal proletariat” at the expense of the concrete proletariat in specific national contexts.
- Ajith charges Avakian with denying the fundamental role of practice in developing revolutionary theory.
- Without the notion of “inevitability” (as in the “inevitable victory of communism”) that Avakian has criticized, “nothing is left,” in Ajith's view, “of Marxian historiography.”
- Ajith argues that Avakian is wrong in identifying and criticizing secondary elements tending toward teleology (the idea that there is a purpose or preordained result in nature) in the writings of Marx and Engels as well as other communist writers and leaders.
- Avakian is wrong to focus attention on critiquing (“hammering”) religion. “With scienticism [sic] as a prominent trait it shouldn't be surprising to see Avakianism indulge

in crass rationalism while dealing with religion.”

From the above partial list of Ajith's attacks on Avakian it becomes apparent that the struggle in the international communist movement is not taking place in a sealed-off compartment. Many of these same questions exist (sometimes in somewhat different forms) among others who are involved in struggling against and critiquing contemporary society. This also interpenetrates with broader ideological struggle – for instance, the widespread idea that no real, objective truth exists, and instead there are only competing narratives representing different social interest groups.

Ajith represents a certain “package,” if you will. It is a combination of a religious-like approach to communism, the view that history will inevitably “work out” for us, with pragmatism, the notion that what works and serves particular goals is true. Ajith champions a kind of thinking that is deeply ingrained in the communist movement, which can sometimes serve to temporarily pluck up one’s courage but only by blinding oneself to whatever part of reality makes one feel uncomfortable.

Given this religious-type thinking, it should hardly come as a surprise that Ajith and others like him feel more than simply threatened by the advances that Avakian has brought forward. Whereas any genuine science, definitely including Marxism, is self-interrogating and subject to correction and further development, religion works according to an opposite dynamic: whole spheres are declared in advance to be special reserves where faith alone must reign supreme and the priests must jealously guard the weak points of the belief system lest one puncture in this water-tight system lead to a massive hemorrhage.

Ultimately, what is at stake in the debate over how to understand the world is what type of society we are trying to bring into being. Is it possible to get beyond the point where truth will be determined or imposed by strength (economic, political, military), or will the world never escape the logic that “might makes right”?

At this crossroads in the international communist movement, the question is posed: will communists be a vanguard of the future or a residue of the past?

II. THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION, COMMUNISM AS A SCIENCE, THE MISSION OF THE PROLETARIAT, AND WHY TRUTH IS TRUTH

What is communism? How is it different from other conceptions and programs of change? Why is it the most radical of all revolutions? Let's listen to Marx:

This socialism is the *declaration of the permanence of the revolution*, the *class dictatorship* of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the *abolition of class distinctions generally*, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations.¹¹

This passage, popularly referred to as overcoming the “4 Alls” during China's Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, conveys that the communist revolution is a total revolution. It

aims at uprooting not some oppression and some injustice but *all* oppressive economic, political, and social relations – from the degradation and subordination of women and the brutal inequality and oppression suffered by minority nationalities, to moving beyond a long epoch of human history in which only a small handful work in the realm of ideas and administering society. And the communist revolution is not only about uprooting all systems of production that rest on exploitation and the political and social institutions and relations that go along with and back that up. It is also, and crucially, about transforming all the values, ideas, and ways of thinking that reflect and reinforce exploitation, oppression, and inequality.

Again, this is a total revolution: a revolutionary process that leads to overcoming the division of society into classes itself and bringing about a world community of humanity without exploitation and oppression, where people are ever more consciously changing the world and themselves.

Zhang Chunqiao and other leaders of the Cultural Revolution under the guidance of Mao repeatedly emphasized the centrality of this understanding to the whole process of communist revolution.¹² This is very different from conceptions of socialism as just some kind of welfare state based on state ownership, that “takes care” of people. No, state ownership of the means of production alone does not lead to the elimination of classes and class antagonism absent the larger struggle and process to overcome those “4 Alls.”

Mao rediscovered and gave deeper meaning to the goal of communism, which the communist movement had increasingly lost sight of. Mao's orientation toward the communist goal was central to how he conceived and led the Cultural Revolution in China, which took the whole process of proletarian revolution to new heights – not only by defeating for ten years those leaders in the party and state who wanted to return to the “capitalist road,”¹³ but also by bringing about unprecedented transformation in people's thinking and in relations between people, and the organization of the socialist economy, education, and other spheres.

This tremendous battle in the sphere of politics was deeply interconnected with Mao's development of the whole science of communism, a development that involved a criticism and rupture on Mao's part with important elements in the thinking of the past communist movement that had been particularly associated with the leadership of Joseph Stalin, who overall was a genuine revolutionary leader.

Mao's further development of communism, in particular his theory and the practice of continuing the revolution under socialism, was also closely connected to his monumental struggle against what came to be termed “modern revisionism.” Revisionism is a program and outlook that uses Marxist terminology (“class struggle,” “ruling class,” the “rule of the proletariat,” etc.) to cover over and rationalize a bourgeois-capitalist politics, economics, and mind set. In the mid-1950s in the Soviet Union, a new revisionist bourgeois class came to power after Stalin's death and consolidated a new type of state capitalist system in which a so-called communist party held power but the actual socio-economic system was based on capitalist exploitation. And this has been the situation in China since the death of Mao in 1976, where a new capitalist class rules society but calls itself “communist.”

Over the past forty years, Avakian has carried out the deep work of examining the

experience of the proletarian revolutions of the 20th century and drawing lessons. This has led Avakian not only to *build upon* Mao's insights and *carry forward* Mao's ruptures with incorrect understandings and approaches in the communist movement, but also, in some important domains, to rupture with Mao himself and previous communist leaders. In particular, Avakian has argued that it will not be possible to achieve revolutionary transformations unless, undergirding this process, there is an even more thoroughly scientific method and approach to understanding and changing the world, and a deeper recognition and repudiation of those elements of thinking that actually run counter to the abolition of the "4 Alls."

There have been strong, erroneous tendencies among communists toward seeing the communist revolution as essentially a matter of simply "turning the tables" – the workers will rule instead of the capitalists – with no real understanding that this involves a total revolution to uproot all that is oppressive and achieve a radically different and better world. This wrong understanding often sees things in terms of revenge (the oppressed can "settle accounts") and a simplistic "class against class"¹⁴ view of revolution – just the workers vs the capitalists, as opposed to emancipating all of humanity.

With these wrong views of the *content* of communist revolution has come a metaphysical (semi-religious) conception of the *process* of communist revolution. This is the erroneous idea that the proletariat has a mission whose success is historically inevitable, even emanating from the very laws of nature and history themselves.

These two opposing conceptions of the content and process of communist revolution have coexisted in the communist movement since its beginning. There have also been repeated ideological clashes over these very points from the time of Marx and Engels onward.

Ajith exemplifies those from the Maoist movement who were never able to firmly grasp the breakthroughs Mao was making and still less accept that Mao's insights opened new roads of inquiry and invited further development of communism. Ajith and others enshrine a different Mao, searching out less scientific and less materialist elements in Mao's thinking and ultimately reducing Mao to a radical democrat and revolutionary nationalist.¹⁵ Avakian's further advance of Marxism drives Ajith into a frenzy. Now Ajith wants to use his denatured Mao to attack Avakian and the entire science of communism, which today Avakian's new synthesis has put on a more scientific and emancipatory foundation than ever.

The struggle for communism is, as Avakian has conceptualized on a whole new level, inextricably bound up with the search for the truth and overcoming barriers to getting at the truth in the structure of society and in people's thinking. Avakian has further developed and emphasized Marx's original understanding that proletarians and others must be brought forward and developed to be *emancipators of humanity*.¹⁶

Others, like Ajith, believe that that the proletariat and other sections of the oppressed are bestowed with a special quality coming from their class position and are on a kind of automatic pilot to make revolution. These two opposite understandings of the revolutionary process are very much linked with two opposite outlooks and methodologies: Avakian has been fiercely fighting for understanding Marxism as the science of communist revolution. Ajith sees it much differently: his conception of

revolution has a truncated and utilitarian view of science.

Socialist society will not be the kind of liberating and vibrant transition to communism that it must be – teeming with dissent and ferment and marked by a rich process of transformation, discovery, and experimentation – unless the vanguard party is leading with a correct method and approach, grounded in a thoroughly materialist epistemology, and popularizing that and struggling for it throughout society.

Ajith represents the residue of the past of the communist movement. His is a wrong understanding that is blind to the real challenges, complexities, and pathways of communist revolution in the 21st century. It cannot inspire and organize forces to carry forward a whole new stage of world proletarian revolution. What Ajith represents cannot lead to overcoming the “4 Alls.”

Ajith's Rejection of Communism as a Science

In “Against Avakianism,” Ajith makes a whole series of reckless accusations, distorts history, and puts forward so many wrong political positions that answering them all goes far beyond the scope of this article. Here we are focusing mainly on those points that deal most directly with philosophy and more specifically epistemology, that is, how humans reach an understanding of the truth and how to assess the reliability of that knowledge.

In general terms, it can be said that everywhere Avakian points to a way forward, seeking to untangle the scientific foundation and heart of Marxism from extraneous and erroneous fetters and deepen that foundation, Ajith screams halt and pushes as hard as he can in the opposite direction so as to enshrine and codify a great many wrong, harmful, and non-scientific notions that had been living alongside Marxism. In so doing, Ajith is more and more vociferously opposing the very clarifications and developments, the new synthesis that Avakian has brought forward, that put Marxism on a more scientific and emancipatory foundation.

Central to Ajith's attack on the new synthesis is his rejection of the heightened emphasis Avakian gives to communism as a *science* as well as a political *movement* and *goal*. Ajith argues that, “Avakian confuses the scientific method for natural sciences and drains out the distinctiveness of philosophy and ideology. This is a manifestation of scienticism [sic], a variant of positivism. The one to one equation of natural sciences and social sciences seen in the RCP flows from just such mistaken thinking and in turn bolsters it.”¹⁷

Let's start with the basics. What is science?

Science... aims to learn the causes of phenomena, the reasons *why* things happen and *how* they develop – and it seeks those causes in the material world, which includes human society. A scientific approach does not seek supernatural “explanations” nor does it accept any explanations which cannot be tested, and verified or disproved, in the real material world, but instead develops an initial theory based on evidence from the world, tests out the theory in actual practice and against the results achieved, and through this process arrives at a deepened understanding of what is true. That understanding must then be further applied to reality.¹⁸

Communism is a radical rupture from all religious outlooks and other forms of idealism and metaphysics.

At the very center of the sharp struggle unfolding around the new synthesis is the fundamental question of orientation with regard to whether we are able and willing to face and deal with *real world contradictions* in the struggle for communism. The capacity and freedom to transform reality, to make revolution, is inextricably linked to having a grasp of the material and social conditions, and the necessity that flows from this, that *actually corresponds to reality to the highest degree possible*. The communist vanguard must lead the broad masses of people in the process of hewing a pathway to the future *on the basis of* the real potentials and constraints, not on illusions, wishful thinking, or relying on the “inevitable triumph of communism.”

Ajith's basic argument is that in the RCP's earlier criticism of his writings, the author makes a “mechanical equation of the realms of natural sciences and social sciences.”¹⁹ “The roots of this lie in his failure to properly grasp the qualitative distinction between the natural sciences and social sciences.”²⁰ This basic argument amounts to saying that Marxism is not a science, or at least not in any recognizable form, and is instead a special ideology and a philosophy of history.

Once again we need to clarify a term, in this case “ideology.” In popular usage and even among many self-described Marxists, ideology is often identified with “false” thinking, or “false consciousness,” how people are trained and led to *mis*-understand the world based on ruling class or special-group interests. But this is not a correct depiction of ideology. Yes, ideology is a mode of understanding and acting on the world, how we see ourselves in relation to the world. But not all ideology is intrinsically false. Communist ideology refers to a comprehensive outlook and scientific method and body of theory that can and must be applied to all spheres of life and reality and in the process further developed.

Let's return to Ajith's above-quoted accusation of “scientism” in more detail.

First, Ajith claims, “The one to one equation of natural sciences and social sciences seen in the RCP flows from just such mistaken thinking and in turn bolsters it.”²¹ Ajith misunderstands science and its methodology. He claims to oppose *empiricism* (the view that direct and immediate experience, especially of the senses, is the only source of knowledge) and *positivism*²² (which excludes from science anything that is not directly and immediately observable and denies deeper levels of causality). But in fact Ajith's conception of science *is modeled* on empiricism and positivism.

In other words, Ajith seems to believe that empiricism is correct in the natural sciences, or at least is of no real concern. Then he attributes his own wrong conception of science and scientific methodology to Avakian, who is accused of applying positivism in domains beyond the reach of science. Ajith severs the relationship between science and philosophy. Or to put it in the terms of the Christian Bible: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.”²³

In fact, Ajith is doubly wrong. He is wrong first to concede the natural sciences to wrong methodologies and outlooks such as positivism, empiricism, and pragmatism (that the

meaning or truth of an idea or proposition derives from its direct and observable application and practical consequences). He is wrong again when it comes to society and history, which he believes cannot be approached and grasped with a materialist understanding and a scientific methodology. And, as we shall see later, this *dualism*²⁴ of Ajith (science on the one hand, philosophy and ideology unhinged from science on the other) inescapably infects Ajith's handling of very important issues such as the role of religion in society (which Ajith prettifies) and the relationship between ideas and consciousness, and material reality.

While Ajith hurls adjectives such as positivism and empiricism at Avakian as part of his charge of scientism, to which we will return shortly, neither in his article criticized here nor in any of his other writings with which we are familiar does Ajith display any real concern for the harmful and erroneous methods of empiricism and positivism (in the sciences or philosophy). In fact, not only does Ajith fail to criticize influential schools of empiricism, positivism, and pragmatism, but he also incorporates much of their thinking, conclusions, and methodology which undermine the recognition of the existence of objective truth and people's ability to obtain it. We will examine Ajith's own adoption of empiricist and pragmatist epistemology in the course of this article.

Ajith joins an array of social theorists and philosophers of science like Karl Popper who seek to draw a line of demarcation, in fact a Chinese Wall, whereby scientific rationality and the scientific method is denied its universality; and, more specifically, that the *rigorous rationality and evidence-based methods of the natural sciences do not apply when it comes to studying society and history.*

Historical Materialism: Pivotal Point of Marxism

If one accepts Ajith's (and others') denial of the scope of the applicability of science, then Marx's breakthrough in putting the study of human society on a scientific foundation evaporates. And what is that scientific breakthrough?

Historical materialism shows that the fundamental, underlying reality of human existence is this. In order to survive and continue from one generation to the next, human beings must produce and reproduce the material requirements of life. And for this to happen, people must come together and enter into particular social relations, especially relations to carry out production. Not just relations of production in the abstract or that people arbitrarily choose – but particular relations of production that are determined by the level and character of the productive forces at hand at a given time in human society. (The productive forces are the tools and instruments, land and raw materials, etc., used in production, along with the people themselves with their knowledge and capabilities to utilize these means of production.) On the foundation of this economic base, there arise certain political institutions, laws, customs, and the like, and also certain ways of thinking, culture and so forth.

In class society, the class that dominates the production process has forced the rest of society to labor under its command and in its interests. And the class that any given time dominates economic life in this way has also dominated the rest of society. It controls the organs of political power, most decisively the military forces, and on this basis is able to maintain the broad conditions under which it exploits labor and controls the surplus that is produced – and forcibly keeps the masses of working people in an oppressed state. This

continues until the further development of the productive forces of society runs into fundamental conflict with the relations of production. Then a revolution in the political superstructure of society must occur in order to establish and consolidate new production relations that correspond to the new productive forces – and a new dominant economic class, which can organize society to make the most rational use of the productive forces, comes to rule.

Marx, and we will come back to this, showed the basis, and paved the way, for an entirely new kind of revolution: the communist revolution based on a class, the proletariat, whose emancipation requires the sweeping away of not just one particular form of exploitation but all exploitative and oppressive relations, and the very division of society into classes.

On the basis of Marx's breakthrough, the development and transformation of human society can be scientifically understood. In fact, no part of life can be excluded from scientific inquiry, including, in the words of Ardea Skybreak, “even the role that religious belief, rituals, and practices play and the purposes they serve.” She goes on to say, “doesn't science have anything to say about that? Can't scientific methods be applied to uncovering where such ideas came from, and how they have been given material expression by human beings.... And what about the *history* of how religious beliefs have *changed* over time (what ever happened, for instance, to the ancient Egyptian, Greek, or Roman gods that people used to believe in as firmly as many modern-day people now believe in the God of the Jewish, Christian, or Islamic scriptures)?”²⁵

For Ajith, to affirm the universal role of science and the scientific method in seeking knowledge is to fall into scientism. In fact, science is the evidence-based process of understanding reality as it objectively is, through the discovery of the structure and dynamics (development and motion) of reality that exists independently of the mind or the observer (the knowing subject). This requirement is equally valid in all spheres of human inquiry, both the natural and social sciences. This is a bedrock principle for communists, as Engels emphasized in the very title, as well as the text, of his celebrated introduction to the communist theory of revolution, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.²⁶

Marxism is not some secular messianism, utopian scheming, or a moral injunction. Like any other genuine science, it is self-critical, living, and developing. Through its development and the social transformations undertaken on its basis, revolutionary communism, or Marxism, has gone through stages and leaps to obtain an ever higher level of correspondence with the social reality it is seeking to change.

The Scientific Method in Both the Natural and the Social Sciences

While basic features of the scientific method and approach are common to both the natural and the social sciences, the means of achieving the scientific goal of an ever more true (i.e., correct) comprehension of reality are available through variegated methods, frameworks, and levels of abstraction. These methods and frameworks differ in many important ways from one sphere of investigation to another. The subject matter itself demands and calls forth appropriate measures and methods.

For example, take two basic spheres of the natural sciences: biology and physics. Physics, especially on the macro level sometimes referred to as Newtonian or classical physics, lends itself to a high degree of description of physical motion, direction, speed,

velocity, mass, etc., through formal mathematical language. For example, the equation force = mass times acceleration [$F = (m)(a)$] describes bullets, planets, rockets, etc. It is possible to make highly accurate predictions and test them.

Biology, no less a science than physics, differs in important ways. For example, in Darwin's breakthrough, his theory of evolution, without which nothing makes sense in biology, the conceptual framework of the process of natural selection was not expressed in the formal logic of mathematics. Biologists use mathematics for types of modeling and representation of certain biological processes but, generally speaking, mathematics has not been as crucial to biology as it has been in some other branches of sciences such as physics.²⁷

Couldn't one say, legitimately, that, in a certain sense, there is a qualitative distinction, in their respective conceptual frameworks, premises, tools, testing procedures, etc., between biology and physics? Yes, these distinctions are important and need to be recognized and respected. But it would be folly to argue that biology is less of a science than physics. The method of these and other sciences corresponds to the subject matter itself. It is not exogenous, i.e., it does not come from outside the subject matter.

There are different levels of material reality and these are expressed between different sciences and even within the same discipline. What obtains on one level as the patterns or dynamics of matter cannot be explained simply by those patterns and dynamics of matter that exist on a lower level, even though one level is based on underlying levels.²⁸ In other words, we have to respect the particularity of a given level of inquiry and not seek to reduce all explanation to the smallest composing element at the lowest level. New forms of motion, dynamics, and behavior, different and new laws, emerge at higher levels, which cannot be explained by reducing a phenomenon to motions at a lower level or by relying on the laws governing the smallest element of the system – an approach called *reductionism*.

However, despite the important differences in the different branches of science, there are basic universal demands in every sphere for fact, evidence, and proof; for rigor and rationality; and for objectivity – all as *part of achieving the closest possible correspondence to reality*. In human society as well as in nature, there exist structures and levels of reality that can be observed, identified, and studied objectively. Ajith's misunderstanding of science in general feeds his unwarranted accusation of scientism against the rigorous scientific accounting of social reality emphasized by the new synthesis.

When it comes to the social sciences, such as history, the development of society, economics, etc., there are obviously important distinctions with the natural sciences as a whole and with specific natural sciences in particular. The subject matter is the study of human beings and different aspects of human activity, and the observers, the agents of this study, are also human beings. In class society, human society is divided into classes with antagonistic interests, and this reality creates further complexity and difficulties in obtaining a correct, true knowledge of human society.

Ajith Rejects the Scientific Method in Social Science

All of these particularities lead Ajith to reject the applicability of scientific methodology

to what are generally called the social sciences.

Throughout history, including in the contemporary epoch, many have argued that knowledge of society cannot be truly scientific or, at least, cannot have the same level of scientific rigor and objectivity as in the natural sciences, hence the distinction often made between the hard sciences and the soft sciences. Ajith is firmly in this tradition even if he occasionally gives lip service to the word “science.”

Ajith's efforts to drive a wedge between the natural sciences and social sciences with his charge of scientism contradicts the fact that all of nature and society consists of matter in motion – with dialectics capturing the dynamics of that.²⁹ The truth of this underlies Mao's pithy observation that, “Marxism embraces but does not replace the natural sciences,” a point which has been repeatedly emphasized and deepened by Avakian.³⁰

Furthermore, Ajith's whole effort to partition off the natural sciences and the social sciences (science and society) harbors a tendency to keep Marxism out of the (natural) sciences, to treat these two spheres as completely independent and non-interpenetrating spheres. Once one refuses to recognize that all reality (social, historical, natural) can be understood on a materialist basis using the scientific method and approach, then the door is wide open to all sorts of wrong explanations of existing reality, such as religion and other forms of idealism, etc.

The laws of development studied in human sciences are definitely not identical to those in natural sciences. Ajith's conception of science is stuck in 19th century paradigms, which were heavily marked by *mechanical materialism* (which views nature as working like a machine, with predictable regularity and without contradiction), *determinism* (the conditions that account for something happening are such that nothing else could have happened), and *empiricism*. In fact, in developing the social sciences there were tendencies to emulate *wrong* approaches and methods that marred the natural sciences.

For example, 19th century positivists such as Emile Durkheim and the related school of empiricists such as John Stuart Mill argued that social phenomena could be considered things and studied as objects in the same way that objects are studied in the natural sciences. The positivist view sees science as consisting of and limited to observation, classification, pattern recognition, and the prediction of future events, and argues that this same approach and method must be replicated in the social sciences.

This positivist approach relies only on observable phenomena and denies deeper, underlying structures and dynamics of reality. The positivists only tolerate underlying laws and interconnections as an explanatory (“heuristic”) device, a “useful fiction” for the convenience of investigation. The positivists claimed that in doing this they were taking metaphysics and religion out of science, and only accepting as justifiable that which can be empirically perceived.

To understand the inner, essential dynamics of stars, for example, devices and techniques such as radio telescopes, spectroscopy, and wave length imagery are necessary but not sufficient. One must develop scientific concepts and abstractions that conceptualize their deeper structure and relations whose manifestations are captured by the such instruments. These abstractions, to the extent that they are indeed correct and scientific, actually *do* correspond to *real, objective structures and underlying relations* of material reality.

Science enables us to know with certitude the existence of many phenomena, or the essence of phenomena, which cannot be observed at any particular point, or which are actually counter-intuitive to the five senses like, for example, the real motion of the earth around the sun as opposed to the *apparent* motion of the sun as observed from earth.

To take another example, over the last one hundred years or so the scientific understanding of the atom has gone through a number of conceptualizations, including the revolutionary reconceptualization and recasting or rejection of different models. But as many, if not most, scientists say, in contradiction to the positivist argument, this is not arbitrary or nothing more than a useful model to predict and make coherent, observable results. Through this process our conception has come into a closer correspondence with reality.

Of course, this is not a straight-line process: science can and often has retreated from correct positions, and it has often been only after considerable struggle and the further accumulation of knowledge that certain truths came to be generally accepted or, in some cases, rediscovered. A case in point is how the insight of some thinkers in ancient Greece about the heliocentric (sun at the center) nature of the solar system was lost and indeed suppressed for more than a millennium in large part because of the reactionary role and strength of the Catholic Church. Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in Rome by the Inquisition in 1600 for advocating the Copernican system and suggesting that the sun was but a star and that other stars were also orbited by planets.

Positivism, which is already wrong in the natural sciences, is certainly corrosive and disastrous when applied to the social sciences. To the degree that any criticisms of scientism are valid or useful, it is through criticizing the application of these same, *wrong* methods in social studies. One example of what could correctly be criticized as scientism is trying to explain crime by the genetic makeup of individuals, or the inferior status of women by pseudo-scientific theories of sociobiology or the differences (or alleged differences) in brain structure between men and women.

If science tries to overreach, to extend into domains such as aesthetics and morality, this could also be correctly criticized as scientism. Of course, aesthetics and morality are ultimately rooted in material reality and especially, in our epoch, in the reality of class society; however, these spheres cannot be reduced to or treated as a mechanical manifestation of underlying reality. An example of scientism is to seek to explain human society by extrapolating literally from animal behavior, as some social scientists have argued. Another contemporary example of scientism, or just bad science, can be seen in the work of some evolutionary biologists who make the dubious claim that evolution produced a need in human beings for religiosity.³¹

What may seem surprising to some is that Ajith, the self-appointed slayer of scientism, himself cites this very pseudo-scientific notion in his apology for religion, which we will analyze in its own right later: “The scientific understanding on the role played by religion has since been deepened through studies in diverse fields. Its historical role in the creation and development of morality and social ties and *its imprint in the human brain* are now better known” [emphasis added].³²

Ajith and Karl Popper

In his attack on Marxism as a science, Ajith finds himself in the strange company of Karl Popper, the influential philosopher of science and philosophical-political opponent of Marxism.

Popper argued that any theory that claims to be scientific must be subject to being “falsified,” that is, capable of being shown to be wrong, and that Marxism cannot meet this test and thus its claim to being scientific is bogus.

Avakian has taken this on – showing that Marxism is not only subject to an evidence-based standard of being proven wrong, but also that Marxism's core concepts (such as the fact that all of nature consists of matter in motion, or the understanding that the system of production and its relations is the base of society) have not been falsified, have not been shown to be wrong.³³

While Ajith criticizes Avakian for showing that Marxism can satisfy the criterion of falsifiability, Ajith actually avoids the fundamental problem in Popper's view of scientific theory, which does not seek or claim correspondence between a given theory and the material world. Popper argues that it is not really possible to determine the truth; it's only a matter of one theory that can better withstand criticism replacing another. Popper categorically rejects the concept of truth defined as correspondence to objective reality.

Ajith's real concern is to elevate philosophy and class ideology and standpoint *above* materialist and scientific investigation and knowledge. Here Ajith is in agreement with various intellectual trends which make it their business to oppose and vilify Marxism's claim to be a science. While Ajith criticizes Avakian for defending Marxism against Popper's charge that Marxism is a pseudo-science that does not accept scientific criteria and scrutiny, ultimately Ajith's answer to Popper's charge amounts to pleading guilty, that is, to accepting Popper's charge that Marxism cannot claim to be a science.

III. CLASS POSITION AND COMMUNIST CONSCIOUSNESS

Ajith rushes to condemn “how Avakianism labours to eliminate class from the process of understanding social reality and conflates the natural and social realms.”³⁴

To be fair, Ajith does stumble, in his typical eclectic fashion, on a (partial) truth that “the class it [Marxism] represents, the proletariat, is the only one [among the existing classes] that has a basic interest in comprehending reality to the fullest extent possible.”³⁵ It is no great revelation that if the proletariat is to play a driving role in emancipating all humanity from all class divisions and all related social antagonisms worldwide, then it certainly has a basic – in fact a whole lot more than just a basic – interest in comprehending reality to the fullest extent possible.

That is exactly the point: the proletariat *needs* such an understanding because it does not *have* this understanding genetically or inherently. It is not available to the proletariat simply by virtue of being proletarians. This understanding of reality is not somehow excreted directly from the material conditions. The proletariat is not a kind of graced historical subject endowed with a special historical intuition and cognition, able to grasp

truth merely due to its class position.

This has very much to do with why a vanguard communist party is so necessary to the whole revolutionary process. It is not simply the obvious reality that a revolutionary struggle against a powerful and well-organized enemy complete with a state apparatus, army, etc., requires a high degree of organization to have any chance of success. On a deeper level a vanguard party is necessary exactly because the spontaneous experience of the proletariat does not and cannot lead to communist consciousness, as Lenin stressed so emphatically (we return to this point again from various angles).³⁶

Ajith points to an actual “interest in comprehending reality” but implies that this interest or need alone will necessarily assure that comprehension is acquired, as if the proletariat were destined to acquire that comprehension simply from its class position. Hence the whole historical question of developing and acquiring revolutionary theory and revolutionary communist consciousness does not appear to pose much of a problem for Ajith. The social and political configuration, a simple class placement in society, will, in his view, go a long way – if not all the way – to resolving the historic challenges.

The whole experience of the communist movement has been a long testament to the fact that the theoretical knowledge and ideological and political consciousness required of a movement that aims to achieve the world-historic transition to communism is not so readily available, and certainly not without path-breaking intellectual efforts of momentous significance. Even the very concept of the “class interest of the proletariat” did not come into the purview of the proletariat itself without the theoretical endeavors of intellectuals such as Marx.

“Simple Class Feelings” and Communist Consciousness

Ajith says that “by minimizing the role of 'simple class feelings' the RCP displays a dismissive attitude towards the foundational significance of class position, the material position of the class.”³⁷

Ajith's remark is made in responding to the RCP's 2006 criticism of his emphasis on “class stand.” The RCP article cited Zhang Chunqiao's remark that “theory is the most dynamic factor in ideology.”³⁸ In his pedantic eclecticism, Ajith does not directly criticize Zhang but instead wants to muddle the point by arguing that “Zhang Chunqiao's correct identification of theory being the *most* dynamic factor in ideology is driven by the RCP's logic to a one-sided position that makes it the *sole* dynamic factor.”³⁹ In fact, nothing of the kind is true – there is no such one-sided position. Avakian has frequently spoken to the dialectical relation between the spontaneous sentiments of the masses and communist consciousness.

What Ajith fails to understand is the qualitative difference between spontaneous class sentiments, on the one hand, and a scientific grasp of society and proletarian revolution on the other. This is not simply a matter of spontaneous sentiments being concentrated and rendered more coherent. There is also a qualitative difference in the actual content as well. Proletarians and others who can be won to the communist revolution must acquire science and change themselves through a process of ideological transformation to *become emancipators of humanity*.

Let's examine this more closely.

Everyday experience, the exploitation and degradation of class society, continuously give rise to hatred of exploitation and oppression, a desire to end it, and similar shared feelings. Avakian has always given emphasis to this reality and discusses how it must be incorporated into correct revolutionary strategy and tactics.

In one early article, he discusses the U.S. Black revolutionary and declared communist George Jackson, who wrote, "To the slave, revolution is an imperative, a love-inspired, conscious act of desperation. It's aggressive. It isn't 'cool' or cautious. It's bold, audacious, violent, an expression of icy, disdainful hatred!" Avakian answers this by saying,

Yes, and no. It definitely must have – any real revolution will have – an element of icy disdainful hatred, but it cannot be principally that. It also has to be more than that – and he says this himself, in speaking of how it is 'love inspired.' But beyond that, it has to be guided by and essentially infused with higher objectives than simply revenge. Revolution can't be, in its essential ideological content, "icy disdainful hatred," even though it cannot do without icy disdainful hatred. So that's another unity of opposites.⁴⁰

Avakian has stressed the relationship between theoretical understanding and what he calls the *visceral*. He emphasizes the importance of communists giving expression to a visceral hatred of the reactionary system and all of its abuses. (In the article where Avakian first elaborates the relationship between the visceral and the theoretical, he emphasizes in particular the need for a visceral response to the oppression of women.)

"But the dynamic synergy between the visceral and theoretical, and the correct understanding and handling of this dialectical relation, is very important in regard to the oppression and the liberation of women, as it is in general in the development of the revolutionary struggle toward a whole new world. Just as in other dimensions of this, *it is impossible to conceive of a correct understanding and the waging of the necessary struggle without the element of visceral hatred for the oppression*, and without the correct approach to – the correct scientific assimilation and synthesis of – what is brought forward through the visceral expression of outrage at this oppression."⁴¹ [emphasis added]

Only a correct scientific assimilation and synthesis of a visceral hatred of oppression, class feelings, yearnings, or in general terms, of the perceptual take on reality, can express more deeply the essence of the social reality and enable us to struggle and transform it. In fact, a correct scientific analysis can and does intensify the visceral because it shows that exploitation and oppression is completely unnecessary at this stage of human history.

But without communist theory that can correctly assimilate visceral hatred of oppression, there cannot be a movement capable of uprooting the existing social conditions, and sooner or later visceral hatred of oppression will become disoriented, and can even turn into its opposite (acceptance of the existing order, etc.).

This is why Zhang Chunqiao's point about theory being the most dynamic factor is so important.

The more scientifically and profoundly we understand the material fabric of class society, the more able and confident we will be in calling for and leading the proletariat and the masses to rid humanity of classes. Beneath the apparent simplicity of Avakian's repeated watchword to be "emancipators of humanity" lies a complex, comprehensive, scientific, and profound understanding of contemporary human society and its historical development, the existence of class antagonisms and their material basis and ideological and political reflections, and the possibility and need to transcend class divisions through communist revolution. (Compare the correct, scientific simplicity expressed by "be emancipators of humanity" with George Jackson's non-scientific reflection of the simple class hatred of the proletarians in his expression "the icy disdainful hatred" mentioned above.) This is what Ajith is unable to understand and is reduced to belittling as the "dismissive attitude towards the foundational significance of class position."⁴²

Furthermore, the spontaneous sentiments and ideas of the masses are always contradictory. Assuming that these ideas and sentiments (flowing from, in Ajith's words, "the foundational significance of class position, the material position of the class") tend to predispose towards communist consciousness is wrong and dangerous. All of this underscores the essential points discussed by Lenin in his landmark work *What Is To Be Done?* about the limitations of the consciousness that develops spontaneously among the workers.

The contradictory nature of bourgeois society provides a material basis for workers (and others) to obtain communist consciousness, but also for various forms of bourgeois and other reactionary views – for instance, patriarchal views, national chauvinism, trade-union consciousness, etc. Avakian has stressed the need "to understand more fully and deeply... Lenin's formulation, in talking about the struggles of the masses, where he refers to their 'spontaneous striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie.'"⁴³ Not just *tendency*, but *striving*. This underlies why so much of the discontent and opposition in society, so much of the time, goes in a reformist direction and framework.

The wrong understanding of the relationship between class position and communist consciousness that Ajith is championing has deep roots in the international communist movement, going back to the period of Marx himself. Many have used some of Marx's early texts written while he was still working out his dialectical materialist understanding of history. At that point in his thinking, Marx tended towards the view that it is the spontaneous struggle of the working class itself that produces "communist consciousness on a mass scale."⁴⁴ For example, Marx wrote, "There is no need to explain here that a large part of the English and French proletariat is already conscious of its historic task and is constantly working to develop that consciousness into complete clarity."⁴⁵

These kinds of statements are used to buttress erroneous and unscientific views about how communist consciousness develops and also to pit Marx, especially the early Marx, against Lenin's further development of Marxism, especially as expressed in *What Is To Be Done?* Rosa Luxemburg is a particularly invaluable source for those who make these arguments against Leninism. Ajith is very much in this same tradition.

Ajith's Defense of the Reification of the Proletariat

Ajith writes,

All the members of a Maoist party, regardless of their class origins, have to struggle to acquire a proletarian world outlook. But there is a qualitative difference in this matter between those who come from the working class and others. In the case of the latter, particularly those coming from the ruling classes or middle classes, declassification is decisive. The lessons of the erstwhile socialist countries amply prove that this is not just a matter of learning Marxist theory. The class line of a Maoist party, building it primarily among the basic classes, consciously tries to draw on the strengths given by the class position.⁴⁶

Let's unpack this statement. The passage says that the task of all party members is to acquire a proletarian world outlook. This is true if a "proletarian world outlook" is correctly understood to be a *communist* outlook. But it posits that there is a "qualitative difference" in the situation of party recruits/members from the proletariat and those coming from other classes or strata in "this matter" of gaining proletarian world outlook (communist consciousness). Ajith gets it wrong here. There is a qualitative difference in the objective class position of people from the proletariat and people from other classes. That is, they stand in a different relationship to the means of production and the process of production. Individuals from different classes and strata will differ in the process of developing communist consciousness. But there is no qualitative difference in the *need* for transformation, for developing communist consciousness and an ever increasing grasp of the science of communism.

Bourgeois ideology pervades all of capitalist class society, and shapes and influences the thinking of all social strata, the oppressed and exploited included. It might be the case, for example, that someone from a privileged class background could have held elitist notions and looked down on manual labor and those who labor with their hands. But those on the bottom of society coming into the revolutionary struggle might have feelings of resentment and revenge towards professionals and the highly educated, or, alternately, feelings of inferiority and bowing down to authority and higher educational background. Are male proletarians somehow exempt from male chauvinism and sexism?

The point is that everyone, basic masses no less than those from the middle classes and privileged strata, must make ideological leaps and transformations towards communist consciousness.⁴⁷ But Ajith is suggesting that proletarians have a special purchase on communist consciousness owing to their material-social position; it "comes to them" in a way that it doesn't for others who have to be primarily "declassified."

At the same time, Ajith insists, as we have seen, that Marxism is not a science. But without science people cannot learn about the underlying workings of society, the social configuration of society, the basis and possibility and pathways for communist revolution – nor can they make the necessary ideological leaps and transformations away from bourgeois ideology, "revengism," its "me first" mind set, religious modes of thinking, etc.

So, taken together, Ajith's view of workers having a special capacity to gain socialist consciousness *and* his negation of Marxism as science can only mean that class

consciousness flows more automatically from direct conditions and experience. Of course, Ajith might deny it. But this is the nub of his position. Science is superfluous if material conditions predispose proletarians to class consciousness. And as will become clear through this polemic, the consciousness that Ajith sees as communist is really something other than a communism based on overcoming the “4 Alls.”

This framework of thought leads Ajith to embrace the kind of *reification* of the proletariat that has been a longstanding problem in the communist movement and which Avakian has dissected and criticized.

The phrase “reification of the proletariat” refers to a tendency to think that the whole of the outlook corresponding to the world proletarian revolution necessary for the transition to communism is materialized and embodied in the specific individuals who make up the proletariat – at a given point in time or in a given country. It can mean making proletarians, or let's say “people of color” in a white supremacist society like the United States, as concrete individuals, the ideal embodiments of communism or revolution. In the same way, women as such can be reified as being embodiments of liberatory goals or principles.

Ajith objects, “They [followers of Avakian] imagine up an ‘ideal’ internationalist proletariat and then make that the basis of their analysis.”⁴⁸ But what Ajith caricatures as an “ideal’ proletariat” is, actually, a correct, *scientific abstraction* of the historical significance of the proletariat, of its historical mission. Yes, the proletariat exists as a real, material class and a social base for revolution and its scientific abstraction, in Lenin's words “reflect[s] nature more deeply, truly and *completely*.”⁴⁹

This brings us back to our earlier discussion of Marx's scientific breakthrough that put the understanding of human society on a scientific basis – analogous to what Darwin did in biology in the realm of the natural sciences.

Lenin's Decisive Contribution on Communist Consciousness

Relying on the material conditions of the class will not enable anyone, including the proletarians themselves, to come to a correct understanding of the entire social dynamic, nor to understand their own historical role as emancipators of humanity. Contrary to Ajith's claim, the proletariat does not have some purchase on truth owing to its material conditions. This brings us to one of Lenin's decisive contributions to Marxism.

Lenin argued that proletarian class consciousness could not develop spontaneously or simply out of the contradiction between the proletariat and the capitalist class. He emphasized that proletarian, or communist, consciousness required learning how and why every class and stratum responds to major events and social questions.

Lenin criticized the empiricist approach that considers spontaneous and perceptual understanding to be the most important source of consciousness.

It is often said: the working class spontaneously gravitates towards Socialism. This is perfectly true in the sense that socialist theory defines the causes of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and for that reason the

workers are able to assimilate it so easily, provided, however, *that this theory does not itself yield to spontaneity*, provided it subordinates spontaneity to itself.... The working class spontaneously gravitates towards Socialism, but the more widespread (and continuously revived in the most diverse forms) *bourgeois ideology nevertheless spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class still more* [emphasis added].⁵⁰

The role of the proletariat in production and the objective conditions of life of the oppressed are a basis for the attraction of these masses to communist principles, but as Lenin makes clear in the quote above, bourgeois ideology imposes itself still more; hence his emphasis on the need to bring communist understanding *from outside* the direct experience of the workers. Lenin had to wage a major struggle in order to clarify the responsibilities of the communists in his path-breaking discussion about the role of theory and the attainment of communist consciousness, in which he elaborates a devastating critique of the “worship of spontaneity” and the need to struggle to *divert* the spontaneous path of the workers' struggle.

The Proletariat and the Sweep of History

As a result of the development of the productive forces, of human societal development, a class has emerged, the proletariat, that corresponds to and that is the backbone force for an entirely new kind of revolution in human history: the proletarian-communist revolution.

This class owns nothing but its ability to work. It works in common in networks of production, the vast, technically advanced and increasingly globalized means of production that capitalism has brought forth. It is an international class dispossessed of all ownership of means of production.

The proletariat and this *socialized production* are in fundamental conflict with capitalism's *private appropriation* of socially produced wealth – in the form of private capital, whose inner nature is exploitation and fierce competition on an expanding scale, with devastating consequences for humanity and nature.

The proletariat is the large, strategically placed class in modern society. But even more important, this class represents the potential for socialized relations of production: for a new socialized way of utilizing the productive forces collectively, as the common property of humanity – without exploitation. It is a universal class in that it lacks any particular-parochial interest to defend. It cannot, as a class, free itself without freeing all of humanity and overcoming the very division of society into classes.

Human society, in the development of the productive forces globally, including the accumulated technical and scientific knowledge of humanity, has reached a *historic threshold*. It is now possible for humanity to make an unprecedented leap: beyond material scarcity, beyond exploitation, and beyond the division of society into classes. The proletariat embodies the potential to take humanity to a particular place, to a whole different world. This is what Avakian has ironically referred to as the “god-like position of the proletariat.”⁵¹

And what are communists? In a basic sense, they represent the world-historic resolution of the contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation. They are, to use Marx's phrase, the “political and literary representatives” of this historically unique class, the proletariat: the first class in history that requires a revolution that will sweep away not some but all exploitative and oppressive relations and the political structures and ways of thinking that arise from and reinforce these relations. Communists are the political and literary representatives of this revolution and this revolutionary struggle which embodies the fundamental and highest interests of this class at this stage of human history.

Nationalism or Internationalism?

Ajith insists on seeing the proletariat as proletarians in their “distinct national context” as “they emerge from the particularities internal to their country.”⁵²

It is true that there are particularities in the social-economic conditions of workers in different countries, as well as particular historical-cultural factors, that exert real influence on struggle and consciousness. But there is a more important and determining reality. The fact is, as brought out in the earlier discussion about interconnected, globalized, socialized production, the *proletariat is an international class*, whose fundamental interests lie in a world revolution that aims to create a world community of humanity without classes and social antagonism.

There is this material basis for internationalism – and the point of view of the proletariat is not that of “the nation.” Ajith's emphasis on “distinct national context” is linked with his nationalism and opens the way for a wrong and dangerous tailing of reactionary forces in specific countries. Ajith's approach to the proletariat is an example of empiricism; he remains stuck at the outward manifestation of the phenomenon and fails to arrive at its true essential nature and structure.

These same kind of empiricist, pragmatist blinders are bound up with what is called “economism,” the notion that communists have to base themselves on the “actual” struggles that “the workers” are waging today. For example, this has very often led communists in the advanced capitalist-imperialist countries (and other countries as well!) to adopt national chauvinism because they proceed from the sentiments and immediate interests of the workers in those countries, instead of politically and ideologically leading them. And these kinds of problems of tailing have existed in all types of countries.

Communists, including those from among the proletariat and other oppressed strata, must make a leap in their consciousness, a “radical rupture” in the sphere of ideas, and come to understand their role, not as fighters for a “concrete” (and national) interest group but rather as “emancipators of humanity” from class divisions and antagonism.

Negative Impact of Reification in Previous Socialist Revolutions

Avakian has analyzed how reification of the proletariat has been a problem in the first stage of communist revolution.

In the Soviet Union during the time when it was a genuinely socialist country, there was a belief that the proletarian character of the state and the party would be assured, as Ajith

puts it, by “draw[ing] on the strengths given by the class position.” That if technicians and managerial personnel were chosen and trained from among the ranks of the workers and peasants, the problem of overcoming the world-historic division between intellectual and manual labor bound up with the emergence of class society would be resolved – and the danger of counterrevolution greatly reduced.⁵³ History showed this was not the case.

Along with this wrong conception – that proletarian class background will be a bulwark against revisionism – there was during the Stalin period the notion that once proletarian rule is established and stabilized, the spontaneous thinking of the masses will necessarily favor the continuation of the revolution. This reflects weaknesses in the understanding that socialist society represents a period of transition, marked by intense and complex contradictions – and that workers and peasants are themselves influenced in their thinking and outlook by the residues of capitalism in socialist society. Moreover, the very victory of socialism and the creation of a new socialist system that brings material benefits to the formerly exploited and oppressed can and has, in the history of socialist revolution, had a conservativizing influence on sections of workers. There is a kind of “settling in,” a “let's not rock the boat of the new society” and is bound up with the fact that socialist societies in the past and probably in the future will have to go up against the domination of the world by imperialism.

Mao was grappling with this very problem in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. Not only was a new capitalist class emerging within the leading structures of the Communist Party, but large sections of the masses had grown complacent, “too content” if you will, with the material benefits of socialism. It was one of the reasons that he looked to the radical youth to ignite this “second revolution.”

Yet and still, in China during the period of socialism, there were problems of reification manifested in various ways. In the early stages of the Cultural Revolution undue emphasis was given to the class origins of cadres in the state, the mass organizations, and the party. Some major Red Guard organizations refused membership to youths who came from “bad class origins.”

Related to this was the promotion of a slogan in this period that “the mainstream of the mass movement is always correct,” when, in fact, history all over the world and in socialist China itself is rife with examples where the opposite has been the case. To take one heartbreaking illustration: the “mainstream of the mass movement” that had earlier brought down Mubarak in Egypt ended up supporting the bloody military coup against the Moslem Brotherhood in 2013. The orientation that the “mainstream of the mass movement is always correct” is not correct.

Ajith-like thinking will actually lead away from fully appreciating the path-breaking understandings and revolutionary transformations brought forward by the Cultural Revolution. The “foundational significance of class position, the material position of the class” that he proclaims, will not spontaneously lead to a correct understanding of the essential contradictions and dynamics of the world-historic transition to communism – for example, the contradictions between city and countryside or between mental and manual labor.

It is important to note how the Chinese revisionists used “workerism” and Ajith-like thinking as part of misrepresenting the reactionary coup d'état they carried out shortly

after Mao's death. The coup-makers charged that the genuine revolutionaries, the so-called "gang of four," were "soft, lax and lazy." The revisionist leaders Hua Guo-feng and Deng Xiaoping wanted to take the focus away from the cardinal questions of ideological and political line, the reality of a life-and-death struggle between the capitalist road (which they represented) and the socialist road, and instead issue economist and workerist appeals to the masses.

And the fact is, among considerable sections of the Chinese masses, there was a lot of spontaneous disgruntlement with the difficulties of making socialist revolution, which facilitated the revisionist coup. The spontaneously perceived interest of "the workers" did not make it evident why the revisionist program of "the four modernizations" was in reality a program to restore capitalism.

Most of the erstwhile Maoists forces in the world ended up supporting Hua's revisionist coup or becoming demoralized and demobilized by it. One reason was that important sections of the masses in China seemed to be, and indeed were, tolerating it, if not supporting it outrightly. Millions of Chinese workers and peasants can't be wrong, thought many communists. But yes, they can be wrong, and in this case they were wrong, and this became part of the difficulty facing the millions who *did* want to continue taking the revolution forward.

IV. DOES TRUTH HAVE A CLASS CHARACTER?

Ajith's criticism of Avakian for "eliminating class" not only serves as an excuse for promoting tailist and economist politics and abandoning the role of communists in bringing to the masses an all-round scientific understanding of the nature and goals of the communist revolution: Ajith's errors go way beyond this and reach deeply into the question of how the world is to be understood, his epistemology.

Much of the difference between Avakian's advance of Marxism, and Ajith's rearguard defense and deepening of erroneous tendencies in the history of the communist movement, becomes focused up on the question of whether or not *truth* has a class character.

Since this is a crucial point of debate, and of the discussion that follows, let's clarify what is meant by the incorrect notion that truth has a class character. One aspect of this is the idea that whether something is true or not depends on, or is profoundly conditioned by, the class or social background or political stance of the person (or social grouping) who holds, advances, or argues for particular views. For instance, the fact that a technician has a privileged background, according to the theory of the class character of truth, sets limits to his or her understanding; or if a scientist holds politically reactionary views, this necessarily calls into question the truth of his or her scientific work or findings. Another aspect of this notion that "truth has a class character" is that truth is conditioned by the political-social uses to which ideas are put. For instance, in the Soviet Union under Stalin, there was a prominent view of agriculture and genetics put forward by Lysenko, a scientist of proletarian background, that was actually quite wrong but upheld as true in part because of this scientist's background and because he was a great supporter of the revolution, using his scientific work to help solve real problems of socialist agriculture.⁵⁴

Ajith argues for what is often referred to as “standpoint epistemology” or “perspectivism,” according to which every standpoint or interest group has its own view or knowledge of things, and thus objective truth is “problematized” (as many advocates of this viewpoint put it) and rejected.

Avakian has repeatedly examined and criticized this formulation of “class truth” and its underlying premises. Ajith claims, “Avakian's belabored criticism of 'class truth' reflects a deep flaw in his conception of material reality and the process of comprehending it... Avakian labors to eliminate class from the process of understanding social reality and conflates the natural and social realms.”⁵⁵

Once again Ajith dodges the heart of the issue, which is whether or not to acknowledge that the truth of a proposition in no way depends upon which person or which class puts it forward. Ajith claims, “The ‘truth of Marxism’ can stand the closest to objective reality *because of its class partisanship*. Its quality of being thoroughly scientific, of starting from objective reality and making that reality the test of its understanding, is indissolubly bound up with its partisanship” (emphasis added).⁵⁶ Ajith is weighing in heavily to construct an indissoluble dependency of truth and scientific knowledge on class partisanship.

In his polemic Ajith purports to recognize this problem in the international communist movement. But he sees this as something that has been essentially overcome. While he concedes that “the tendency to envision or explain reality in a fashion suited to one's views or immediate political, organizational needs...” did become “...particularly pronounced during the Comintern period,” this was all put back in order, according to Ajith, since “Mao broke away from this.”⁵⁷

While Stalin did sometimes concentrate erroneous tendencies in the communist movement, it is wrong to separate him from this movement as if he were an aberration. Ajith uses Stalin as both scapegoat and escape valve for avoiding a scientific dissection of the problems of the communist movement. On this question of class truth, Mao's rupture with Stalin was far from complete, yet Ajith wants to hide behind Mao to avoid coming to grips with the errors of the movement on this subject.

“Class Truth” as a Secondary Tendency in the Cultural Revolution

Ajith centers his argument for class truth in a defense of the May 16th Circular that launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) in China. Avakian had criticized a formulation in that Circular. Ajith cites and defends the Circular's statement:

Just when we began the counter-offensive against the wild attacks of the bourgeoisie the authors of the outline raised the slogan: 'everyone is equal before the truth.' This is a bourgeois slogan. Completely negating the *class nature of truth*, they use this slogan to protect the bourgeoisie and oppose the proletariat, oppose Marxism-Leninism, and oppose Mao Tsetung's thought. In the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between the truth of Marxism and the fallacies of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes, either the East wind prevails over the West wind or the West wind prevails over the East wind, and there is absolutely no such thing as equality

(emphasis in the original text).⁵⁸

Our point here is not to review the history of the GPCR and the various ways that bourgeois forces raised slogans such as “everyone is equal before the truth.” Nor does this change our evaluation that the GPCR represents, to date, the most advanced experience of proletarian revolution, which must be upheld, enthusiastically propagated and learned from. But the fact is: the defense of the “class nature of the truth” was wrong. One can only decide if any particular argument, theory, or proposition is true or false by its correspondence with objective reality, not by the class position or worldview of its exponent.⁵⁹

Ajith, in his confusion, wants to skirt the issue by interpreting the use of the word “truth” in the May 16th Circular as referring not to objective reality but “about ideologies, thinking.”⁶⁰ However, truth, by its very definition, is always about both thinking and whether or not thinking corresponds to objective reality; there is no escaping the issue. When thinking corresponds to reality, we call it true. There is a mind-independent objective material reality. Dialectical materialism holds that this reality can be known.

Ever since the thinking mind/conscious human beings evolved, with their distinctive cognitive faculties, there has been an ongoing debate about the validity, accuracy, and reliability of human reflection about reality. This is a dividing-line issue in epistemology and the philosophy of science, referred to as the *correspondence theory of truth*, to which we will return shortly.

The debate over the criteria and definition of truth continues to rage: positivism, pragmatism, empiricism, and other schools opposed to dialectical materialism insist on other definitions of truth or, in some cases, argue that there is no purpose served by even attempting to determine whether we have or can obtain truth (for example, the neo-pragmatists make these arguments).

Consider what is referred to as the *consensus view of truth*. In this wrong view, whatever is consensually accepted functions as truth, and any attempt to define truth more rigorously is impossible, futile, and counterproductive. What Ajith defends as class truth is one version of the consensus theory of truth that is quite similar to how it is expounded by pragmatists and others.⁶¹

Ajith and Class Partisanship

Ajith puts it this way:

Not just the ‘fallacies of the bourgeoisie,’ the ‘truth of Marxism’ too is not objective reality as such. Through an ongoing process of ‘seeking truth from facts’ Marxism can grasp this reality in a qualitatively deeper and more comprehensive manner as compared to the bourgeoisie and other classes. The ‘truth of Marxism’ can stand the closest to objective reality *because* of its class partisanship. Its quality of being thoroughly scientific, of starting from objective reality and making that reality the test of its understanding, is indissolubly bound up with its partisanship. This is so because the class it represents, the proletariat, is the only one that has a basic interest in comprehending reality to the fullest extent

possible. That derives from its being the only class that must take the revolution all the way to the emancipation of all humanity to achieve its own liberation.⁶²

This paragraph consists of several partially correct statements cobbled together with some fundamental epistemological and philosophical errors that wind up constructing an erroneous whole. Again, let's clarify terms, in this case, "partisanship." This refers to one's political and ideological stand: whom do you stand with, the oppressed and exploited, or with the forces perpetuating the oppressive status quo; do you stand with revolution, or against it. Marxism is both true – it corresponds to reality – and partisan, it serves the cause of revolution, the communist (or proletarian) revolution to do away with all exploitation and oppression.

But Ajith reverses the relationship between the scientific truth of Marxism and its class partisanship; he insists on defending the erroneous position that, "Marxism is true because it is partisan." Ajith continues,

The Avakianists [sic] highlight Marx and Engels' application of scientific principles and the scientific method in separation from the class partisanship that guided them. They then confuse the issue by dragging in the matter of 'constructing truth' as opposed to 'discovering' it. We must certainly discover truth, not construct it. However, the point of debate here is the role of class interests, partisanship, in enabling one in this task. Marxism emphatically declares and upholds this relation. The Avakianists deny it.⁶³

Marxism owes its capacity to grasp reality in a qualitatively deeper and more comprehensive manner *not* to partisanship but to its *scientific method*, including confronting reality as it actually is. Contrary to Ajith's claim, Marxism provides the *scientific basis for partisanship* by revealing the objective nature of class exploitation and oppression, its historical specificity and development, and its "unnecessary-ness." This scientific character also helps explain why intellectuals and others from non-proletarian classes can be won to understand the need for and take up the cause of proletarian revolution.

V. AJITH'S DENIGRATION OF THEORY

Perception, experience, alone does not reveal the internal dynamic and laws (inner necessity) governing the underlying causes of social development and tendencies. As Mao put it, "The outward appearance is visible, it stimulates the senses. The essence is invisible and intangible; it is hidden behind the outward appearance. The essence can only be discovered through investigation and study. If you could touch and see the essence there would be no need for science."⁶⁴

But Ajith's method does not enable him to go beyond the level of appearance. Marx was also very clear on this point: "The philistines' and vulgar economists' way of *looking at things* stems from... the fact that it is only the direct *form of manifestation* of relations that is reflected in their brains and not their *inner connection*. Incidentally, if the latter were the case what need would there be of *science*?"⁶⁵

There is a dialectical unity between appearance and essence, but they are not the same thing. Ajith rails against Avakian for concessions to positivism, but it is Ajith who fails to grasp the leap from perceptual to conceptual knowledge and, coupled with this, worships empirically available knowledge (available through class position). In doing this, Ajith is in the company of positivists who have made it their trademark to refuse the distinction between phenomena and essence.

There is a leap, and a rupture, that must take place for a theoretical conceptualization to emerge after experience and perceptual knowledge has been accumulated. This process both invites and requires contributions from broader spheres of human practice and human thought. There is by no means an automatic one-to-one correspondence and, in fact, *invariably there are different, and opposing, conceptualizations* that encompass the same, or much of the same, empirical data, observations, etc.

Ajith also reduces the whole complex process of scientific inquiry and discovery to simply “seeking truth from facts,” a reference to a citation of Mao with which Ajith ends his article. Once again Ajith takes a *secondary tendency* in Mao, removes it from Mao's overall correct orientation, and thus covers up his own empiricism. As we have seen, Mao made other, more correct statements as well, such as this: “[L]ogical knowledge differs from perceptual knowledge in that perceptual knowledge pertains to the separate aspects, the phenomena and the external relations of things, whereas logical knowledge takes a big stride forward to reach the totality, the essence and the internal relations of things and discloses the inner contradictions in the surrounding world.”⁶⁶

Positivists and empiricists like to speak of brute facts, but all facts must be mediated through theory even to establish what the facts are and, more importantly, to explain their interconnection and to reveal their underlying dynamics. Furthermore, the process of discovering, verifying, and establishing the truth is not linear. It is not a case of simply drawing conclusions from a specific set of facts; arriving at truth also includes corroboration and cross-pollination from other spheres of human activity and inquiry. Even verification itself is a complex process and must not be one-sidedly vulgarized to say that the meaning and content of a theory is reducible to the method of its verification, as is put forward by the schools of empiricism and positivism. Sometimes what takes place is the verification not of an immediate theory but of a subordinate or derivative theory one or two generations removed from the original theory. Ajith understands very little of this process.

Empiricists and pragmatists pride themselves for being close to reality in that they argue that empirical observation by the five senses alone is the source of knowledge. For them, only immediate practice in a particular domain can demonstrate the success or failure necessary to corroborate or falsify any specific knowledge claim.

A Narrow View of Practice and Social Reality

Naturally this view of reality and epistemological method necessarily produces an outlook and orientation that narrows down horizons and expectations. As part of this, it leads to a rationale that narrowly conceives and defines what is referred to as “practice.” Whatever, in the words of pragmatists, “ends inquiry” (for the time being) and produces some form of consensus to this end, based upon a perceived success in the immediately

given results in a specific context, is thus defined as *true* (or, as the pragmatists would have it, is taken as a *substitute* in the place of truth).

This kind of empiricist, pragmatist conception of “practice” is not the thoroughgoing materialist engagement of knowing and changing the material world. How should we correctly understand practice in the most universal sense of the word? It means *all* human endeavor, both the interactions with external nature and the interactions of a world human community that have become increasingly integrated with the development of capitalism and particularly imperialism. Even though this world community is riven by class division and antagonism, by the division between nations, especially oppressed and oppressor nations, and by the oppression of half of humanity, women, there is still a “whole” to humanity.

But Ajith turns away from and truncates worldwide social reality in the name of the “complex concreteness of its [the proletariat's] emergence and existence in different countries. The proletariat of any country emerges and takes form through a historical process, a process specific to that country.” In this way Ajith (like so many before him, and in all countries!) is ignoring and denigrating the real scope of human activity and social practice that is the basis of correct theory.

Here we see the philosophical moorings of Ajith's nationalism and his attack on Avakian's understanding of imperialism and world proletarian revolution as “a single world process.”⁶⁷ But that's not all. His epistemological blinders prevent him from having a comprehensive grasp of either the world process as a whole or the complex processes that define any society. Economism, workerism, tailing spontaneity, and a piece-meal approach to revolution and seizing power are all manifestations of this kind of thinking.

Avakian has stressed the importance of viewing the multi-layered nature of social reality, especially in fighting against all sorts of reductionism that would ignore or deny important political, artistic, cultural, and ideological manifestations of social reality.⁶⁸ Only by understanding reality in this way can practice, both direct revolutionary practice and broader social practice in the world and in every specific country, take on its full meaning and stature and serve as a sound basis for developing correct revolutionary theory. It's actually Ajith-like empiricism and pragmatism which, to borrow Ajith's words, “in the real world and for the real tasks of revolution... has disastrous implications.”⁶⁹

The “Direct Practice” of Marx and Engels Was Not the Source of the Development of Marxism

Ajith distorts the way in which Marxism arose and then developed. “Avakianism is quite fond of bringing in the example of the founders of Marxism. It claims that Marx and Engels achieved the synthesis of Marxism from existing theory and not from direct practice. As we noted earlier that is not true. Marx and Engels were quite involved in the class struggles going on in those days, at times even directly.”⁷⁰

The implication that “direct practice” was central to Marx and Engels' theoretical work is a rewriting of history (remember Marx's years at the same desk in the British Museum?). More importantly, Marx and Engels developed their theory in the course of waging *a theoretical struggle* with leading representatives especially in the crucial domains of philosophy, political economy, and scientific socialism. There are always different,

competing abstractions (theories) that arise out of the same social experience (whether from “direct practice” or broader indirect practice, for that matter) and conditions, and there is a *struggle* to determine which abstraction is correct, i.e., which corresponds most closely to reality. What is missing in Ajith's account is the reality of this struggle over ideas.

Marx did achieve a *synthesis*, a recasting of understanding and insights from other thinkers such as Ricardo, Darwin, Hegel, etc., and his keen analysis and observation of political developments and class struggle along with, very secondarily, his own direct experience in building the First International (the first attempt to bring together organizations of different countries that were fighting for the workers and oppressed and for socialism) and so forth. Ajith should target not Avakian but Lenin who, in his famous article “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism,” wrote not a word about Marx's direct experience but stressed the connection between Marx and the 19th-century schools of philosophy, political economy, and socialism.⁷¹ Ajith's counter-description of Marx's work is but a candid admission of his own empiricism and pragmatism.

Ajith says,

Without in the least diminishing the astounding intellectual labor of Marx and Engels, it must be emphasized that they were prompted by this partisanship and not some super heroic propensity for being scientific. They arrived at this through a process of realizing the inability of existing theories to correctly grasp reality and learning from the class struggles going on.⁷²

Actually, this description is ahistorical and makes a metaphysical category of “partisanship.” Marx and Engels developed their partisanship, fundamentally, through discovering that the scientific basis for eliminating class antagonism, exploitation, and oppression passed through the proletarian revolution. There were plenty of utopian well-wishers, some of whom understood the conditions of the masses and sympathized with them no less than Marx and Engels. Some fought heroically and gave their lives in fighting for the Paris Commune in 1871 but did not develop a scientific theory for emancipation, and because of this their understanding (i.e., line, theory) was *not* partisan to the proletariat (hence the description of such forces in the *Communist Manifesto* as advocates of “feudal socialism,” “petty bourgeois socialism,” etc.).⁷³

Yes, Ajith is correct that there is a relationship between partisanship and truth, but this relationship is the inverse of what he argues. *It is the science of Marxism, its correspondence with reality, which ultimately grounds its partisanship.*

Furthermore, Ajith's attribution of the role of partisanship to the proletariat does not solve the problem – in fact, it is tautological, or a circular argument assuming what it is supposed to explain. We should ask Ajith, partisan *to what*? Was Marx partisan to the proletariat or was the reformist Proudhon? Or the utopian Saint Simon? Partisanship to the proletariat is not self-evident. Ajith assumes that recognition of this partisanship does not require “some super heroic propensity for being scientific” (as he slanders Marx and Engels' intellectual endeavors).

Once again we see why Mao stressed that the “correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything.”⁷⁴ Even people who pledge partisanship and allegiance to a class, and even those who sincerely believe this and often make considerable sacrifices, will be confronted with the question of whether their understanding scientifically (accurately) explains reality and what is required to transform it toward communism. This is what will ultimately determine what class any leader or political line actually represents.

Mao spoke to this issue in his own inimitable way:

Marx was also one divided into two. Marx's philosophy was learned from Hegel and Feuerbach, his economics from England's Ricardo and others, and from France he studied utopian socialism. All this was bourgeois. From this, one divided into two and produced Marxism. Let me ask you, when Marx was young did he ever read Marx's work?⁷⁵

Marx played the leading role in developing the science of communism through the interplay of his own theoretical undertakings and the unfolding of a complex conjuncture of class, political, social, and ideological struggles that were taking place in mid-19th century Europe amidst the growth and consolidation of a new mode of production, capitalism, and its political superstructure.⁷⁶ In fact, when Marx and Engels began their political activities their ideology could be characterized as what we now call “bourgeois democratic,” representing a force which at that time in history, in the mid-19th century, was still in the forefront of revolutionary struggle. The commitment of Marx and Engels to a thoroughgoing transformation of society certainly encouraged their theoretical rigor and critique of existing theories; however, in order for them to become Marxists they had to make a radical rupture, in their words, to “settle accounts with our former philosophical conscience.”⁷⁷

Partisanship Must Be Grounded in Science

Supporters of Avakian's new synthesis do not deny the relationship between Marxism's partisanship and its ability to discover scientific truth about society. But again, Ajith has this relationship backwards. The partisanship toward the proletarian revolution must be grounded in a truthful (i.e., scientific) understanding of the reality of class society. The motivation to make revolution can and should encourage and sustain individuals to obtain and persevere in obtaining this indispensable knowledge. At the same time, the more people theoretically understand that the world does not need to remain the way it is, the more they can be motivated to struggle to bring a different world into being.

It should help enable and embolden the practitioners of this science, the communists, to confront reality, including, as Avakian put it, “the truths that make us cringe.”⁷⁸ We can see that partisanship does not suffice. No communist should really want to argue that Stalin was not partisan to the proletarian cause. Yet Stalin nevertheless fell into much wrong thinking. His errors need to be looked for in the spheres of methodology, approach, and scientific conceptualization, in what Mao identified as “Stalin's metaphysics,”⁷⁹ i.e., his philosophy and approach, not in a supposed failing of partisanship.

Indeed, the more we know about the world in all its aspects the better and more

profoundly we will be able to change it. As Avakian put it,

Of course, it has not always been the case that communists have acted in accordance with this fundamental truth – there have been marked tendencies in the history of the communist movement to fall into adopting various forms of 'political truths' – in other words, stating as truths things which are in reality *not* true but which seem convenient at the time (an approach Lenin identified philosophically and criticized as “Truth as an organizing principle” or “organizing experience”). But the fact remains that, as a matter of basic principle, communism as a worldview and method rejects such instrumentalist approaches and recognizes the fundamental epistemological principle that, as I have put it in another discussion: “Everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, all truths can help us get to communism.”⁸⁰

Again: *everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, all truths can help us get to communism.* Now contrast that with the following statement that seems similar but is profoundly at variance with it and profoundly wrong: everything that is good for the proletariat is true. This is “political truth.”

Costly Lessons of “Political Truth”

Unfortunately, a non-scientific so-called partisanship can and far too often has interfered with examining reality correctly. A case in point was the willingness of many communists to not squarely confront the reality of what had happened in Peru in 1991. There a people's war was being waged under Maoist leadership. It had made great gains but then faced an unprecedented challenge with the arrest of its core leadership, including Gonzalo, the chairman of the Communist Party of Peru. While in prison, statements were made and attributed to Gonzalo that called for “peace accords” and a cessation of the armed struggle.

The Communist Party of Peru and many of its supporters declared this a “hoax.” Many communists, Ajith included, accepted this “hoax theory” without evidence – indeed in the face of strong evidence to the contrary.⁸¹ What was considered politically convenient, or what advocates of this view proclaimed as “political truth,” was supposed to trump seeking facts – what some of those now allied with Ajith called “journalistic truth.” To use our formulation from the preceding paragraph: it was considered good for the international proletariat to keep people's hopes up for the victory of the Peruvian revolution, and to misrepresent the actual truth of what investigation and evidence were revealing about Gonzalo's position.

The tragic consequences in Peru of this mode of thinking – the disorientation and real demoralization it caused when it could no longer withstand further evidence that Gonzalo was advocating peace accords and the cessation of the people's war – underscore that revolution would have been better served if truth had guided partisanship instead of the other way around. This also, ironically, shows that empiricists and pragmatists like Ajith who raise “seeking truth from facts” in opposition to the search for the inner connections and the leap to rational knowledge easily wind up discounting those facts they find inconvenient.

Ajith's approach underestimates the challenges that stem from the difficult and complex process of communist revolution and that require advanced communist theory. Instead, he assumes that revolutionary theory and consciousness will become available through an indissoluble link to the class. Ajith's deep-seated conviction about inevitability and the “foundational significance of class position, the material position of the class,” goes directly *against* grasping the need to achieve a comprehensive, scientific understanding of the process of proletarian revolution. The decisive need for struggle and clarification in the realm of ideas, theory, philosophy, arts and sciences, and ultimately for fighting in the superstructure, do not appear to figure much in Ajith's schema of preparing for and making proletarian revolution, that is, for achieving the world-historical advance to communism.

Marxism abhors the idea of manufacturing its own particular brand of truths or axioms. Communists must strive to get to the truth of things, not to *their own* truths of things. Fallacies are fallacies simply because they do not correspond to things they are claimed to depict or reflect in thought, and not simply because they are marshaled for non-proletarian/non-communist political ends.

Likewise, we must squarely confront those “truths that make us cringe” from the history of the communist movement, that is, those practices and approaches in the communist experience that ran counter to the overwhelmingly positive and liberatory thrust of the history of the proletarian revolution to date. Once people accept the concept of class truth, then actually engaging the negative experiences of the proletarian revolution becomes all the more difficult, less apparently necessary, and less likely. Why not just ignore errors, even grievous ones? Or justify them by reference to intentions or to short-term results? Indeed, Ajith-like thinking will reinforce exactly these types of tendencies, which have undeniably existed and caused so much harm in the past and up to the present day.

Facing and grasping reality as it is through scientific knowledge and methodology enables us to understand how to transform the enslaving material and ideological conditions of humanity so as to put an end to and move beyond class divisions, social antagonisms, and all forms of oppression, exploitation, and inequality. The need for communist revolution derives from this reality. The partisanship to the world proletarian revolution is anchored in and is sustained in this scientific understanding of the existing historical and material conditions. It is not a utopian scheme or a transcendental moral injunction, nor a plan for the proletariat and oppressed to take revenge and get their chance to be on top for a change.

VI. SOME POINTS ON PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

Ajith criticizes Avakian for pauperizing philosophy because Avakian insists on the scientific mooring of dialectical materialism. As we will see, Ajith is seeking a philosophy that stands “higher” than science, that is not held accountable to reality and not subject to rigor and rationality.

Ajith argues:

Philosophy is no doubt indissolubly bound up with material reality and the

sciences that unravel it. But empirical sciences are only one of the sources of philosophy. It emerges from all the realms of human existence, including art and culture, and draws sustenance from them. Its roots lie not only in the human-nature interaction but also in those of oneself with one's own material and spiritual existence. The greatness of Marxist philosophy lies in its unbound capacity to comprehend and address this totality in all its dazzling particularities.⁸²

We encourage the reader to ponder the above paragraph in all of its “dazzling particularities.” First, Ajith is presenting a non-dialectical and non-materialist separation between the different realms of human activities. He is again unjustifiably narrowing the scope of science to only the “empirical sciences” and then declaring all other aspects of human existence beyond the purview of scientific quest. A fundamental flaw in Ajith's argument is to restrict science only to unraveling material reality in the “human-nature interaction.” Ajith cannot see that while “other realms of human existence, including art and culture” are indeed sources of philosophy, they are also rooted in and part of material reality correctly understood and must not be walled off into a domain from which science is excluded.

Ajith is raising philosophy above science; he is arguing, in effect, that philosophy has a higher and more comprehensive explanatory power.⁸³ Ajith's view is in sharp contradiction with the correct relationship expressed by Mao (and stressed repeatedly by Avakian) that “Marxism embraces but does not replace” the natural sciences and other distinct intellectual and cultural fields.⁸⁴ Let's look at how Avakian explores this:

Mao (I think it's in *On Practice*) says, dialectical materialism is universal because it is impossible for anyone to escape from its domain in practice. Now I happen to think that's a true statement, and an important one, but anyone who'd say... “That's the end of the discussion” rather than in a certain sense the beginning of more discussion and more work misses the point, in my view.... Just being a dialectical materialist doesn't tell you about Einstein's theory on gravity, or quantum mechanics, or whatever. You still have to go into those spheres and understand them, and there's still a lot that's always going to be there to be learned. I believe the more you're able to apply dialectical materialism, the more thoroughly you'll be able to understand things. Let's say I try to apply dialectical materialism, but I know a hell of a lot less about physics than a lot of physicists who don't believe in and maybe are very strongly opposed to dialectical materialism... It's important not to confuse those two things. That's the point of “embraces but does not replace” as I understand it. It also means to me that, in any field, including the field of philosophy, people who don't apply, and are very much opposed to, dialectical materialism may hit upon important aspects of reality.... that those of us who are communists don't understand at a given time.⁸⁵

To the extent that Ajith accepts a relationship between Marxism and the other sciences at all, he sees it as a *hierarchical one* in which Marxism represents “a higher level of abstraction.” However, “embraces but does not replace” means drawing on and synthesizing knowledge obtained in all fields about the real world *both* in its natural and social components. Marxism cannot dictate to the other sciences as Ajith wants to do

through his emphasizing the so-called inviolability of its fundamental principles (we will return to this point). Marxism can and must absorb what is discovered in other fields, and in so doing Marxism must develop.

The Place of Philosophy in Marxism

Let's step back and trace some of the development of Marxism's understanding of the place of philosophy and its role in the development of human knowledge as science has become far more advanced.

In the process of settling accounts with his earlier understanding that still straddled his Hegelian roots, Marx wrote:

When reality is depicted [i.e., objectively and scientifically explained] philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence. At best its place can only be taken by a summing up of the most general results, abstractions which arise from the observations from the historical development of men.⁸⁶

Engels wrote in *Anti-Duhring* the following along the same vein:

Modern materialism is essentially dialectic, and no longer requires the assistance of that sort of philosophy which, queen-like, pretended to rule the remaining mob of sciences. As soon as each special science is bound to make clear its position in the great totality of things and of our knowledge of things, a special science dealing with this totality is superfluous or unnecessary. That which still survives of all earlier philosophy is the science of thought and its laws – formal logic and dialectics. Everything else is subsumed in the positive science of Nature and history.⁸⁷

Marx and Engels are pointing to the fact that problems previously considered philosophical or theological questions (for example, the origin of the universe, origin of life, development of human consciousness, etc.) were more and more taken up by the natural sciences.

Still, in the above quotations, Marx and Engels were one-sided in their treatment of philosophy. It is wrong to imply that there would be no further role for philosophy in the general quest for knowledge. Philosophy has an indispensable role in the formulation, clarification, and systematization of ideas and concepts. For example, there is a legitimate role and need for a philosophy of mathematics, language, and morality. Historical materialism observes, describes, and analyzes socio-historical phenomena, events, and epochs. It involves both empirical observation of data and their appropriate conceptual framing and theorization and is informed by dialectical materialist philosophy.

Avakian observed that he had “some significant disagreements with this argument by Engels.”⁸⁸

I'd like to divide that into two. On the one hand, I think the essence of what he's [Engels] getting at is that from now on, once we have the dialectical materialist viewpoint and method, it's a matter of seeking out

the connections between things in the real world and not in the fantasies in people's brains. In that sense, I not only agree with it, I think it's important. On the other hand, if by "the end of philosophy" there's an aspect which could be interpreted as, there's no more need to think about philosophy, then I would not agree with that.⁸⁹

However, whatever the mistakes made by Marx and Engels in their assessment of the future role of philosophy, Ajith's error is much more fundamental and harmful. For Ajith, the "greatness of Marxist philosophy"⁹⁰ that he wants to resurrect is precisely the *wrong* role for philosophy that Marx and Engels so sharply denounced. Ajith wants philosophy to rule over the remaining "mob of sciences," as Engels put it, while philosophy itself is carefully sheltered from rigor and rationality. Ajith restores philosophy to the "queen-like" role that Engels derided in the citation above.⁹¹

Ajith criticizes Avakian's statement that

Communism, it could be said, is not *simply* a science, *in the sense that it does involve other elements*, including morality, which are, strictly speaking, *outside of the province of science*. *But all this cannot be divorced from science*; and it all ultimately and fundamentally rests on, as well as needing to be continually regrounded in, what is actually true, as determined by a scientific approach and method, and no other.⁹²

For Ajith,

Astonishingly enough, this is said while claiming to present a correct understanding on the relation between science and philosophy. Apart from "morality," the "other elements" mentioned by Avakian as constituting communist philosophy are "outlook and method." Among them "method" obviously cannot be "strictly kept" outside the province of science. The distinctly philosophical is thereby reduced to "morality and outlook." Thus what is advanced as the defense of scientific methods in philosophy ends up as the pauperization of philosophy.⁹³

Ajith Divorces Philosophy from Science

What Ajith claims as the "pauperization of philosophy" is Avakian's insistence that, ultimately, philosophy "*cannot be divorced from science*." Avakian is emphasizing that our understanding must be fundamentally grounded in an accurate grasp of the material world. Nothing can be divorced from or trump this.

All useful philosophical inquiry and debate addresses, correctly or incorrectly, the same material reality. Certainly philosophical discussion and debate can and does contribute to all-around intellectual quest and human inquiry and to the overall process of synthesizing and theorizing. Philosophy is a legitimate and necessary form of consciousness and inquiry. It is not the same thing as science. However, ultimately the validity of any proposition or theory, including philosophy itself, will be determined by how well it engages with and corresponds to material reality. Indeed, it is generally religion and idealism that most vociferously insist that their worldview not be subjected to the test of correspondence with material reality. It is unfortunate when self-declared Maoists like

Ajith feel it necessary to demand the same exemption.

Is the non-existence of god, for example, only a philosophical question as Ajith's logic would argue and even many agnostics and skeptics concede? No. Philosophers have been arguing about the existence of god for millennia, but ultimately this is a scientific question: science can and does establish the non-existence of god. The problem is that Ajith allows for another, and indeed higher, sphere of knowledge beyond and above science. This is the real crux of his charge of scientism – *Ajith wants to have an ideology that need not be subject to the test of its correspondence with reality*. In this light we must note that it is Ajith who impoverishes the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism by divorcing it from science and the basis for the continual enrichment of this philosophy by drawing from the truths that are continually discovered in both the natural and social sciences, the class struggle and other insights arising from other realms of human endeavor.

As for Avakian's supposed disdain for philosophy, Ajith can only be hoping that his readers are not familiar with Avakian's extensive writings on Marxist philosophy and philosophical issues. For example:

Now, obviously, what I've been talking about here involves the question of religion and “spirituality” (or “soul,” as it is sometimes referred to) and its relation to dialectical materialism, which represents a comprehensively and systematically scientific approach to reality and the motive forces in reality... man (or people) “cannot live by bread alone.” Communism recognizes and embraces this... Communism and its dialectical materialist outlook and method do not leave us with nothing but “cold material laws”... When we talk about the quest for “spirituality,” the first thing we have to say is that this can't be understood or approached in abstraction from, or by ignoring, the social relations in which this is actually situated... Communism will not put an end to – nor somehow involve suppression of – awe and wonder, the imagination, and “the need to be amazed”... as part of – a systematic and comprehensive scientific outlook and method for comprehending and transforming reality. We have to understand that there is a unity there. Yes, it is a unity of opposites.⁹⁴

Contrast the above with the earlier statement of Ajith that philosophy's “roots lie not only in the human-nature interaction but also in those of oneself with one's own material and spiritual existence.” Avakian is obviously not denying the importance or role of the ethical, moral or strictly philosophical, and, on the contrary, is reinvigorating a discussion of these topics. Ajith, however, is demanding that the spiritual elements of human existence be found in a completely different sphere outside of the material structure of society. This is another clear expression on Ajith's part of dualism, the “two substances” discussion in philosophy, spirit and matter, which is both a product and sign of religion and idealism.

For example, in discussing differing non-materialist explanations for sources of meaning, Avakian says: “I find myself once again wanting to say a word for science and materialism. Not to *exclude* the question of meaning, but in order to *address* the question of meaning.”⁹⁵ Later in the same work Avakian points out,

What I mean is people confronting, engaging, learning about, and changing nature, themselves, their interrelations, their interactions, their thinking, by themselves and by their own initiative, without the invention of illusory and imaginary means for attempting to do so... I include in that people giving meaning and purpose to human existence themselves, out of the social conditions that they are enmeshed in and are transforming at any given time...⁹⁶

Ajith sees materialism as a threat to giving due place to “other aspects of human existence.” At best, he wants to let the “empirical sciences” deal with the material conditions of life and nature while reserving for philosophy the “other realms of human existence.” From this stems his fear and denunciation of Avakian's so-called scientism, by which Ajith really means that fundamental questions of ideology should be unmoored from science and materialism.

This discussion brings into bold relief the significance of Avakian's theoretical work insisting upon, upholding, and developing further Mao's philosophical position on the dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness, their interpenetration and the transformation of one into the other. Materialism does not fetter or render irrelevant the role of people's spiritual side, but rather provides the real basis to correctly understand these aspects of humanity and recognize the powerful role that human consciousness can and must play in transforming material and social conditions, including people themselves.

Ajith's Quasi-Religious Approach to the Fundamental Principles of Marxism

In this part of our discussion we will respond to Ajith's false claim that “Avakianists” treat “practice as incidental in the development of ideology.”⁹⁷ This is related to a wrong understanding of truth verification; how it is that theory can and must *run ahead of practice* in order to guide revolutionary work; and in what sense is it correct to speak of universal and fundamental principles of a science, including Marxism.

Yes, theory is indeed tested and ultimately verified in practice, and we will add, repeatedly. But Ajith once again misconceives this process – here we will look at one aspect of his misunderstanding. According to Ajith, “new ideas and practices” in the communist movement will emerge but they will “need verification over a longer period” before they can, in his words, be “elevate[d] to the level of ideology.”⁹⁸

As we saw earlier, by “ideology” Ajith means a special category of truths, of “higher abstractions,” that are higher than science. Here we see him explain that, once established, these propositions become a kind of article of faith which must no longer be questioned.

Here we want to return to the previously cited 2007 RCP critique of an article by Ajith in which he wrote, “Though new advances in Marxism arise from concrete application and verification through practice in a particular country they contain universality precisely because they are guided by the fundamentals.” The RCP pointed out in reply that, “He [Ajith] does not argue they [new truths] are universal because they are universally true, but rather because they correspond to, or were based upon, the 'fundamentals' of

Marxism. Gone is the objective criteria of truth, that it corresponds to material reality, and in flies another opposite criteria where the truth of some idea or theory (its 'universality') is determined by its consistency with the premises on which it was based.”⁹⁹

Ajith puts it this way:

The line of a Maoist party in a country is developed by creatively applying the universality of MLM in the concrete conditions obtaining there. That universality already corresponds, in an overall sense, to the material reality existing there. This is so because the experiences of particular applications from which it was derived (to a great extent) have given lessons already validated by objective reality.... A creative application of MLM already contains universality precisely because of this guidance. Its verification through practice in a particular material reality, the concrete conditions of a country, in turn enriches the universality of Marxism.¹⁰⁰

There is a deep error in how Ajith sees the relationship between “perceptual knowledge” and theory and, in particular, the relationship between the advance of Marxism overall and the experience of its application in a given country. One expression of Ajith's narrow, empiricist, and nationalist view of this is his failure to give any substantial attention to the lessons of the revolutions in the Soviet Union and China. That experience, and based on it, the “perceptual knowledge” as well as the developed theoretical summations of the socialist revolutions of the 20th century are many times vaster, richer, and more profound than the important but unfortunately all-too-limited experience of communists in making revolution in the period since Mao's death. According to Ajith, almost forty years after the death of Mao, the international communist movement must understand that it remains in a process of “Quantitative development in the context of ideological development [which] can only be understood as the accumulation of ‘perceptual knowledge’ in the course of the revolution.”¹⁰¹

It is just not true, as some comrades have believed, that first there has to be further successful seizures of political power by the proletariat, followed by an extended period of socialist construction and socialist revolution, and only *then*, after (in Ajith's words) “verification over a longer period” might it be possible to have a further leap in communist theory.

On the contrary, the extremely deep and rich experience of proletarian revolution in the 20th century is the principal source from which Avakian has been able to develop more correct theory (though certainly not the only – Avakian has drawn from other experience of revolutionary struggle, developments in society, the arts and sciences) on the nature of the socialist transition to communism and revolutionary struggle more generally.

While all scientific law is subject to verification in practice, such verification is not necessarily “one to one” and immediate. Scientific understanding also advances when an explanation is found for already observed phenomena, and not only phenomena that are yet to be observed, and indeed the struggle over what theory best explains a set of already observed phenomena plays an important role, generally running ahead of its ultimate verification in practice. Here again is the importance of examining the different understandings of communist revolution in light of the history of the revolutions that

have actually taken place and what we know about the previously existing socialist societies.

Furthermore, when an advance in understanding does take place, its truth is not necessarily confirmed by immediate verification, or over any particular period of time. Lenin's advances in the understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat as concentrated in his crucial work *The State and Revolution* were developed prior to the October Revolution; indeed, it was important theoretical scaffolding without which the October Revolution would not have taken place.

Fortunately, Lenin's theory was rapidly tested and verified, but his theory would have been *no less true* if the October Revolution had failed, which it could well have done, for reasons not resulting from errors in his theory. The contrary is also true: Stalin's achievements in building socialism were intertwined with a series of significant theoretical errors as well as important errors in politics. Using Ajith-type logic, it was generally accepted by most communists of the period that Stalin's theories had achieved “verification over a longer period of time,” and, for most of the international communist movement, they were thus “elevate[d] to ideology.”

Ajith's essentially narrow empiricist “verification” ultimately means that “whatever works is true” and will in fact lead to a “might makes right” conception of the truth.

In “Against Avakianism” Ajith acknowledges limits in how he was approaching what he called the distinction between “fundamentals and models.” But he wants to hang on to a special category of higher truths:

I attempted a definition by suggesting that such principles [of Marxism] should be distinguished from the models thrown up by their application. This approach is of use in some contexts. Let's take an important issue currently under debate, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Its vital necessity during the period of transition from capitalism to communism is an inviolable basic principle of Marxism. Now, the specific way this was implemented in the Soviet Union was at one point considered as THE application and sanctified as a fundamental. Yet, its errors were later criticized and Mao developed a qualitatively different application. The “fundamentals/models” distinction can be of assistance to understand this. But, even then, it is of limited value. The examples listed out by the RCP of principles that were considered fundamental at one point and later abandoned as mistaken or outmoded certainly shows this. Yet, it remains a fact that a satisfactory resolution of what constitutes the essential fundamental principles of Marxism still remains unfulfilled. Its stand, viewpoint and method no doubt lie at the core. But that is not all. Ideological positions too are part of it.¹⁰²

Sometimes Ajith uses the term principles, and at other times universal truth, but it is clear from the context that for him these mean the same thing. The particular problem he has set for himself is looking for a formula that will enable him to define a set of principles and universal truths that must be inviolate, that will no longer be subject to dividing into two, as Mao has stressed.

Absolute and Relative Truth and the Advance of Knowledge

How we understand the relationship between absolute truth (denoting the whole of the possible knowledge of material reality) and the relative and approximate nature of our actual, existing knowledge of reality, is a basic principle of dialectical materialism. This point has been developed at length by Engels in *Anti-Duhring* and by Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.¹⁰³ Avakian put it this way: “Communism has made a breakthrough, in understanding the world – a breakthrough with dialectical materialism. But that doesn't mean that we understand everything about dialectical materialism at any given time – or that we ever will – and, as a deeper reflection, it doesn't mean that we understand everything about reality and the universe, or ever will.”¹⁰⁴

Let's return to Ajith's example above about the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is a scientifically grounded and universally valid concept of Marxism. But our current understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat is *not* itself an absolute truth that defies change and that can only differ in its application, as Ajith is arguing in the above citation.

The theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat is not a Platonic, ideal, pure conception that was waiting to be discovered – it is a *scientific abstraction* first made by Marx and Engels on the basis of summing up a great deal about historical development, the revolutionary process, and so forth. There was also much that was incomplete and even elements that were erroneous in Marx's initial formulation of the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Similarly, we have seen that the understanding of Lenin, Mao, and Avakian of the dictatorship of the proletariat has evolved in stages, and significant aspects of the previous understanding have been seen to be incomplete or partially wrong, while the conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat has become enriched. The words dictatorship of the proletariat can and have been used to reflect quite different and opposing political programs and worldviews.

The counter-revolutionary coup in China in 1976 after the death of Mao, for example, was carried out under the signboard of protecting the dictatorship of the proletariat against Mao's followers. So it was clearly not enough to accept the universal principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat as an “ideological position,” as Ajith argues, and merely debate its application; a further deepening of the historical and material *reasons* for the dictatorship of the proletariat and its *content* was required. Indeed, such a discussion was very much at the heart of the two-line struggle in China that unfolded in the years before the coup.¹⁰⁵ Just knowing the ideological position on the dictatorship of the proletariat was not enough to enable many in China or in the Maoist movement internationally to distinguish Marxism from revisionism, just as knowing the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat did not appear to be of any help to Ajith in understanding the revisionist abandonment of the revolution in Nepal, for which he was an apologist.¹⁰⁶

In any sphere of science an established body of work exists that has been shown to correspond to objective reality and serves as a basis for further advance. But this process will necessarily involve re-examination of principles, premises, and concepts, especially at those points in the development of a given science where a leap in understanding is

required to more correctly explain diverse phenomena.

Ajith cites Avakian in a footnote in which the latter explains an important way in which genuine science advances, “Of course, it is possible that a scientific theory is true – correctly reflects reality – in its main and essential aspects, but is shown to be incorrect in certain secondary aspects – and, in accordance with that, some of its particular predictions prove not to be true. And when that is the case, the application of the scientific method leads to a further development of the theory – through the discarding, or modifying, of certain aspects and the addition of new elements into the theory.”¹⁰⁷

Ajith then goes on to add: “This is founded on the assumption that the Popperist concept of falsifiability is fully applicable to Marxism.” In addition to Ajith's transparent distortion of Avakian by adding the word “*fully*” before “applicable,” this supposed refutation of Avakian is really only another self-exposure by Ajith.

Avakian is correct in insisting that Marxism, like any other science, can and must discard and modify aspects of its previous understanding and add new elements when secondary aspects have been shown not to be true. What is wrong with this? Ajith's argument leads inescapably to the conclusion that his version of Marxism *need not* discard aspects that prove not to be true. Indeed, this fits well with Ajith's concept of class truth.

We have seen earlier Ajith's distaste for scientific method in his refusal to accept that Marxism could be subject to the criterion of falsifiability. Ajith writes,

Recollect Mao's observation that despite having correct ideas representatives of the advanced class may still suffer defeat because of their comparative weakness. By its very logic, the criterion of falsifiability can never comprehend this paradox. For it, failure is simply failure and conclusive proof of being unscientific. Avakian's defense of Marxism is thus fatally flawed.¹⁰⁸

Actually Ajith's example does nothing to prove his point and really only shows how wrong is his conception of Marxism.

“Failure” in any particular Marxist endeavor, such as attempts at revolution in any particular country at any particular time, does not falsify the core principles of Marxism, such as the need for revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. These core principles, as we discussed earlier about Avakian's refutation of Popper, are subject to falsification... but haven't been falsified.

Ajith shares the same erroneous understanding of science as the positivists and Popper, that the essence of the scientific enterprise is to make precise predictions which can then be tested. Once again, this is a wrong view of science generally, including the science of Marxism. However, Marxism does theorize laws, tendencies, and dynamics for history and society that are not untestable propositions or metaphysical theories and which, on the contrary, must be and are constantly “tested” by actual developments.

There is nothing in Marxism that excludes failure or that predicts that a given revolution *must* succeed. But the objective reasons for a defeat (the strength of the opposing sides certainly, but also the impact of chance, accident, and contingency) as well as the subjective reasons (errors or limitations in the thinking of the communists themselves)

that may have contributed to a defeat do need to be and *can be* understood and explained by scientific examination. When a defeat (or for that matter a success!) reveals errors in the thinking of the Marxists, they need to be corrected.

Ajith defends himself: “the fundamentals of Marxism are not being posed as something above critical examination. The necessity to develop them by rupturing from views that do not correspond to contemporary social reality is acknowledged.”¹⁰⁹

Here Ajith is backtracking on his creation of a special category of “fundamentals” beyond examination, which had been criticized by the RCP,USA earlier. But Ajith's explanation is only partly true. It is not only that a theory may *no longer* correspond to “contemporary social reality.” It is also sometimes the case that people may discover *errors* in a theory that mean such a theory did not or did not fully correspond to previous, historic social reality, and furthermore laws of the natural sciences are also developing as new things are discovered and new theories are developed. Ajith continues, “But if this is not done by standing firm on the universal truth of Marxism it will deviate.”¹¹⁰ Again, the tautology – one can examine fundamentals as long as it does not deviate from the “universal truth of Marxism”.

Ajith states that there has not yet been a “satisfactory resolution of what constitutes the fundamental principles of Marxism.” He continues, “*Therefore, the development of Marxism is not simply a matter of putting up its fundamental principles for re-examination in a general sense.*” Which, of course, neither Avakian nor the RCP critique of Ajith ever argued – in any science there are core principles which, while also subject to reexamination, do serve as building blocks for further advance. Finally, Ajith concludes this passage with a pompous but confusing declaration that, “*It demands the application of the universal truth of Marxism in concrete situations which include the realm of theoretical practice also.*”¹¹¹

We will leave it to others to try to untangle what Ajith means by calling “the realm of theoretical practice” a “concrete situation.” What interests us here is that he is still defending his earlier wrong claim that there is a special category of “ideological positions” or “universal truth of Marxism” that can then judge other arguments.

How Certain Can We Be about Our Knowledge?

Avakian has clearly and correctly explained the relationship between existing knowledge and its further advance, and between our ability to be *certain* about some things even while being aware of the relative and non-absolute nature of our knowledge. Here we would again encourage the reader to study Avakian's work *Away With All Gods!*, where there is a lengthy treatment of this question that builds on the approach of Engels and Lenin. Here we will quote only some of this rich passage. (And we will also see that this passage, once again, belies Ajith's charge that Avakian ignores the strictly philosophical aspect of Marxism.)

This leads me to the more general question of certitude, scientific and moral certitude – what is the same and what is different about them.... to invoke what perhaps seems like an oxymoron, we can arrive at certitude, relatively.... It is possible to be, on a correct basis, *certain* about certain things.... [W]e can say with *certitude* that evolution is a scientifically

established fact. Or, in simple and basic terms: it is true...”¹¹²

This is further explained by Ardea Skybreak in *The Science of Evolution and the Myth of Creationism: Knowing What's Real and Why It Matters*:

[W]e'll never have *absolute* truth – in the sense that we'll never know everything there is to know about everything – but we do have some means and methods for getting to the point where we can say, with a high degree of confidence, that something is true – meaning that *it actually corresponds to some aspect of material reality as it really is*.

[T]he point is that it's good and important to question everything, but it's *also* good and important to recognize that not everything is forever up for grabs – sometimes we can know *enough* about something to accept it as true.¹¹³

The scientific approach demands that we base ourselves on what we know to be true at any given time and interact with the material and social world – and learn and discover new things. But, again, as Skybreak emphasizes, this doesn't mean that we can never come to a conclusion and say that something is true.

There is no validity to Ajith's claim that Avakian and the RCP are “*putting up its [communism's] fundamental principles for re-examination in a general sense*.” But Avakian's “certitude” is scientifically-based and not “faith-based.”

What needs to be understood is that once Ajith makes a fundamental departure from a scientific method and approach, and all the more so since Ajith is determined to dig in his heels and defend his epistemological errors, he falls into different and often seemingly opposite errors.

On the one hand, he dismisses Avakian's insistence on the scientific foundation of Marxism as “scientism” and lambastes Avakian for insisting on a scientific approach and methodology. On the other hand, Ajith takes the worst methods plaguing science and raised to a principle by certain schools, such as positivism and empiricism, to describe how he believes Marxism develops (this is the basis for his criticism that Avakian negates the role of “practice in developing theory”).

On the one hand, Ajith does not see Marxism as a science. Marxism becomes a kind of technical problem-solving tool – it must deal with very specific needs – and in this regard an empiricist and pragmatist approach to “what works” is quite sufficient to determine truth. On the other hand, Ajith's Marxism, if it is to have theoretical sweep, must be seen as a kind of belief system that is by its very nature divorced from and beyond the reach of science. Ajith straddles two wrong viewpoints whose unity is the rejection of science in explaining the motion and development of human society.

At several points in “Against Avakianism,” Ajith lashes out at Avakian and the RCP, saying that the “fundamental principles” of Marxism are reduced to “method and approach.” Ajith's oft-repeated division between principles and method is central to Ajith's insistence that Marxism be based upon primordial, axiomatic principles as the basis of further judgment (even if he is forced to admit that he has not yet been able to catalog these).

VII. COMMUNIST REVOLUTION IS NECESSARY AND POSSIBLE BUT NOT INEVITABLE... IT MUST BE CONSCIOUSLY MADE

Avakian has criticized tendencies in Marxism toward *teleology*, i.e., the view that nature and history are endowed with a purpose, are driven by a preexisting end or goal – and the related tendency toward “inevitabilism,” that is, the belief that a given outcome in nature or society, and in particular the eventual triumph of communism, is inevitable. The understanding that Avakian has been fighting for is central to the materialism and scientific method of the new synthesis.

Ajith reacts vehemently to Avakian's critique, and he devotes a number of pages to trying to refute Avakian on this point. But Ajith hesitates between defending the notion of inevitability and denying that Marxism ever exhibited such tendencies at all – he wants to “have his cake and eat it too” by redefining well-established terms and ignoring or trying to hide glaring evidence from the history of the communist movement.

He claims that teleology was opposed by Marx from the beginning, while arguing that inevitability does not mean what is commonly understood by the term: he concedes that “there is no hidebound certainty that humanity will achieve communism” and then immediately takes it back by adding, “But do these possibilities eliminate inevitability altogether from historical development? No they don't.”¹¹⁴

Ajith's efforts to make a distinction between “certainty” and “inevitability” are really just a clumsy attempt to play with words and avoid confronting reality. Take, for example, how Zhang Chunqiao, an outstanding representative of the revolutionary headquarters in the Communist Party of China, put it: “The extinction of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and the victory of communism are inevitable, certain and independent of man's will.”¹¹⁵ Not only does Zhang use “inevitable” and “certain” as synonyms, but by adding “independent of man's will” he is also veering toward a teleological explanation of the historical process as well.

Ajith opposes Avakian's efforts to criticize teleological tendencies in Marxism by saying, “[as to] understanding historical advance in a teleological sense the founders of Marxism negated this right from their early writings.”¹¹⁶ First of all, Avakian never argued that Marx's concept of history was *at its core* teleological. On the contrary, Marx opened up a new scientific horizon in the study of history not based on a metaphysical and speculative inquiry into history, and at times Marx and Engels made sharp criticisms of teleology.¹¹⁷ Marx was a materialist and was able to understand the real material contradictions, especially the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, shaping human society and its development.

Avakian has put great emphasis on this scientific breakthrough and the core conception of Marx concerning the “coherence” of human history. In other words, history is not just an inchoate jumble of unrelated events and happenstance, nor is it fundamentally a product of the ideas of great men and women or heroes. Neither is history the product of the unfolding and self-realization of the Absolute Idea, as speculated by idealism of the Hegelian cast. Yet within the body of Marxism, including its greatest teachers, secondary tendencies have existed that are inconsistent with the overall scientific method and approach of Marxism, including teleological tendencies.

Consider the concept of the “negation of the negation,” which Marx and Engels took over from Hegel who had formulated it as a “law.” This definitely has teleological implications. The fundamentally scientific approach of Marx and Engels is also intermingled with shortcomings in the materialism of the natural sciences of their times.¹¹⁸ But there are even more glaring and more harmful contemporary examples of a teleological understanding, which Ajith conveniently ignores.

An extreme version of this, from more contemporary experience, is the statement by Chairman Gonzalo of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP), who declared, “Let us recall what we put forward in 1979: fifteen billion years of matter in motion – the part of this process we know about – have given rise to the irresistible march to communism.”¹¹⁹ This statement is, to put it mildly, a sharp expression of a teleological understanding – that there is a purpose to nature and history. While this is particularly evident in writings of Gonzalo, it is hardly limited to him.

The natural history of the universe is most definitely not “leading” anywhere in a predetermined way, including not to the victory of the communist revolution in this tiny speck of matter in this part of the universe.¹²⁰ This teleological understanding cannot explain the evolution of our universe or the development and change of life forms on Earth, including the emergence of *Homo sapiens* and human society, nor the development of classes and the emergence of both the material basis and the need for communist revolution.

This kind of thinking has much in common with a certain type of theological worldview – the existence of a transcendental deity who intervenes in earthly affairs is denied, but there is still an “immanent” god co-substantial with nature itself and endowed with a purpose and goal and governed, to borrow Ajith's words, admittedly from another but related context, by a “logical, orderly and consistent interconnection.”¹²¹ Such a worldview will ultimately hinder our ability to understand the world correctly and transform it.

Avakian has brought a more scientifically correct understanding to this subject:

Neither the emergence of the human species nor the development of human society to the present was predetermined or followed predetermined pathways. There is no transcendent will or agent which has conceived and shaped all such development, and nature and history should not be treated as such – as Nature and History. Rather, such development occurs through the dialectical interplay between necessity and accident and in the case of human history between underlying material forces and the conscious activity and struggle of people.¹²²

Avakian is drawing lessons from science that strengthen materialist philosophy. Tendencies toward seeing “purpose-ful” and goal-seeking processes in nature have existed in the sciences and philosophy and have also influenced the communist movement.¹²³

Marx and Avakian on “Coherence” in Human History

In a major theoretical essay, *For A Harvest of Dragons*, written in 1983 on the occasion of the centennial of Marx's death, Avakian discusses “why and how the principles of dialectical materialism do apply to human society and its historical development,”¹²⁴ and he quotes an important insight of Marx:

Because of the simple fact that every succeeding generation finds itself in the possession of the productive forces acquired by the previous generation, and that they serve it as the raw material for new production, a coherence arises in human history, a history of humanity takes shape which becomes all the more a history of humanity the more the productive forces of men and therefore their social relations develop.¹²⁵

In a more recent work, Avakian pursues this fight for historical materialism:

[A]s Marx also emphasized very importantly, these relations of production have been established and are in effect largely independent of the wills of individuals. In other words, the relations of production are not arbitrarily determined by the will of individuals, including individuals who comprise the ruling class of society and who dominate in the ownership of the means of production... Here again is the analogy between changes in human society and changes – evolution – in the larger natural world.

This was also Marx's point when he stressed that there is a certain “coherence” to human history. We have emphasized that there is no inevitability about communism, no inevitable direction to human society. But there is a certain coherence. So everybody, including the members of the ruling class of any society, have to deal with what is handed down in terms of productive forces – and production relations – from previous generations, even though at certain critical junctures leaps are made in terms of transforming the production relations through a revolution in the superstructure...¹²⁶

Ajith criticizes Avakian's interpretation of the passage from Marx quoted earlier. Instead of grasping the underlying materialism, Ajith sees evidence of inevitability. His passage reads in full:

The materialist conception of history comprehends determinations of necessity, inevitability, at several levels of human existence and development. When Marx speaks of coherence in historical development he indicates the logical, orderly and consistent interconnection of various aspects of social life. Needless to say these interconnections invariably contain necessity. There is an element of inevitability in them. This is what gives rise to direction in historical motion, the potential for historical advance. Whether it will be realized, whether other factors will upset this working out of contradictions, is a different matter. Marx's usage of the term

"coherence" is consistent with his grasp of the role of "inevitability" in history. Avakian's interpretation eliminates the materialist basis of Marxian historiography.¹²⁷

Let's look at what Ajith is doing. He takes Marx's correct and crucial insight about "coherence" in human history and – as a magician's hand is faster than the eye – slips in this "element of" or "role of 'inevitability.'" He takes the truth that there are certain necessary interrelations in human society, for instance, between the economic base of society and the political structures and dominant ideas of society, and turns this into a doctrine of inevitability.

Inevitability means “cannot be avoided.” It indicates a fixed trajectory of development with no other possible outcome. *Necessity* is different; necessity determines, structures, and limits potentials and pathways but does not always produce a single result. The concept of necessity involves causal laws, there are “cause and effect” relationships, but it is not linear and predetermined – it is a dynamic process.

To make this clearer, let's take an example. Capitalism, as the profit-driven economic system that it is, could not function if the laws, culture, and dominant values of society held and enforced and reinforced mandates that no corporation could lay off workers... that everyone has the right to eat... and that society guarantees the rich and all-around development of the individual. If there were that kind of legal-political-moral superstructure, a capitalist economy would simply collapse (or the capitalist class would overturn that superstructure). This is another way of saying that there are *necessary* features and relations of capitalist society – there must be a certain (there is a necessary) correspondence between the economic base and the political structures and dominant ideas and values. But it was not inevitable that capitalism would emerge in human history, or take the precise forms that it does.

Ajith is not only trivializing the actual meaning of inevitability but also trying to transform Marx's “coherence” into a full-blown “logical, orderly and consistent” inevitable scheme of development.

In doing so, he negates the role of accident and chance in history. This is pushing in the direction of saying that all that has happened had to happen, and in a lock-step deterministic fashion. The “Maoist” Ajith would do well to learn from the dynamic and revolutionary vision of contradictory and constantly churning reality of Mao Tsetung (for example, “Disasters are social phenomena, natural phenomena. Sudden changes are the most fundamental law of the universe”¹²⁸).

Ajith's acceptance of “inevitability” is no small matter. Because in addition to negating the role of accident, and the actual dynamics of development, there is an even bigger problem. Ajith is unable to comprehend, to fathom, the *conscious dynamic role* of human beings, rooted in the relationship between freedom and necessity (a point we will return to shortly). His view of inevitability is very similar to his view on the proletariat and its material conditions: the inevitable workings of the system will cause them to become conscious agents of communist revolution.

Real Dynamics of History and Erroneous Views within the Communist Movement

Although Ajith vehemently objects to the argument that teleology influenced the arguments of Marx and other leaders, he claims that without inevitability, “what remains of historical materialism?”

Deterministic and mechanical thinking in different forms, looking for a “typical motion,” has contributed to significant errors in the communist movement in analyzing events and developing trends.¹²⁹

In China, these same tendencies were represented particularly by Lin Piao's argument that “Mao Tsetung Thought is Marxism-Leninism of the era in which imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is advancing to world-wide victory.”¹³⁰ This was a distorted view of the dynamics at work in the world imperialist system. Partial trends of the period were absolutized and turned into the inevitable march of world history.

These theories had very harmful effects on the Maoist movement internationally. Mao himself was not completely immune to these tendencies, but as he increasingly confronted the contradictions involved in carrying forward the revolution under socialism, his tendency was to rely *more* on materialism and interrogate some of the “received wisdom” of the communist movement. Ajith has gone in the opposite direction, not only by resurrecting much of the specific content of Lin Piao's nationalist, self-serving wishful thinking but also by insisting on the “inevitabilism” associated with Lin's worldview.

Avakian has been excavating and building on Marx's scientific breakthrough by identifying and struggling against the secondary tendencies that can also be found in the writings of Marx, Lenin and Mao. While these mistakes are secondary in the thinking and writings of the great leaders of the proletarian revolution, within the ranks of the communist movement historically these secondary tendencies have grown in importance and scope, threatening to replace the scientific materialist basis of Marxism itself.

Only a priest who refuses to examine the “fundamentals” of his faith and not a practitioner of a genuine and living science would be surprised, shocked, or offended when an error (even an important error) is later discovered. Actually, it is with conceptions like “millions of years of matter in motion” leading to communism and Ajith's desperate clinging to inevitabilism that “not much remains of historical materialism.”

Ajith pays no attention to glaring examples of teleology in the contemporary communist movement because, in reality, he shares a great deal of this conceptualizing himself. His real problem is not that Avakian has wrongly imputed some “teleology” to Marx and Engels, but that his own worldview relies heavily on a belief in “inevitability.”

There are underlying *tendential* laws of history. One of Marx's great achievements was to identify the contradiction between the forces and relations of production as an underlying motor of social development. This underlying contradiction unfolds through the mediation of different aspects and contradictions in society, class struggles, ideological issues, crises and wars, etc., which intermingle and can accelerate or mitigate the overall unfolding of the fundamental contradiction of the bourgeois epoch: between socialized

production and private appropriation.

Instead of looking for the actual, material processes and structures that give history the coherence Marx spoke of, Ajith's "element of inevitability" seeks to impose purpose and meaning onto the historical process (the very definition of the teleology that Ajith denies) and sees the proletariat as its inevitable product and agent.

The potential for revolution can be scientifically identified, tendencies must be recognized, and on this basis revolutionary struggle needs to be developed and led. However, no one can say with certainty how and even whether any particular potential will be actualized in a given society or even on a world scale. Note that Marx and Engels themselves wrote of how sometimes class struggle has resulted in the mutual destruction of the contending classes.¹³¹

Freedom, Necessity and the Transformation of Necessity

Avakian has further developed the Marxist understanding of the relationship between freedom and necessity. Freedom lies not in the absence of necessity but in the recognition, understanding, and transformation of necessity through conscious human activity, through struggle.

Necessity refers to the underlying conditions and constraints, both natural and social, that set limits at any given time to what people are able to do and how. People are compelled to respond to necessity. In capitalist society, for instance, for the vast majority of people, in order to live they have to work – and they have to work, find work, in an economy that operates on the basis of private ownership and according to the dictates of profit. Obligations that people have to each other, their children and society are another form of necessity. The ecosystems (and environmental crisis) of the planet impose certain limits on how people can live and sustain themselves.

Freedom refers principally to the capacity and scope of people, both as individuals but most decisively socially and collectively, to act and effect change and transform society and nature. This is positive freedom. There is also the negative freedom of being able to pursue individual inclinations without the interference of the institutions of society, provided these pursuits do not harm other individuals or society more generally.

Avakian has stressed that by understanding the underlying material reality and identifying possible channels and pathways of development necessity can be *transformed* into freedom. Constraints and possibilities form a contradiction, a unity of opposites, and provide the basis for reality to be transformed. Furthermore, Avakian has stressed that this process is a continual one with spiral-like motion whereby a new necessity is created which must also, in turn, be transformed through struggle into freedom. There is something else of critical import that Avakian brings out in his work *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy*:

[A]t present we are still in the era of human history where any individual's or any group's attempts to respond to necessity not only have to confront that necessity in a general sense, but in attempting to do so face obstacles imposed *by social and class divisions and the corresponding ideas and outlooks.*

The essential difference with regard to communist society is not that we would no longer face necessity, or that no terms would be

set – not only by nature but also socially – but that human beings, individually and above collectively, would be able to confront and approach the transformation of this necessity *without the hindrance of class divisions and other oppressive social relations and the corresponding ideas, including the ways in which an understanding of reality is distorted through the prism of these antagonistic social and class relations, and the ideas and outlooks that correspond to them....*

Communism envisions and will embody a whole new dimension of *positive* freedom: people pursuing, and effecting, individually but above all in common and through their mutual interaction – including through non-antagonistic struggle – the ongoing transformation of society and of nature (and the relation between the two) to continually enhance the material and the intellectual and cultural life of society as a whole as well as of the individuals who comprise society.¹³²
[emphasis in original]

Ajith's Wrong Understanding of Freedom and Necessity

Ajith is unable to understand freedom and necessity in this kind of dynamic, dialectical, and revolutionary way. Ajith's different and wrong understanding of the relationship between freedom and necessity comes out in his comments on a famous statement by Engels, where he mentions “humanity's leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom.” While we will see that Ajith is on record as accusing Marx and Engels of being mired in the tradition of the Enlightenment, for Ajith any criticism of Engels' one-sided statement about the relationship of freedom and necessity, carrying the influence of Hegel, is a call to arms: “Avakian’s imputation is that Marx and Engels tended towards ignoring or underplaying the role of necessity in communism. This is sought to be clinched with platitudes on how necessity will continue to exist in communism.”¹³³

Ajith elaborates,

The concept “realm of necessity” has a specific meaning in Marxism. It is not necessity *in general*, but the realm of physical needs of human existence.[!] When Marx wrote about moving from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom he was explicit that this would not mean the ending of the realm of necessity. *The point was that humanity would no longer be ruled by it, but would be able to submit it to its control.* [Our emphasis.] Thereby its physical needs of existence would be achieved with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, its human nature. This in turn would allow it to develop its human faculties to the greatest possible extent in the given circumstances. Evidently, there is nothing here even remotely suggestive of *getting free of necessity*.

In support of his argument, Ajith cites Volume 3 of *Capital* in which Marx writes,

Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production.

With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, *which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis.* [emphasis added by Ajith]¹³⁴

Here Marx reflects his scientific historical materialist understanding of the freedom and necessity faced by humanity. However, there is still ambiguity, as seen in the phrasing “the true realm of freedom” and “bringing it [Nature] under its [humanity's] common control.” This problem is that what represents perhaps only a shade of error in Marx's thinking has become aggravated and consolidated into wrong understandings among communists. Ajith shows that he himself is not free from this thinking and, in fact, wants to enshrine an error.

He blithely paraphrases Marx about the need to “submit [nature] to its control” without appearing to notice the erroneous and harmful implication of thinking, or acting as if, humanity could ever submit nature to its control. First of all, *humanity is part of nature* (in fact, in other places Marx shows remarkable prescience in discussing the relationship between humanity and nature, even displaying remarkable insight into some ecological problems that were only to become evident several generations later). But Ajith, despite contemporary experience and a very widespread discussion of the degradation of the environment and ecosystems, is content to repeat the past Marxist understanding that tended toward seeing humanity moving from a state of subordination to nature to one of dominion over and utilization of nature.

The more correct understanding is that humanity must ever more consciously regulate the interrelations of human society with nature, and more deeply grasp the laws and motion of development of the natural world – not least the crisis of the ecosystems of the planet. Avakian has emphasized the need for the emancipators of humanity to also be the protectors of the planet.

This same wrong view is also seen when Ajith says that “the realm of necessity has a specific meaning for Marxists,” which refers only to “the realm of physical needs of human existence.” This is philosophically unsound in that humanity's physical needs are only a subset of the full scale of necessity in nature and society. Furthermore, this misdefinition of necessity feeds pragmatist and economist views that have plagued the communist movement. In fact, the study of the experience of the first socialist societies reveals the important need to expand the horizons of the masses (and their leadership) to far more than simply meeting humanity's physical needs, however important that remains.

A close look at different passages of Marx and Engels, and especially the passage from *Anti-Duhring* that has long been considered the authoritative presentation of the Marxist

view on freedom and necessity, shows that Ajith is incorrect in his depiction of the thinking of Marx and Engels.

Engels writes in *Anti-Duhring*,

The conditions of existence environing and hitherto dominating humanity *now pass under the dominion and control* of humanity, which now for the first time becomes *the real conscious master of nature*, because and in so far as it becomes master of its own social organization. The laws of man's own social activity, which have hitherto confronted him as extraneous laws of nature dominating him, will then be applied by man with *full knowledge* and hence be dominated by him.¹³⁵ (emphasis added)

Engels is not speaking only about the immediate “physical needs of human existence,” as Ajith insists, but is making a larger, more general statement about necessity. This is clear, for example, in Engels' reference to “the laws of man's own social activity.” Engels then argues:

Man's own social organization, which has hitherto confronted him as a process dictated by nature and history, now becomes a process resulting from his own voluntary action. *The objective extraneous forces which have hitherto dominated history now pass under the control of man himself.* It is only from this point that man will himself make his own history *fully consciously*, it is only from this point that the social causes he sets in motion will preponderantly and ever increasingly have the effects he wills. *It is humanity's leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom.*¹³⁶ (emphasis added)

A Leap but Not into *Absolute Freedom*

This passage from Engels has long been appreciated for its sweeping description of the tremendous transformation that will be achieved by humanity abolishing class division and antagonisms and consciously organizing itself to transform its own conditions of existence and its relation to the rest of nature. This will mean, as Engels insists, a *leap* for humanity into qualitatively greater freedom than is the case under class-divided society.

However, this leap is not a leap into *absolute* freedom, as Engels' celebrated quote could imply. Nor can there be a final reconciliation and resolution of all the contradictions of history. Necessity continues to exist – necessity itself will be continually transformed, and for humanity there will constantly be new challenges and constraints, as well as new possibilities and pathways.

Nor will humanity ever be able to “fully consciously” make its own history. Knowledge will always lag behind reality. The contradictions of necessity and contingency will always bring new unexpected elements into play. Elements of indeterminism will always exist in the structure of reality along with elements of determinism acting through causal laws. If the leap to communism is not understood in this way, there is a strong tendency to view communism as the “end of history.”

Engels also wrote that Marx “never based his communist demands on this [moral principle] but upon *the inevitable collapse of the capitalist mode of production*, which is

daily taking place before our eyes to an ever greater degree.”¹³⁷ Ajith is blind to the weaknesses in Engels' discussion of freedom and necessity because it gives comfort to a lingering notion of inevitability that Ajith cherishes, because he is seeking some “complete mastery” of nature that in fact is never possible, and because he does not understand the role of *transformation* in wrenching freedom out of necessity, which always leads, spiral-like, to new necessity.

Ajith says that Avakian's discussion of these points presents nothing but “platitudes on how necessity will continue to exist in communism.” But the non-recognition of what Ajith ridicules as “platitudes,” the continuing existence of contradictions under communism, has in fact been a major problem in the communist movement. There has long been a quasi-religious view of communism as a paradise without contradiction, the final reconciliation of the contradictions in human history (or even, as we saw in the earlier citation from Gonzalo, the end point of “15 billion years of matter in motion”).

Ajith, the (sometimes) “Maoist,” ignores the fact that it was Mao himself who initiated the criticism of Engels' formulation on freedom and necessity (which, Mao pointed out, “only says one half and leaves the rest unsaid”), emphasizing that freedom resides in not only the “understanding of” but also “the transformation” of necessity.¹³⁸ Avakian grasped the importance of Mao's critical observation which so many chose to ignore (including, as we see, Ajith even to this day) and has developed this dialectical materialist grasp of the relationship between freedom, necessity and transformation.¹³⁹

Indeed, this understanding of freedom and necessity is linked to the emphasis of Avakian's new synthesis on the *the scientific basis for the dynamic role of people*. This conscious revolutionary role of people does not come from voluntarism, sheer will power, or divine endowment from class position, or “historical inevitability,” but on a thoroughgoing recognition that the possible and favorable pathway of development (the achievement of communism) has its roots in material conditions, but there is not a sole or inevitable pathway: to use Avakian's words again, “it must be hacked out.”¹⁴⁰

No Predestination in Revolution

Ajith writes,

The resolution of social contradictions contains inevitability. For example, a socialist (or new democratic) revolution is inevitable for the *resolution* of the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. And, if humanity continues to exist, the basic contradictions of imperialism will inevitably continue to sharpen and give rise to rebellions, communist parties and revolutions led by them.¹⁴¹

Here Ajith is both redefining the rather clear concept of “inevitable” and again confusing necessity and inevitability. Communist revolution is *necessary* to resolve the contradictions of capitalism but it is *not inevitable*. There are objective, material contradictions and relationships whose resolution specifically and necessarily provides a basis, calls for, a communist revolution. But there is no determining philosophical force or process that means revolution will inevitably take place. There is no “predestination” in revolution.

The contradictions of objective material reality compel social actors and classes into motion. Capitalists will continue to exploit on ever greater scales, the proletariat will be forced to sell its labor power and be exploited, and a myriad of other social ills will be

created or reinforced by this process, all of which will lead to great hardship, resistance, struggle, and upheaval. The point, however, is that these conditions form the basis for the communist revolution as a possible, potential pathway to resolving complex social contradictions. This is certainly the highly desirable and much-needed outcome for humanity, but there are other less desirable pathways, such as what happened in South Africa where the apartheid regime was ended but a liberatory society did not take its place; or even horrendous pathways, as what happened following the 1979 revolution in Iran that overthrew the hated Shah with the consolidation of a medieval-like Islamic regime. This materialist understanding enhances our capacity to fight to bring forward the communist revolution as the necessary, desirable, and possible outcome.

On the basis of the same objective conditions, that is, necessity, classes will clash and various actors will develop different and competing understandings, political programs, organizations, and solutions. However, to respond to Ajith's confused example, it is not at all inevitable that a communist party will be formed, it is not at all inevitable that a given revolution will actually contribute to the resolution of these conditions (consider Iran in 1979), and it is definitely not inevitable that humanity as a whole will reach communism and most certainly not independently of conscious, revolutionary activity led by a vanguard party based on a scientific understanding of how the world is and can be.

How Do We Understand Historical Laws?

A further revelation of Ajith's lack of understanding of historical materialism, which he views not as a science but as a closed, axiomatic system, is his treatment of historical laws. He criticizes Avakian because, "His elimination of the premises of historical materialism is in fact already set up by speaking of a 'tendency,' instead of the 'laws' of social formations and their historical transformation." For Ajith, historical materialism requires inevitability, iron-clad laws, without which, indeed, there is "nothing left" of historical materialism. "Laws" for Ajith are fully deterministic and linear.

However, Marxism does not draw a wall between "tendency" and "law"; for example, Marx was quite explicit in portraying the falling rate of profit as a "tendential law," in other words, subject to mediations and counter-currents. Ajith foresees this possible objection and tries to preempt criticism with a footnote: "It may be argued that he [Avakian] is justified in using this term since these laws are tendential. But that is true of all laws, even more so in the case of social laws."

The problem is not whether Avakian uses the word "tendency" or "law," it is how Ajith understands the very conception of law, both in the natural sciences as well as in the social sciences and specifically Marxism. A metaphysical concept of law implying strict causal relations, similar to Ajith's "orderly, consistent and logical" conception of the world, has long plagued philosophy and the sciences.

Historically, this conception of law was often linked to the religious notion of the perfection of god as the source of knowledge, design, and purpose. This is one underlying assumption of idealist thinking. Even when scientists refused the metaphysics of theology, many were still captivated by a perceived perfect order in nature and the idea that all is determined by strict causal relations. The mechanical materialists believed that if you had adequate and accurate knowledge of initial conditions, it would be possible to predict future events with exact precision. Of course, they knew that would be impossible in practice because of the limitations in human knowledge – but in this view contingency,

randomness, indeterminism, accident, etc., were due only to the insufficiency of knowledge and not part of the nature of reality itself.¹⁴² The communist movement, to a large extent, was heavily influenced by this understanding.

Furthermore, in looking at how Ajith juxtaposes “law” and “tendency,” we need to note that laws involve contradiction. Even the most deterministic of laws involve (and can even produce) unpredictability. The opposite is also true: “uncertainty” can be used to describe very “lawful” behavior. For example, the Heisenberg uncertainty principle in physics can lead to very accurate predictions and measurements. Ajith's view of law assumes that it operates in a tight chain of cause-and-effect relations producing linear motion and determinism. With this reasoning, one will wrongly seek explanation of complex phenomena by an unbroken chain of causalities on the basis of the most elemental level and/or components of reality. Ajith's embellishments cannot hide the fact that he is really doing nothing other than repeating Gonzalo's more straightforward assertion that, “15 billion years of matter in motion . . . have given rise to the irresistible march to communism.”

In fact, in major branches of science accident and chance together with deterministic law have an integral role – the uncertainty principle in physics, probability and deterministic wave equations, and the modern synthesis of Darwinian evolutionary theory recognize the role of possible pathways and constraints and the role of contingency. The recognition of “contingent, chance occurrences” does not deny these branches of science their coherence, rigor, and explanatory power.

Take a monumental event like World War 1. There were deep contradictions in the imperialist system that gave rise to it. But how and when it broke out – and the particular triggering event, the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Serbia in August 1914 – were bound up with multiple contingent and accidental factors.

The existence of *possible* pathways of a historical process and the *actual* outcome of this process as a product of a *particular* pathway is the result of the interplay between accident and necessity – and the dynamic role of the conscious human factor and interplay of different class forces.

What Ajith cannot see is that *dialectical* and historical materialism “remains” when teleology and inevitability are correctly weeded out of Marxism. Ajith wants the consolation of inevitability. He wants Marxism as a religion.

VIII. AJITH FINDS HIMSELF IN THE COMPANY OF POSTMODERNISM AND RELIGION

We have discussed what science is, what a scientific approach involves: learning the causes of phenomena, *why* things happen and *how* they develop, and seeking these causes in the material world – and providing explanations whose validity depends on test, verification, on proof/disproof.

Ajith's attack on Avakian for scientism and rationalism is linked to Ajith's one-sided negative evaluation of the Enlightenment. Indeed, Ajith's overall efforts to erect a “Maoism” unmoored from its scientific groundings lead him to target the Enlightenment.

Avakian's Dialectical Assessment of the Enlightenment

Avakian has identified the importance of the evaluation of and the current controversy over the 18th century Enlightenment. The Enlightenment represented the emergence and consolidation of the ideology, the thinking, that corresponds to the modern epoch and the capitalist mode of production as it emerged in Europe especially in the 18th century. In recent decades there has been an intense debate over the nature and shortcomings of the Enlightenment. In particular, there have been strong challenges to “Enlightenment ideology” coming both from various resurgent and reactionary religious assaults on reason and science, and from the diverse and loose trend generally referred to as “postmodernism” – we will find that Ajith is comfortable in both their company.

In an important essay, “Marxism and the Enlightenment,” Avakian wrote,

[T]here are various strains of imperialist and reactionary thought relating to the Enlightenment. There is a certain kind of all-out assault on the Enlightenment, from religious fundamentalists and obscurantists, including the “Religious Right” in the US, who identify the Enlightenment – and in particular the concept of reliance on science and rationality, rather than obscurantist religious notions, as the foundation for ideology and politics – as the dawning of the age of the devil, so to speak. On the other hand... there is a definite strain in bourgeois liberal thinking to conceive of the Enlightenment (and what are considered its results) as a “positive” instrument of colonialism and of an imperialist domination that seeks to remake the whole world in the image of bourgeois democracy...

Marxism agrees with that aspect of the Enlightenment that says that the world is knowable, that people should seek to understand the world (or reality generally) in all its complexity, and that they should do so by scientific methods.... [I]t is a tenet and a basic premise of the Enlightenment that people should seek to understand the world by scientific methods, and this is a principal reason why the Enlightenment has been brought under attack – and today is once again being brought under attack – by religious obscurantists and other reactionary trends. That's the aspect of the Enlightenment with which, in a general sense, Marxism agrees.

What it disagrees with is, first of all, the notion that (to invoke a certain irony by quoting the Christian Bible) “you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” This is not true, in the final analysis. First of all, what's in the Bible is not the truth. But even if it were, just **knowing** what the truth is and thinking that in itself will “set you free” is a form of rationalism (of idealism); it goes along with this idea that science will re-make the world by mere force of its “truths.”...

So that's an important way, philosophically, in which Marxism differs from the core thought of the Enlightenment, or the rationalism that's integral to the Enlightenment. And, at the same time, of course, politically, the revolutionary proletariat opposes and represents a

radical rupture with the system of bourgeois political rule which essentially corresponds to the Enlightenment. And, more particularly, we oppose the use of the Enlightenment, and the scientific and technological advances associated with it, as a way of effecting and justifying colonialism and imperialist domination, in the name of “the white man's burden” or the alleged “civilizing mission” of the “more enlightened and advanced” imperialist system, and so on. This is another way in which we differ, profoundly, from at least important aspects of how the Enlightenment (and associated things) have been applied.¹⁴³

Avakian's approach to the Enlightenment, and this seminal article in particular, sends Ajith into a frenzy in which he ignores and distorts what Avakian is actually arguing and, more importantly, reveals his own outlook and his own position in the debate over the Enlightenment in which he is in the disturbing company of reactionary religious zealots and postmodernist currents.

Ajith's Take on the Enlightenment and His Distortion of Avakian's Views

Let's look at Ajith's most succinct summary of his own views in which he responds directly to the quote from Avakian cited just above:

Today, compared to even Mao's time, we are enriched with a new awareness of the contradictory essence of the Enlightenment and its scientific consciousness. Postmodernist trends have made significant contributions in this matter. Though their relativism led them to an ahistorical rejection of the Enlightenment and modernization, the critical insights they offer must be synthesized by Marxism. The contributions made by theoreticians of the Frankfurt school are also to be acknowledged. The necessity to distinguish the emancipatory aspect of the Enlightenment from its overarching bourgeois, colonial nature and thrust is one important lesson that we must derive. Furthermore, scientific consciousness itself must be critiqued in order to separate its rational content from the influence of Enlightenment values seen in it....

Far from grappling with new thinking that directs attention to problems *inherent* to Enlightenment and modern scientific consciousness, all he speaks about is how they are *conceived* of and made *use* of by imperialism. This suggests that the problem is with their misconception and misuse. Such thinking is a step back from the theoretical advances made in this matter.¹⁴⁴

In deference to Ajith's above declared appreciation of postmodernism, let's try to “deconstruct” a bit of his tangled thinking.

It is quite clear when reading the whole of the above passage from Avakian (which Ajith is intent on distorting) that Avakian is actually calling attention to the sharp contradictions in the legacy of the Enlightenment. He specifically points to some of the ways in which “Marxism differs from the core thought of the Enlightenment.” In his criticism of rationalism above, Avakian is drawing attention to the fact that struggle is not restricted to the realm of what is right or wrong in a given set of ideas. Class

contradictions and class rule cannot be hidden away in the name of scientific truth and progress, as apologists of imperialism, capitalism, and bourgeois democracy argue.

The danger of Ajith's errors in relation to the Enlightenment bears heavily on political and class struggle, as evidenced in the struggle today in various parts of the world against creationism and the religious fundamentalist assault on science – which interpenetrates with other struggles, especially against the enslavement of women.

In other works Avakian has treated these themes at great length, including in his ground-breaking book (published in 1984), *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* which examined at length the philosophical and political arguments and premises of key Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau and Mill. Far from excusing “Enlightenment values,” as Ajith charges, Avakian actually shows how many of today's most sacrosanct premises, including “democracy” itself, are inseparable from modern class-divided society with its modern forms of oppression and exploitation in Europe and around the world.

In this book and in his work overall, Avakian is calling attention to and advancing upon the fundamental rupture and leap Marx made with the confining horizons of the Enlightenment, which were intrinsically linked to the rising capitalist mode of production.¹⁴⁵

Ajith dares accuse Avakian of failing “to distinguish the emancipatory aspect of the Enlightenment from its overarching bourgeois, colonial nature.” In fact, throughout his writings for several decades, Avakian has insisted on the knowability of the world (which is intrinsically linked to the transformability of the world through revolution) through the application of a scientific approach, which gained predominance with the ascension and consolidation of the capitalist mode of production. But the point has never been to accept the domination of the capitalist-imperialist countries in which this mode of production arose. For instance in an article in 2000 Avakian wrote,

This underscores once again the need for us to have the correct approach to the Enlightenment – to correctly divide the Enlightenment, and the values and traditions associated with it, into two – to unite with that aspect of the Enlightenment that says that the world is knowable, that people should seek to understand the world (or reality generally) in all its complexity, and that they should do so by scientific methods, while opposing the idealist notion that merely taking a rational (or rationalist) approach to the world will itself lead to a just society, and resolutely opposing the proclamation of the superiority of bourgeois liberal society to justify imperialist domination and depredation throughout the world, the Third World in particular.

This “international line” of “liberal” imperialism these days (which could legitimately and fairly be characterized as an updated “white man's burden”) argues for “human rights” even above “national rights” – it proclaims “human rights” as a “universal” value and good which supersedes and “trumps” (as they like to say) even national sovereignty and related principles. It's a kind of “imperialist universality”¹⁴⁶

On Marx's Stand Towards British Rule in India

It has been necessary to refute Ajith's silly slanders of Avakian as an apologist for imperialism. But Ajith also presses his attack on the Enlightenment and on Marxism as a science by turning his criticism in "Against Avakianism" to Marx and his treatment of British colonialism and India:

Some of the writings of Marx and Engels did exhibit the influence of Eurocentric Enlightenmentism [sic]. This cannot be completely attributed to the paucity of information they had about these societies. It can be seen, for instance, in their writings on India. We can also see tendency to dismiss some national movements as obstructions to historical advance.¹⁴⁷

Ajith is arguing that there is a Eurocentric blindspot in the writings of Marx and Engels that led them to downplay, if not negate, the cruel and destructive effects of British rule in India. That is, to see national liberation as something that stood in the way of the development of the productive forces, like railway construction, that would be stimulated by the extension of markets, the breaking down of traditional systems of agriculture, etc., associated with British rule and economic penetration of Indian society. This is a widespread interpretation of Marx, and some postmodernist and postcolonial thinkers have gone so far as to characterize Marx as a Eurocentric apologist for British colonialism.

In *Marxism and the Call of the Future*, Avakian makes some salient observations that provide an important methodological framework for understanding Marx's approach, the development of his thinking, and the development of any science, historical materialism included.

The first point is that Marx analyzes developments underway in India at the time. He is trying to see what is driving British colonialism to conquer markets and what its effects, its results, might be from the standpoint of advancing the world-wide proletarian revolution. Avakian references some of Mao's writings on the effects of imperialism on China where he points to all the things it did, but Mao also shows that, on the other hand, it brought into being or hastened the development of the proletariat, which made possible a different kind of revolution in China.

Avakian steps back and puts the matter this way: to say that something "did happen" (the violent and destructive penetration of India) is not to say "this is the only way that something could have happened, therefore it's good." The point is "this did happen and divides into two: on the one hand it did all this – it brought all this depredation and suffering – and, on the other hand, it did bring certain conditions into being, and now we can do something with what it has brought into being"¹⁴⁸

The second point is that Marx's thinking actually evolved:

What [Marx] said about the Irish question, I believe also applied to India – that he thought for many years that the Irish question would get settled by the proletarian revolution in England, then he came to recognize that there

would never be a proletarian revolution in England without taking up the Irish question, that is, the question of the emancipation of the Irish from England....

I think you can make an analogy to Darwin, for example. That was a world-historic breakthrough that Darwin made... But there were things that Darwin didn't understand about evolution and there were things that are yet to be “worked out.”... But we, the people who uphold this and want to continue to learn about it, are working within the tradition and framework, in a broad sense, established by Darwin, even if we don't agree with him on everything.... I look at Marx the same way. Marx saw the revolution coming out of Europe – he saw it coming in more immediate terms than it's been, unfortunately.... You're expecting it to come quickly in Europe, and your view is that this will take care of things, in the sense that these are the advanced countries, where the proletarian revolution will first succeed, and once these become socialist, then the rest of the world will be transformed and “the problems of history will be cleared up....”

[But] once you begin to get a longer view of things, two things stand out to you. One, proletarian revolution is not coming, at this stage at least, mainly from Europe.... And second of all, we've gotten a longer view of history and we understand more the complexity and variegated nature of history over the past, but we also see that this epoch we're in is a much longer epoch than Marx anticipated.¹⁴⁹

The third point is that it is absurd to suggest that Marx was oblivious, callous to, or in any way apologetic about colonialism. Marx and Engels were emphatically clear on the brutal and rapacious nature of the emerging capitalist system throughout the world. Engels studied the terrible conditions of the proletarians in England, and Marx graphically described the international process by which this system drew blood from all over the world:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theater. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain, assumes giant dimensions in England's Anti-Jacobin War, and is still going on in the opium wars against China.... [Capital emerges] dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.¹⁵⁰

Ajith's Opposition to “Scientific Consciousness”

Ajith says,

Furthermore, scientific consciousness itself must be critiqued in order to separate its rational content from the influence of Enlightenment values

seen in it. These are particularly manifested in the claim made about modern science as the final word, the disparaging of pre-modern thought and practices on that basis and a utilitarian approach on the human-nature relation. In the oppressed countries, the belittling of traditional knowledge continues to be a dominant aspect of the comprador modernisation, developmental paradigm.¹⁵¹

Let's take a look at Ajith's confusion. He throws out the term “scientific consciousness” but does not define it in any way other than to say it shares the “values” of the Enlightenment. What does he mean? Ajith reveals a disturbing view of science and scientific understanding. Isn't Marxism itself “scientific consciousness”? Perhaps what Ajith means by “scientific consciousness” is the approach and understanding used in the natural sciences as they came to be generalized during the Enlightenment and as is practiced in the present imperialist-dominated world today. But even if he means this, Ajith is still wrong.

It is true that the practice of science is a social enterprise: the discovery and the debate over the truths about reality take place within the framework of a class-divided society and are profoundly marked by the social system and prevailing ideology. For example, science was practiced much differently in the USSR when it was socialist and in Mao's China, and even more so as the revolution deepened in the course of the GPCR. But scientific *knowledge itself* is not identical to the practice or “industry” of science in any particular social system.

Let's leave aside Ajith's “scientific consciousness” for a moment and look at what actually happened in the sciences during the period more or less corresponding to the Enlightenment. A new approach to knowing reality was consolidating in opposition to defining or knowing things by qualitative definitions (Aristotle's Earth, Water, Air, and Fire). The emerging scientific approach relied upon consulting reality, and quantitative measurements, repeatable experiments, and empirical methodology became established.

The role of rational reasoning (logical deduction, formal logic, scientific languages such as calculus, and the development of higher mathematics more generally) also developed apace. Relying on *a priori* philosophical investigation (truths are pre-given as constructs of the mind or by God) was challenged and replaced by new advances in the different sciences. In fact, for the first time science was in the process of breaking free, i.e., differentiating itself, from philosophy (science had previously been called “natural philosophy”). The establishment of the scientific method, its generalization, and its influence on other spheres of thought represented a revolution in human thinking.

There were, of course, serious limitations and errors in how science was practiced under capitalism earlier and how that continues today. Some of these errors result from a lack of knowledge, from limitations in the instruments available for observation and testing, and so forth. However, the social system and the ideological and political superstructure also play a role in the practice of science and can either propel forward or disorient and hamper scientific inquiry and discovery or do both of these to some extent.

Darwin and his followers, for example, had to fight ferociously for the establishment of the truth of the theory of natural selection precisely because that theory had to go up directly not only against the teachings of the Church (which remained powerful even in

the epoch of the capitalist revolution) but also against the dominant worldview of the times that change was not possible without a Designer. In Darwin's theory, the place of humans in the universe was radically demoted from representing the "image of God" to a particularly successful if astonishing mammal.

What Ajith cannot understand is that the limitations and errors of scientists and more generally of the whole society's approach to science cannot be attributed to "scientific consciousness" in general. On the contrary, where there were (or are and certainly will be in the future) failings and limitations in the approach to science, these represent precisely those methods, conclusions, and arguments that in fact fall short of, or go against, the actual scientific method.

Science and Traditional Knowledge

Ajith argues against seeing "science as the final word, the disparaging of pre-modern thought and practices on that basis and a utilitarian approach on the human-nature relation. In the oppressed countries, the belittling of traditional knowledge continues to be a dominant aspect of the comprador modernization, developmental paradigm." We will add, not only the "pre-modern" thought in traditional societies but even other "non-scientific" forms of knowing such as the arts, non-scientific investigation, and speculation must also not be "disparaged."

The point is that a correct communist world outlook that insists upon a rigorous application of a scientific approach and method does not, despite Ajith's charge, "disparage" other sources of knowledge and fields of inquiry. In this sense, "non-scientific" frameworks of "pre-modern thought" most definitely can and must be interrogated by the standards of the most advanced scientific knowledge. Nor does such an interrogation imply that Marxism considers other schools of thought and inquiry without value or simply relics of the past.

Avakian has, as we commented earlier, made the point that there will always be "awe and wonder" in the face of the magnitude and astounding complexity of the universe. Art and imagination will always be part of how human beings approach this (for example, Avakian asked "can we do without myth?" and proceeded to show how we must do without myth in the religious sense but that imagination will always form part of human consciousness).¹⁵²

A genuine scientific approach, dialectical materialism, does not seek to wipe out or disqualify all other worldviews, but rather provides the grounding to criticize what must be criticized, to appreciate their contributions better, and to assimilate their insights. But the point is not to adopt an *alternative* to science, rather we must make use of all contributing elements and understand the processes at work in an overall scientific framework both to solve immediate needs and to incorporate these parts of knowledge in the overall treasure chest of humanity's understanding of the world. All of this is true for both the most advanced capitalist countries as well as for more "traditional" ones. It is also true that when it comes to traditional society special attention needs to be paid to the legacy of oppression, forced assimilation, and cultural degradation, much of which has been carried out in the name of "modernization" or even "science."

It is a slander to claim, as Ajith does, that Avakian is oblivious to these complex and

difficult issues. To the contrary, note with what care and what dialectics Avakian addresses these thorny problems:

How do you put your arms around the history of humanity? What about indigenous people whose religion is so crucial to their sense of identity? Difficult – but we don't have a shot without this kind of outlook and methodology I'm arguing for. Without this you are going to uncritically tail this or brutally suppress it when it gets in the way.¹⁵³

Ajith Falls Back into Bed with Postmodernism

Ajith's apprehension and confusion over science and its method and approach necessarily puts him in the company of intellectual trends that share similar concerns over the availability of objective truth, the applicability of science to human society and the claim of Marxism to be a science.

Ajith states, “Postmodernist trends have made significant contributions in this matter” (in our view, the “matter” he is referring to is the “matter” of opposing materialism). He continues, “Though their relativism led them to an ahistorical rejection of the Enlightenment and modernization, the critical insights they offer must be synthesized by Marxism. The contributions made by theoreticians of the Frankfurt school are also to be acknowledged.”¹⁵⁴ Quite a statement from someone who has been arguing that there has not been any qualitative advance in communist theory since Mao's death!

Our disagreement with Ajith is not that he is examining non-Marxist schools for possible insights, but that he shares important parts of their premises and concepts and thus is unable to discern what is correct or incorrect in the thinking of these schools or to recast any possible insights into a dialectical materialist framework.

Ajith's short but telling references to “the theoretical advances” of the postmodernists and the Frankfurt school cannot be ignored as a passing aside or excused as a minor mistake. It is a reflection of Ajith's deep-rooted and conscious allegiance to some of the key, either openly or disguised, anti-Marxist and anti-communist intellectual currents both as they present themselves today and as they developed historically.

The problem is that what Ajith sees as “theoretical advances” are nothing of the sort. They are part of a trend among many intellectuals to *move away* from a critique of the capitalist system as a system and instead attack the science and reason that were proclaimed as the authority in the Enlightenment against previous theological ideological systems used by the reactionary social forces (especially those associated with the feudal system and the Church), which came under attack in the bourgeois revolution.

We have seen earlier Ajith's preoccupation with drawing a sharp distinction between the scientific method used to study the natural world and the study of human society. We have seen that he accepts “class truth,” which objectively goes against the correspondence theory of the truth that is at the heart of materialist epistemology. These two planks of Ajith's worldview put into question the know-ability of the world. Here we see the a major convergence between Ajith and one of the principal present-day opposition currents to Marxism, in academia, the arts, and even progressive political movements, postmodernism.

Even though postmodernism is an amorphous conglomeration of related currents of thought, and many of its practitioners reject the postmodernist label, nonetheless it is possible to indicate some of its shared themes. One basic tenet is that objective truth is not obtainable. Further, some postmodernists argue that the “overshooting” or the “excess of reason” are responsible for what they describe as the “double tragedies” of the 20th century: Nazi Germany with its Holocaust and Stalin's Soviet Union and the Gulag (sometimes put as Stalin and Hitler). Any attempt to assert a claim to objective truth is, in the thinking of the postmodernists, playing with fire and leads to totalitarianism.¹⁵⁵

Ajith's discomfort with scientific methodology and its extension to human society shares the postmodernist rejection of the availability of objective truth.

Replacing Truth by “Narrative”

Furthermore, Ajith's defense of “class truth” has very much in common with the postmodernist conception of “narrative.” By “narrative” the postmodernists mean that there are many interpretations of reality; that truth is relative to each narrative (“you have your truth and I have my truth”); and that none of them can legitimately claim to represent objective reality. Given that there is no objective standard, what then is the basis for determining which competing narratives or assertions will be taken as truth? According to much postmodernist thinking, it is “power,” that is, the dominant economic, social, and political forces in a given society, that determines the validity or truth of a given assertion.

It is, in fact, the case that in class-divided society the ruling classes impose their interests, their morality and values, their worldview and many specific ideas and interpretations on the whole of society. As Marx and Engels put it, “the ruling ideas of an epoch are ever the ideas of the ruling class.”¹⁵⁶ The reality of Marx's pithy statement is one reason why many progressive people were attracted to intellectuals of this trend, such as Michel Foucault, who exposed enshrined assumptions and edicts of contemporary bourgeois society.

The error of the postmodernists is that they respond to the ruling classes' intellectual domination by concluding that there is no objective truth whatsoever. “Knowledge,” according to Foucault, “is an effect of power.”¹⁵⁷ The struggle thus becomes not whether or not a set of ideas corresponds to the material world but rather “whose truth” is going to be established in society. Inversely, whatever set of ideas helps the oppressed achieve its ends (for example, to come to power) thus becomes the equivalent of truth, an ersatz truth.

And, indeed, in the communist movement as well there has been an attraction to this way of thinking in the form of using social or political criteria to define what is true, hence “political truth” or “class truth,” which, as previously addressed, Ajith so adamantly defends. Ultimately, whoever holds power determines what is true, in this logic, which would apply equally to both the exploiting class and the revolutionary proletariat. Here is what Avakian wrote about such “idealist epistemology”:

This is unvarnished subjective, idealist epistemology (the notion that whether something is true or not is a matter to be determined by the subject, by a particular individual, without regard to whether it conforms to a larger,

objective reality). But this is subjective idealism in the service of *objective* idealism – that is, religion and belief in the supernatural as objectively true (or as functionally the same as objectively true). And we know where the viewpoint that it doesn't matter if something is factually true or not – it can be an illusion with regard to reality, but if it fulfills a function as defined by someone somewhere, *a priori*, then that's as good as the truth, if not literally the truth – we know where that kind of thing can lead, where it has led and will lead. Not only to all kinds of errors, but to all kinds of horrors. If everyone is free to choose what's valid and true according to whether it suits them, we're back to all the problems with relativism – including, ultimately, particularly when myths conflict with each other, the reduction of things to a contest of power relations to see which myth can be imposed over the other. In short, “might makes right” – this is where things can go, and have often gone, when there is no objective criterion to determining if something is true and valid or not.¹⁵⁸

We have already seen that Ajith seeks to dismiss Avakian (and really all of Marxism) with his charge of “scientism.” Here, too, Ajith is promoting a central theme of postmodernism. For example, some major postmodernists have argued that science is just a utilitarian techno-industrial narrative or a “social construct.”¹⁵⁹

Another tenet of postmodernism is to oppose the “authoritativeness” of science, that is, the upholding of scientific methodology as the paradigm in society, which they trace back to the negative, to use Ajith's words, “influence of Enlightenment values.” Scientific methods such as testing, verification and falsification, etc., are considered earmarks of positivism and opposed by postmodernism. For Ajith as well, using scientific methods in the study of society (recall his objection to submitting Marxist theoretical claims to the test of “falsifiability”) is evidence of “scientism.”

These persistent trends in Ajith's thinking resonate closely with the intellectual commitments of postmodernist theorizing in the West about the prospects and the forces of social change. Advocates of these schools, many of them “leftists,” are suspicious and critical (sometime the word “incredulous” is used) of “grand narratives,” including Marxism, which is treated as a continuation of the Enlightenment tradition.

A Non-Scientific Critique of Capitalism

Postmodernism argues that the rational thinking associated with the Enlightenment and the search for objective truth is inherently oppressive, misguided, and does not have the universal validity it claims. The ascendancy of the Western world brought the ascendancy of Western philosophy and its treatment of science. As we noted earlier, Avakian calls attention to how science and Enlightenment values are “used” in the service of capitalism and imperialism. But for Ajith the problem is Avakian's failure to note that “scientific consciousness” “inherently” has the values and class character of the Enlightenment. In essence, Ajith treats the “scientific consciousness” of the Enlightenment as if it were the “class truth” of the bourgeoisie. The further development of Marxism as a science and Avakian's insistence on treating Marxism as such is thus anathema to Ajith.

The growth of capitalism and the suffering and exploitation that its development brought to the masses, the reduction of all human relations and previous values and ethos to what

Marx called the “cash nexus,”¹⁶⁰ led to waves of disenchantment and criticism directed against the emerging “modern world” (i.e., the world capitalist system). Disillusioned critics among artists, intellectuals, and political figures fought the “ethos” and claims of the Enlightenment that the world can be understood and changed for the betterment of humanity by using science and rational thinking.

This mode of criticism was, and remains, extremely contradictory. It includes clearly reactionary political programs and ideologies, for example, those who defended the monarchy or religious dogma. But there were also insightful criticisms of the unbridled use of technology, such as the famous story of Frankenstein's monster created by a science gone wild, by Mary Shelly, herself part of the Romantic tradition that arose in reaction to capitalism. In philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche was also part of this trend of rejection of the contemporary morals and values upheld by bourgeois society. But his “anti-establishment” views were not scientific, and he “actively ignored” Marxism, which was becoming influential in Germany and elsewhere in his time.

In the 20th century this same kind of non-scientific critique of capitalism re-emerged and was greatly heightened by the horrors of the two world wars. Martin Heidegger, whose essential work before, during, and after the Second World War represents an influential philosophical trend which impacted on the postmodernists, looked for “authenticity” in a disenchanted world dominated by the logic of industrial production and technology. Heidegger was a “nostalgic” for all that had been lost by modern society.¹⁶¹

The postmodernists have placed themselves squarely in the tradition of this non-Marxist and ultimately non-materialist critique of capitalism (which got a huge boost after the defeat of socialism in China in 1976 and the collapse of the Soviet social-imperialist bloc in 1989-91, along with the bourgeoisie's stepped-up slanders against communism). Ajith finds backing in this kind of criticism for the so-called “Maoism” with which he combats an alleged Eurocentric Marxism plagued by “scientism.”

The postmodernists are a source of some insights, due to their “interrogation,” as they put it, of the underlying assumptions of the canons of Western culture. For example, with respect to “the formation of the subject,” Foucault and others have discussed how various factors, such as power, knowledge, and discourse, have helped produce (“construct”) the “subject.” An example might be how the slave system in the U.S. constructed the white subject and the conceptions of rights and freedoms that took shape in that society.¹⁶² Postmodernists have shown some of the ways in which the knowledge and control of the Western colonialist powers interpenetrated.¹⁶³ The colonialists defined the reality of the colonial world to such an extent that the colonized people accepted these definitions.

Interrogating these kinds of assumptions has served to broaden and deepen avenues of learning about the world. But these insights must not be eclectically grafted onto a pseudo-Maoist framework as Ajith is seeking to do. On the contrary, as Avakian emphasizes, these insights need to be sifted through, wrong arguments need to be rejected, and even much of what is insightful and partially correct needs to be recast in a scientific framework.

Ajith's Embrace of the Frankfurt School

It is not surprising that Ajith also openly acknowledges his affinity for and debt to the

Frankfurt school. The Frankfurt school predated the postmodernists in some of their basic assumptions, in particular their efforts to deny the scientific foundation of Marxism and historical materialism and their attack on the Enlightenment.

The Frankfurt school, whose “contributions” Ajith wants to acknowledge, emerged in the crisis-ridden Germany of the Weimar Republic and the atmosphere produced by the defeats of the German revolution in 1919 and 1921. They professed a “non-dogmatic Marxism,” by which they meant, in particular, opposing the model of the Bolshevik revolution and the example of the USSR under the leadership of Lenin and Stalin. The most important theoretical statement from this school is the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno.¹⁶⁴ In this book they condemn the Enlightenment tradition for its “instrumental reason,” which they consider a crude, materialist, and “productionist” world outlook and project. Western society as it issued from the Enlightenment was cast in the model of manipulating and dominating nature and, in turn, brought all aspects of social life dominated and “totally administrated” by this logic.

The Frankfurt school argues that the Enlightenment opened the door to all of the horrors that we witness under capitalism.¹⁶⁵ And the Frankfurt school philosophers believed that Marxism and historical materialism would not be able to fulfill its claim of emancipating humanity because it suffers from the shortcoming of materialism and scientific methodology. We see the affinity with Ajith's denunciation of the “scientific consciousness” of the Enlightenment. Along with other affinities between Ajith's line of thought and major elements of the critical theory of the Frankfurt school, particularly the positions of Jürgen Habermas, they share an eerily common criticism of “scientism” and an ambivalent position on the role of religion in today's society.¹⁶⁶

Marxism, in the view of the Frankfurt school, showed a deficiency in encompassing philosophical thinking: it had lost itself somewhere between science and philosophy. By this they meant that Marxism crippled itself by its scientific pretensions and that this “deficit” needed to be compensated by giving due place to philosophy, especially German idealism and Immanuel Kant.¹⁶⁷

What do Ajith, the postmodernists, and the Frankfurt school have in common? All of them have, or at least began with, a critique of the ills of capitalism and modern society yet refuse or are incapable of a thoroughgoing materialist and scientific analysis of the fundamental nature of capitalist society. In philosophical and political debate they either shun or openly oppose the existence of objective truth, the correspondence theory of truth, and the scientific method and approach to understanding reality and the world.

Ajith is able to combine religiosity – notions like the inevitable victory of the proletarian revolution – and key elements of postmodernism.

Ajith and the Kantian Tradition

As we saw earlier, Ajith insists on “the foundational significance of class position, the material position of the class. All three components of the proletarian world outlook – stand, viewpoint and method – flow from this material reality; they are ultimately determined by it.” We have put this to considerable critique. What is directly relevant in our discussion here is that the view that the proletariat, because of its position, has a

special purchase on truth – this view leads in the direction that others who do not occupy this class position (non-proletarians) cannot gain access, or the same level of access, to this knowledge. And, therefore, knowledge ultimately is “observer-dependent.”

Ultimately, according to Ajith's logic, there can be no reliable objective knowledge of reality and especially human society *as it is*, and what is available as knowledge is how the world *appears* to specific observers, in this case the proletariat. This is a longstanding debate in philosophy and science: can the world be known independently of the mind?

Kant, the darling of the Frankfurt school, is renowned for his dualism, his attempt to straddle and reconcile idealism and materialism. He argued that there is a subjective element in the construction of knowledge, that one cannot know the “thing in itself.”¹⁶⁸ Rather, Kant claimed, we can only know phenomena as they appear “for us.” In Ajith's case, the “for us” becomes “for the class.” In other words, truth is reserved, structured, and restricted along class lines. It is on the basis of this kind of epistemology that Ajith defends the statement that “truth has a class character” and that “Marxism is true because it is partisan.”

The striking similarity of Ajith's thinking to the features of the Kantian view doesn't end there. During the same period when the modern sciences were developing and separating from philosophy and metaphysics, there was resistance to broadening the scope of science to include the social realm. We have seen Ajith arguing on the same grounds as Kant of yore and as the neo-Kantians of the 20th century (including some of the arguments that Lenin directly takes on in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*).

This is a march toward relativism, agnosticism, and the “non-knowability” of the objective world and ultimately what the postmodernists call “incredulity” towards the claims of science.

IX. AJITH'S UGLY AND TORTURED BRIEF FOR RELIGION AND THE CHAINS OF TRADITION

Ajith's worries about “scientific consciousness,” his taking exception to the universal applicability of science to society and history, his concern about “Enlightenment-alism” and to “not disparage pre-modern thought and practices” – all of this is concentrated in how he handles the question of religion and traditional morality in human society.

This is also another point of convergence between Ajith and postmodernism.¹⁶⁹ Consider Ajith's statement about how to properly assess and appreciate the role of religion: “The scientific understanding on the role played by religion has been deepened through the studies in diverse fields. Its historic role in the creation and development of morality and social ties and its imprint in the human brain are now better known.”¹⁷⁰

We have seen that Ajith is not able to correctly understand the relationship between ideas and consciousness and the material and social conditions that form the basis for these ideas. Ajith's refusal of the scientific method for understanding social reality, including ideas and ideologies, and his nationalism land him in serious confusion and deadly illusions about the nature and the role of religious fundamentalism – and in outright conciliation with it.

Ajith considers it wrong to call groups like the Taliban and reactionary Islamic fundamentalist forces “enemies.” In his view this is “imperialist economism.” “What is needed is the firm and unconditional defense of the right of an oppressed people or section of society to resist with arms. Opposition to the ideology or social program they follow cannot be allowed to dilute this.”¹⁷¹ He continues his tortured rationalization:

The essential problem with the main resistance in Iraq or Afghanistan is not that it is Islamic, or, to put it broadly, led by a religious ideology. Religious ideologies have played a progressive role in the past.... They still can become the means of expressing national and democratic content because in the semi-colonial, semi-feudal conditions of oppressed countries religion is not only a spiritual affair. It is also a way of life tightly interwoven with national culture. In the specific issue under discussion, the main problem lies in the particular elaboration of this ideology, the reactionary social programs being advanced by the more determined Islamic resistance forces – their fundamentalism.¹⁷²

This is as fantastical as it is appalling. Here a self-described Maoist, a supposed communist, gazes out into the world. It is a world in which all manner of medieval horrors are being carried out and all manner of obscurantism being enforced by Islamic and other fundamentalisms. A world in which Marxism has been relentlessly attacked... in which secularism and science and critical thinking are under extreme siege in large parts of the world... in which women's humanity is denied, degraded, and ravaged by patriarchy and religious tradition.

But Ajith beseeches us not to get too worked up by the leading role of religious ideology as such – it's just that not enough progressive religious ideology is in the driver's seat of national resistance. Ajith offers up an ugly brief for religion and an unconscionable conciliation with fundamentalism.

This is Ajith in his full glory, showing us where his celebration of spontaneous class feeling, his rejection of Marxism as a science, and his insistence on appreciating national particularity and national context lead. Which is assuredly not the communist revolution that Marx encapsulated as bringing about the “two most radical ruptures”: with “traditional property relations” and with “traditional ideas.”

Putting the Veil on the Oppression of Women

Think about it. Ajith bends over backwards to credit religion for “its articulation, spread and assimilation as a *national* discourse” and its role in national resistance. Meanwhile he is totally oblivious to the degradation and subjugation of half of humanity. Ajith's obscene apology for religion belittles the colossal weight of religion on society, ideologically as well as politically, and in particular, through justifying and enforcing the oppression of women. This is not some accidental lapse of judgement. Rather, his roaring silence¹⁷³ on such a fundamental question, this flagrant blind spot, is very much a product of and consistent with Ajith's whole worldview.

The insistence on a reified and “national” proletariat, the belief that revolutionary communist consciousness exudes from the material conditions and feelings of the

proletariat, the refusal to recognize the indispensable role and real scope of the ideological struggle needed for transforming the world outlook of people in preparing themselves and the ground for revolution – leads Ajith to a narrow, circumscribed, pale, and listless idea of “emancipation” from which half of society is already excluded.

Once again, the contrast in program and opposing worldviews between the residue of the past and the new synthesis could not be starker. Avakian writes:

So in this context, as well as in the larger, world-historic context of the communist revolution, there is a profound and pressing need for those representing the emancipatory goals of the communist revolution, with its final aim of the abolition of all class divisions and all relations of exploitation and oppression, to make further leaps and ruptures in our understanding of and approach to the woman question, in theory and in practice – in the realm of ideological and political line, and mobilizing mass struggle based on that line – in accordance with the pivotal and decisive role this question objectively occupies, not only in terms of ending the millennia of subjugation and degradation of half of humanity, but also the way in which this is integrally and indispensably bound up with the emancipation of humanity as a whole and the advance to a whole new era in human history with the achievement of communism throughout the world.¹⁷⁴

Tailing after Nationalism, Prettifying Fundamentalism

To return to Ajith's views on religion. As he sees the matter, the ideological superstructure of oppressed countries such as Iraq contains an aspect of national resistance, it voices a “perceived authenticity.” In his discussion, Ajith gives particular pride of place to religion, which he credits as “not only a spiritual affair. It is also a way of life tightly interwoven with national culture,” which is true, of course, but hardly a reason to excuse or tail religion.

For Ajith, all the contradictions within the nation and in the thinking of the people are *mitigated* by the contradiction with imperialism. Religion and backward and reactionary tradition and thinking generally are excused or justified because, in Ajith's view, this ideology is imbued with an authentic national (sometimes even “democratic”!) content that is in resistance to imperialism and national oppression. But there are problems with this thinking: such ideas do not reflect directly or in an un-mediated way the underlying social antagonisms or the social reality of any particular class or strata, let alone a nation as a whole, which is rent with class contradictions.

In any given national culture there are many and often sharply contradictory elements. Some of these elements do reflect, to various degrees, historically positive sentiments and aspirations. Many of these elements echo similar revolutionary or progressive features found in other cultures as well. On the other hand, fundamentally and overwhelmingly religion is a chain and an obstacle to understanding and radically changing the world.

Often masses of people do use religion to express their hopes of finding solace and “deliverance” from their lot. However, that does not change the reality that religion helps enshrine servile relations in society and, generally speaking, justifies the subjugation of the masses to the ruling authorities. It is true that historically, especially before the ascent

of a scientific outlook and materialism, progressive and revolutionary trends or movements were often wrapped in religious garb.

Today a scientific outlook and analysis, and most especially revolutionary communism, is available and required to understand the world and transform it in the necessary direction. National culture and religion, like everything else, must not be exempted from rigorous scientific dissection. Ajith wants to give free rein to the spontaneously available national culture and the role of religion within it.

Indeed, what Ajith is really arguing for amounts to saying that the communists must become the better expression of all the elements in the national culture, including religion. What else does he mean when he says,

Avakian's arguments totally fail to identify and locate the major role played by national sentiments and culture in the growth of Third World fundamentalism.... Its articulation, spread and assimilation as a national discourse is nowhere acknowledged [by Avakian].... Understanding the "national" claim of fundamentalism helps us locate the failure of Maoists to uphold the national banner in oppressed countries.¹⁷⁵

It should be pointed out in passing that if Maoists failed to "uphold the national banner" to Ajith's satisfaction, including some particularly ugly aspects of it, then it was not due to any lack of trying: tailing after nationalism, religion and patriarchal thinking has, unfortunately, been an historical problem.

Just how far from reality his method of analysis has taken Ajith can be seen in his comparisons between today's "Islamic forces" and the heroic struggle waged by the Vietnamese people:

Iraq and Afghanistan are not strictly comparable to Vietnam. There a revolutionary force was leading a national liberation war. Here the national war is mainly organized and led by Islamic forces. But, in terms of the situation the U.S. finds itself today, the similarities are striking. This is rooted in their ultimate source, the working out of the contradiction between imperialism and oppressed nations and peoples, which sets the context and determines the dynamics.¹⁷⁶

Ajith reaches this conclusion by resorting to some of the same kind of metaphysical thinking that we observed earlier in his discussion of "fundamentals" versus "application." He begins the above passage by declaring "the principal contradiction between imperialism versus oppressed people and nations"¹⁷⁷ as a given and unquestioned premise. Furthermore, in Ajith's metaphysical ordering of things, "at any specific period the principal contradiction, not the fundamental contradiction as such, will determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions." Finally, he deduces from his logical system false attributes about the different actors and comes to wrong conclusions about the roles that they play and the revolutionary tasks in these countries. Although Ajith is cautious enough not to equate the Islamist forces and the Vietnamese leadership exactly – or "strictly," in his words, he winds up attributing the same role to both of them in "the working out of the contradiction between imperialism and oppressed nations and peoples."

Contrary to Ajith, it is not the “similarities” between Afghanistan and Vietnam but rather the dissimilarities that “are striking.” Ask the Islamic State in their new Caliphate how they feel about being credited with becoming “the means of expressing national and democratic content”!

Avakian on the “Two Outmodeds” and the Ideological Struggle with Religion

Ajith charges Avakian with being “aloof from this messy reality.” In reality, Avakian has brought forth a pivotal analysis that elucidates a key dynamic of the current world situation. Here is Avakian on what he calls the “two outmodeds”:

What we see in contention here with Jihad on the one hand and McWorld/McCrusade on the other hand, are historically outmoded strata among colonized and oppressed humanity up against historically outmoded ruling strata of the imperialist system. These two reactionary poles reinforce each other, even while opposing each other. If you side with either of these “outmodeds,” you end up strengthening both.

While this is a very important formulation and is crucial to understanding much of the dynamics driving things in the world in this period, at the same time we do have to be clear about which of these “historically outmodeds” has done the greater damage and poses the greater threat to humanity: It is the “historically outmoded ruling strata of the imperialist system,” and in particular the U.S. imperialists.¹⁷⁸

This analysis has critical implications not only for understanding the character of events in the world. It also speaks to the necessary stance that communists in both the oppressor and oppressed countries must take and the kind of all-around political and ideological work called for – not least, because many basic masses in the oppressed countries have gravitated to reactionary fundamentalism.

By contrast, the political and ideological harm of what Ajith is arguing should be clear: his United Front which dares not say its name, indeed Ajith's strategy and orientation for confronting the imperialist system, will not lead to liberation. Rather it is a recipe for tailing after reactionary forces or justifying trying to unite with them under the signboard of dealing with “this messy reality.”

Rather than relying on the kind of concocted, idealist wishful thinking espoused by Ajith, what is needed is the approach Avakian describes to understanding the conditions for communist revolution in today's complex world:

It is like proceeding through a thicket to actually get to a grasp of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism *and* how it is actually moving and developing, and the different forms of motion of all this, and how they're interpenetrating. This is not readily apparent, even to communists who are seeking to systematically apply the scientific outlook and method of communism to the world and to history and to society and nature.... We have a responsibility to fight for the correct understanding and application of the communist viewpoint and method,

to see to it not only that this isn't lost but that it becomes, on a qualitatively higher level, a real material force, taken up by growing ranks of the masses of people, of proletarians and other strata.¹⁷⁹

What is Avakian's actual attitude toward the masses of people who believe in religion? Contrary to Ajith's charge of "crass rationalism," consider how Avakian actually calls on communists to deal with the religious thinking prevalent among the masses. Avakian denounces the condescending "smug arrogance of the enlightened"¹⁸⁰ who are actually oblivious to or overwhelmed by the grip that religion holds on important sections of the masses. He is quite clear that large sections of the masses will believe in religion, not only now but well into the future socialist society.

Avakian says clearly:

[I]n terms of the basis of unity in the political struggle, the dividing line should never be whether or not people believe or god and are religious, but whether they are willing to unite, and can be won to unite, in ways that are objectively in the interests of the masses of people. To the degree that they do so, it is necessary to build unity with them, and to struggle with them to do so more fully and consistently, even while struggle is also carried out with them, in the ideological realm, over the question of which worldview actually corresponds to reality and will lead to emancipation.¹⁸¹

Avakian sees this ideological struggle among the people as part of the dynamism that can help the whole of the society to move ahead even in the period of socialist transformation.

Ajith mocks Avakian for underscoring the importance of "hammering religion in the ideological sphere," which he cites as an example of "crass rationalism." Actually Avakian is quite clear that what is involved here is not only a simple struggle of scientific versus religious ideas; he points out that "in circumstances of great social upheaval and struggle against the established order, people go through great changes in their thinking and their way of relating to each other. If this were not so, revolutions could never be made and the social relations could never be changed by people consciously reacting back upon them."¹⁸²

But religion *is* part of the ideological superstructure and must be treated (i.e., "hammered") in that sphere, in its own right.

Avakian also stresses:

It is necessary to struggle, boldly and vigorously, against religion in all its forms – and especially against fundamentalist religious obscurantism and absolutism and its expression politically as Christian Fascism in the U.S. It is crucial not to in any way underestimate the importance of the struggle in the realm of thinking, of ideology, and specifically struggle against the religious worldview in all its manifestations, because of the way in which this interferes with and leads people away from really understanding reality, and therefore being able to engage it and transform it in accordance with their own fundamental interests.¹⁸³

The idea that these types of ideological issues can be ignored while appealing to the masses in other arenas, such as in economic or political struggles, and acting as if these ideological issues can be dealt with as a simple byproduct of other struggles – this is a dangerous illusion. It is very closely related to Ajith's adoption of what amounts to “standpoint epistemology”: that classes will wage struggle according to their interests, and the viewpoint that emerges will be established through this struggle. In this way, there is no need to take up the struggle in the realm of ideas. All of this is consistent with Ajith's view.

At the same time that Avakian has called for bold and robust ideological struggle against religion, he has also extended broad arms to and promoted an approach of unity-struggle-unity with people motivated by religious belief and conviction to stand with the oppressed and against injustice. An outstanding example of this was the high-profile November 2014 dialogue on revolution and religion between Avakian and Cornel West, the prominent public intellectual and revolutionary Christian.

The masses need to become, as Marx put it, “fit to rule,” and part of this means that a decisive section of them need to be won to a scientific worldview. Contrary to Ajith's assumptions, history has shown that when the communists do not boldly and comprehensively confront ideological issues from a materialist and communist perspective, they end up ceding ground to the reactionary forces defending these reactionary ideologies. Who needs Ajith's half-hearted and eclectic defense of tradition, morality and religion when you can have the Taliban or the Hindu chauvinist BJP!

Choosing between the “Two Outmodeds,” or Bringing Forward Another Way

Ajith says that

[A] lot of ideological churning is going on among Muslims, and that is true of the religious sphere too... The pro-West political stance of some trends of Islamic reformism facilitates the appropriation of anti-imperialism by fundamentalism. It in turn bolsters its claims on being the true rendering of Islam and helps it block the democratization of Islamic belief. Maoist ideological intervention will have to address all of these aspects if it is to make headway.¹⁸⁴

Note that Ajith is not discussing possible political contexts in which relations with some Islamic forces need to be analyzed concretely, rather he is discussing the “Maoist *ideological intervention*,” which means accommodating with reactionary, outmoded ideology under the guise of calling one trend or another “democratic” or “anti-imperialist.”

When Ajith says that “the main problem lies in the particular elaboration of this ideology” and not the ideology itself, he seems to be embarking on a search for an Islam that is ideologically progressive which needs to be distinguished from a correct policy of seeking joint political activities with believers where appropriate combined with a vigorous ideological struggle against religion. Indeed, Ajith strongly implies that the communists have the task of helping the “democratization of Islamic belief.”

Elsewhere Ajith warns that, “if analysis is guided by moral repugnance, the whole lot [of fundamentalist forces] will just be seen as reactionary, outmoded strata, period....”¹⁸⁵ We have no apology to make for our “moral repugnance” towards the ideology and practices of reactionary Islamist (and other reactionary religious fundamentalist) forces. Furthermore, it is crucial that in the political arena these religious fundamentalists be thoroughly opposed because of their reactionary social vision and program. It is a horrific and enslaving medieval outlook that happens to have certain contradictions with imperialism. But, as Avakian points out, to support one outmoded is to strengthen the other: the task is to “bring forward another way.”

Ajith wants to cobble together an “anti-imperialist” front with the fundamentalists, as can be seen by his charge that the “Avakianists” fail to see that “[i]ts [fundamentalism's] articulation, spread and assimilation as a *national* discourse is nowhere acknowledged.” In fact, fundamentalism is not a program for national emancipation – it is a concentration of the interests and reactionary program of the outmoded strata of the oppressed nations.¹⁸⁶

Contrary to Ajith's hope of building an anti-imperialist front with such forces, current events are bearing out Avakian's analysis of the reactionary dynamic of the “two outmodeds,” and in particular that uniting with either outmoded ends up reinforcing the other.¹⁸⁷

Ajith claims that Avakian has not examined the reasons why religion has had an increasing grip on important sections of the masses in many countries around the world. This is, frankly, ridiculous, as any serious survey of Avakian's work shows a great deal of particular, detailed, and rigorous examination of the material, social, and ideological factors at work.¹⁸⁸

What Ajith objects to is that Avakian makes a thoroughgoing materialist analysis of religion (hence Ajith's denunciation of “crass rationalism”), whereas Ajith wants to reserve a niche or an enclave where science is excluded. Science itself must recognize, according to Ajith, religion's role in the “creation and development of morality and social ties and its imprint in the human brain.” Part of the resentment toward the Enlightenment and the accusation of “scientism” is the belief that an important realm of human reality gets mistreated by the materialist and scientific world outlook, thereby confounding what is actually science with the “scientific establishment” dominated by capitalism. This disenchantment with the existing world and the (mis)use of science leads some to source and ground ethics and morality in a transcendental realm.

For Ajith, however, traditional morality, and so many other “traditions' chains,” shall bind us (to paraphrase the *Internationale*), because in his view this is an important part of the heritage of a nation battling against imperialism.

X. CONCLUSION

By now we hope the reader will have seen how two quite different ways of looking at the world are sharply in contention. How can we know the world and how do we change it?

As we pointed out at the start of this article, the understanding of what we had called Marxism-Leninism-Maoism has been dividing into two. It now becomes possible – and

necessary – to more clearly separate the wheat from the chaff. Ajith serves as a useful if distorting mirror, like those seen in carnivals, in which every imperfection is blown up to grotesque proportions. Everyone who has been part of the communist movement can benefit from a look through the Ajith prism, precisely to better identify the very shadowy zones in the collective thinking of the communist movement that represent fetters and dead weight standing in the way of the emancipatory communist project soaring to new heights.

The world cries out for revolution. Not simply to carry forward the first and momentous breakthroughs of the communist revolution in the past century, but for *more* revolution, more thoroughly identifying and uprooting all that enslaves humanity; for revolution that is more capable of assimilating all that is fresh, invigorating, and revolutionary from every aspect of human existence, revolution resonating even more with people's deepest aspirations; for revolution that truly aims to achieve those “two most radical ruptures” with “traditional property relations” and “traditional ideas.”

This is the communist revolution we need and that we must bring about. For this revolution to take place, for it to take hold and grow deep roots among the basic masses of people, the radical-minded youth, artists and intellectuals, and others, and for millions to rise again to their feet, our movement must dust itself off and re-emerge after the terrible setback that has now lasted four decades.

It is this great need – the rescue, reinvigoration, and further development of communism – to which Bob Avakian has responded in an all-round way. He has theorized how, out of the very real material relations and contradictions of society, it is possible to build the communist movement that can do even better and go even further than the first stage of communist revolution. We need a worldview that does not rely on mystical properties such as inevitability or on supposed intrinsic qualities of proletarians and oppressed masses. On the contrary, it is crucial to weed out these errors that have marred the most revolutionary and scientific understanding of society, Marxism. But here postures Ajith clutching at the very metaphysical crutches. We can thus appreciate more deeply the epistemological rupture that Avakian is pioneering, his breakthroughs in the communist method and approach.

It is true that Ajith is often skilled at hiding the essence of his politics and worldview behind a jumble of words that mix up elements in a mishmash. Ajith's writings have long been marked by eclecticism. We should recall Lenin's observation that “substituting eclectics is the easiest way to deceive the people...”¹⁸⁹ Ajith's “Against Avakianism” is no exception, and we see repeatedly that he protests that others have unfairly excerpted his remarks and not paid sufficient attention to reproducing each and every fig leaf.

The vehemence of his protest is due not so much to a deliberate effort to cover his own errors as to the fact that eclectics is not merely the jumble of “on the one hand this, on the other hand that” but a jumble that masks what is principal in a contradiction. For Ajith, science is fine, as long as room is made for religion, too – and so religion cannot be fully interrogated by science. Whatever errors may have existed in the international communist movement with regard to seeking “political truth,” Ajith nevertheless insists on the validity of “class truth” – and so objective truth is tossed overboard. Teleology is opposed in words, but “an element of inevitability” is considered by Ajith to be essential to Marxist historiography – and so historical materialism is no longer materialist or

historical but vested with religious-like predestination.

The basic source of Ajith's eclecticism comes from his previous efforts to reconcile Marxism-Leninism-Maoism with a different and objectively opposite trend of thinking and politics that had long existed in the communist movement. For many years Ajith tried to straddle and reconcile objectively opposing and diverging understandings of Maoism. But such a position has become progressively impossible to maintain. "Maoism" that refuses to advance, that departs from its scientific and liberatory foundations, that fails to pick up on and follow the orientation that Mao himself pioneered – this kind of Maoism, Ajith's Maoism, "turns into its opposite."

On the other hand, Bob Avakian has brought forward a new synthesis of communism that is a further development of the theoretical framework for carrying forward the communist revolution at the very time when its enemies have declared it dead and buried. The new synthesis unearths, upholds, and builds upon the integral science of communist revolution as it was first founded by Marx and led to new heights by Lenin and then Mao. It draws insights from a wide range of human thought and endeavor. And the new synthesis makes critical ruptures with previous wrong understanding. It goes beyond Mao – and is taking Marxism to a new place. It is *the framework to go further and do better in making revolution and emancipating humanity*.

It is no longer possible for Ajith to keep one foot on the wharf and the other on the departing boat. He, and others who think like him, were faced with the need to make the leap in understanding that is required for the new leap in revolutionary practice to take place. But instead Ajith has fallen and is stuck up to his eyeballs in the residue of the past.

Further advance could come and did come in the only way that advance is ever possible – as a dialectic between destruction of the wrong and construction of the new, based on a ferocious defense of past accomplishments coupled with unsparing examination of the shortcomings, a bulldog certitude in the need and possibility of proletarian revolution along with an equally fierce insistence on critically absorbing all that is pouring from a thousand pores.

Ajith's own worldview probably makes him believe, as he charges, that Avakian's new synthesis can only lead to further isolation from the masses. In reality nothing is further from the case. It is the vision and program of Ajith that is hopelessly sectarian, petty, and incapable of inspiring a new generation of communists. Ajith hopes that somehow communists will be able to surf on the spontaneous struggle of the masses, and can then impose their "class truth" (as interpreted by the Ajiths of the world). But this is neither liberatory nor attractive.

Ajith's efforts to portray himself as the champion of (a certain version of) Maoism also helps explain his virulent distortion of the actual history of the Maoist movement following the 1976 coup in China, and especially the struggle to regroup the Maoist forces internationally through the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement. He feels obliged to degrade the well-known centrality of the contributions to this process made by Bob Avakian and the RCP,USA (which he calls "an outrageous lie"), while prettifying Ajith's own very contradictory role.¹⁹⁰ At some other time it will be necessary to untangle and refute Ajith's distorted and self-serving "history" of this process. But today's

ideological battle with Ajith, while rooted in and linked to a series of past disputes, is of a qualitatively different character. There is both the *basis and the need* for a whole new stage of communist revolution to take place.

In philosophy, which has been our focus here, the

... new synthesis is, in a meaningful sense, regrounding Marxism more fully in its scientific roots. It also involves learning from the rich historical experience since the time of Marx, upholding the fundamental objectives and principles of communism, which have been shown to be fundamentally correct, criticizing and discarding aspects that have been shown to be incorrect, or no longer applicable, and establishing communism even more fully and firmly on a scientific foundation.¹⁹¹

To the extent that there were errors in the communist movement, including in the thinking of its greatest leaders, this should neither make communists shrink in horror nor adopt an ostrich-like defense of secondary weaknesses. But what were mistakes in one historical context, when championed, canonized and developed as Ajith does, become transformed into a qualitatively different project for society.

The new synthesis “re-ideologizes” communism and puts it on a firmer, more scientific footing. More based in reality, more dialectical, more possible, and more desirable. This is not “rationalism.” It is not “scientism.” It is communism. A communism that has emerged over several decades of ferocious attack, from its greatest political and ideological challenge, not “intact” but re-synthesized, armed with lessons of the past, assimilating the understanding that humanity has gained in diverse fields, with a stronger sense of mission and, most importantly, with a *deeper and more scientific* method and approach to carrying the revolution forward to its next stage.

Humanity needs to transcend the whole capitalist epoch and the very division of human society into classes. There are millions and millions who can be won to understand and act on this truth. The communists need to cast aside all ideas and methods of thinking that stand in the way of accomplishing this.

- 1 Bob Avakian, *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*, "Bob Avakian in a Discussion with Comrades on Epistemology: On Knowing and Changing the World," Insight Press, 2005, p. 43.
- 2 Clyde Young (1949-2014) was a member of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. See more about Clyde Young see <http://revcom.us/a/356/clyde-young-1949-2014-a-life-lived-for-the-people-and-full-emancipation-en.html>
- 3 The first wave of the proletarian revolution began with the establishment of the Paris Commune in 1871 but which lasted from March 18 to May 28.
- 4 The Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) was formed in 1984 as the "embryonic centre of the world's Maoist forces." It was united around its founding document, the *Declaration of the RIM*. It played an important role in combating the demoralization and disorganization after the coup in China in 1976 and gave impetus and support to the reorganization of the world's communist forces and the furthering of revolutionary struggle led by them.
- 5 *Demarcations – A Journal of Communist Theory and Polemic*. http://demarcations-journal.org/issue03/letter_to_participating_parties_of_rim_revolutionary_communist_party_usa.pdf
- 6 At that time *Naxalbari* was the organ of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Naxalbari) of which Ajith was the Secretary General. On May 1, 2013 a merger was announced between the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and the the CPI(ML) (Naxalbari).
To aid the reader in finding quoted material, the subheads and the page numbers where the subheads begin are included in this note only: The Special Meeting and the RCP Letter, p. 7; The Ethics of Avakianist Polemics, p. 9; The Arbitrary Stages of Avakianism, p. 16; Mis-rendering Mao, p. 19; A Perversion of Internationalism, p. 22; The National Task in Oppressed Nations, p. 24; The National Question in Imperialist Countries, p. 30; Infantile Criticism of United Front Tactics, p. 34; Gutting Marxist Political-economy, p. 38; The World Situation, p. 43; Socialist Democracy, p. 45; Truth, Class Interests and the Scientific Method, p. 56; A Rationalist Critique of Religion, p. 64; Struggle within the RIM, p. 73; More Devious, More Dangerous, p. 75. These page numbers correspond to the pdf from <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-ML-Naxalbari/Naxalbari-Magazine/Naxalbari-04.pdf>.

Hereafter citations from the Ajith article will be referred to as "Against."

- 7 "Against," p. 78.
- 8 See Raymond Lotta, "On the 'Driving Force of Anarchy' and the Dynamics of Change," *Demarcations*. http://demarcations-journal.org/issue03/driving_force_of_anarchy_and_dynamics_of_change_polemic.pdf
- 9 "The New Synthesis of Communism and the Residue of the Past" and "Communism or Nationalism?," both articles by the Revolutionary Communist Organization of Mexico (OCR). http://demarcations-journal.org/issue03/the_new_synthesis_of_communism_and_the_residues_of_the_past.pdf, <http://demarcations-journal.org/issue03/communism-or-nationalism.pdf>
- 10 This alchemy masquerades as "Maoism," but it is an empty shell. Its content has little in common with what Mao Tsetung, the revolutionary communist leader, represented and defended. Ajith's arguments reflect an appeal to those who fail to understand Mao's most important development of Marxism, specifically Mao's path-breaking analysis of the contradictions in socialist society as a transition to communism, the danger of capitalist restoration and the need and means for the revolution to be continued under conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead, Ajith and other opponents of the new synthesis of communism have focused on a different Mao, one with some elements in common with Mao the communist revolutionary, but stripping the scientific and Marxist heart out of Mao, insisting on upholding and making central errors that in Mao were only very secondary weaknesses, while loading their own nationalism, pragmatism, and other deviations onto this false and disfigured Mao.
- 11 Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850," *Selected Works of Marx and Engels*, FLPH, Moscow, Vol. 1, p. 223.
- 12 Zhang Chunqiao, *On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1975. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/zhang/1975/x01/x01.htm>
- 13 For an all-around account and summation of the Cultural Revolution, see Interview with Raymond Lotta, *You Don't Know What You Think You 'Know' About... The Communist Revolution and the REAL Path to Emancipation: Its History and Our Future*, "The Cultural Revolution: The Furthest Advance of Human Emancipation Yet." <http://revcom.us/a/323/you-dont-know-what-you-think-you-know-en.html#chapter0408>
- 14 *The Communist International, 1919-1943*, Documents Selected and Edited by Jane Degras. Volume II, 1923-1928. <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/documents/volume2-1923-1928.pdf>
- 15 KJA, "Polemical Reflections on Bernard D'Mello's Essay 'What Is Maoism?' Scientifically Comprehending, Firmly Upholding, and Going Beyond Maoism for a New Stage of Communism," *Demarcations*. http://demarcations-journal.org/issue02/demarcations-polemical_reflections.pdf
- 16 Frederick Engels, "Preface To The German edition of 1883 of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*," Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1970, pp. 7-13. "This struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time forever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class

struggles – this basic thought belongs solely and exclusively to Marx – I have already stated this many times; but precisely now it is necessary that it also stands in front of the Manifesto itself."

17 "Against," p. 64.

18 *Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*, RCP Publications, Chicago, 2008, p. 25.
<http://revcom.us/Constitution/constitution.html>

19 "Against," p. 62. See a reply: The Current Debate on the Socialist System – A Reply by Revolutionary Communist Party, *Demarcations*. http://demarcations-journal.org/issue02/demarcations-ajith_reply.pdf

20 Ibid., p. 63.

21 Ibid., p. 64.

22 Positivism is a current prominent in the 19th and 20th century. It distinguishes itself by setting out criteria and norms of knowledge. Its most distinctive feature is the rejection of any difference between phenomenon and essence. Any claims of knowledge other than observable phenomena are considered occult qualities and thus outside the framework of legitimate and valid knowledge. It is sometimes considered an anti-philosophy.

23 Matthew, chapter 22, verse 21.

24 Dualism is a long-standing philosophical school associated with Descartes and others who argue that there are two substances, two absolutely separated domains, one concerning matter and the other concerning the soul, or more generally, the realm of ideas and consciousness. See the earlier RCP criticism of Ajith, which pointed out Ajith's dualism, "The Current Debate on the Socialist State System – A Reply by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA." *Demarcations*.

25 Cited in Bob Avakian, *Away with All Gods*, Insight Press, Chicago, 2008, pp. 220-221. Ardea Skybreak, *The Science of Evolution and The Myth of Creationism – Knowing What's Real And Why It Matters*, Insight Press, Chicago, 2006.

26 Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1975, p. 72. "But now idealism was driven from its last refuge, the conception of history; now a materialist treatment of history was advanced, and the way found to explain man's consciousness by his being, instead of, as heretofore, his being by his consciousness... But the earlier socialism was just as incompatible with this materialist conception of history as the French materialists' conception of nature was with dialectics and modern natural science. The earlier socialism certainly criticized the existing capitalist mode of production and its consequences. But it could not explain this mode of production, and, therefore, could not get the mastery of it. It could only simply reject it as evil.... These two great discoveries, the materialist conception of history and the revelation of the secret of capitalist production through surplus-value, we owe to *Marx*. With them socialism became a science, which had now to be elaborated in all its details and interconnections."

27 The Darwinian theory illuminates the decisive role of random mutation which, for example, unlike a bullet shot from a gun, is not predictable and not reproducible in the same way. The evolution of natural life forms works through differential reproductive success. Some random mutations, indeed most, fail, i.e., do not lead to an adaptive advantage, while a few equally random mutations can lead to a reproductive advantage for an organism under specific and changing environmental conditions.

28 For example, in biology, bacteria can recognize two different geometries or shapes of a sugar molecule (its "handedness" or chirality), but will only feed on one form of the molecule, not because the two different forms are made of different elements, but because of the history of the evolution of a given bacteria which began by feeding on a single form of sugar molecule.

29 Frederick Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1976, p. 28. "Nature is the test of dialectics, and it must be said for modern science that it has furnished this test with very rich and daily increasing materials." And further, on p. 180: "In fact, dialectics is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought."

30 *Observations*, p. 7: "All that I have been speaking to so far has a lot to do with the principle that Mao emphasized – that Marxism embraces but does not replace all these different spheres of society and human endeavor. Each of them has their own, as Mao put it, particularity of contradiction."

31 See V. S. Ramachandran's "scientific research" presented in his paper entitled "The Neural Basis of Religious Experience" delivered to the Annual Conference of the Society of Neuroscience. October. Abstract 529.1, Vol. 23, Society of Neuroscience. He argued that there is a physical basis in brain cells and synapses for the process of spiritual stirrings, a physical basis for the religious state of mind.

32 "Against," p. 64.

33 See Bob Avakian, "Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity," Part 1.

<http://revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution/> and part 2, <http://revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution2/>

34 "Against," p. 57.

35 Ibid., p. 57.

36 Limiting the need for a vanguard party to its organizational and practical aspects, ignoring the issues of ideological and political vision and leadership and rupture with spontaneity, leads to the kind of party typical of Trotskyists and other reformists and is consistent with economism and social democracy.

- 37 "Against," p. 59.
- 38 Bob Avakian, "The Need for Communists To Be...Communists," *Revolution*, no. 38, March 12, 2006. "To put this another way, 'stand' is not enough. Even among communists, there is a lot of confusion about this. Sometimes people say, 'he or she has a really good ideological line,' and by that they mean the person has a good stand – is really dedicated, filled with hatred for oppression, and so on – but stand is not enough. Zhang Chunqiao wrote something about this (at least it is claimed that he wrote something about this, and I'm willing to believe it, to take it as fact and go with it). After the coup in China, the revisionists, in one of their attacks on the 'gang of four,' said that Zhang Chunqiao had insisted that theory is the most dynamic factor in ideology. The reason these revisionists were raising this was to say, 'oh, he's just a dogmatist – he's all theory and no practicality, no dignity of immediate actuality'." <http://revcom.us/a/038/avakian-need-for-communists.htm>
- 39 "Against," p. 59.
- 40 The section "Rereading George Jackson" in the essay "Getting Over the Two Great Humps: Further Thoughts on Conquering the World," *Revolutionary Worker*, no. 968, August 9, 1998. <http://revcom.us/avakian/ba-getting-over-two-great-humps-en.html>
- 41 Bob Avakian, "Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution," <http://www.revcom.us/avakian/driving/> See also *Break ALL The Chains! Bob Avakian on the Emancipation of Women and the Communist Revolution*, RCP Publications, 2014. p. 24. <http://revcom.us/avakian/Break-ALL-the-Chains/Break-ALL-the-Chains-FULL-WORK.pdf>. See also "The New Synthesis and the Woman Question – The Emancipation of Women and the Communist Revolution, Further Leaps and Radical Ruptures," *Demarcations*. <http://demarcations-journal.org/issue03/the-new-synthesis-and-the-woman-question.pdf> (emphasis added).
- 42 "Against," p. 59.
- 43 Bob Avakian, "Views on Socialism and Communism: A Radically New Kind of State, A Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom," particularly the section entitled "A Materialist Understanding of the State and Its Relation to the Underlying Economic Base," which appeared in *Revolution*, no. 42 (April 9, 2006). <http://www.revcom.us/a/037/avakian-views-socialism-communism.htm>
- 44 Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01d.htm>
- 45 Karl Marx, *The Holy Family*, Chapter IV. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/ch04.htm>
- 46 "Against," p. 59.
- 47 See the discussion on the experience of Maoist China, including the strengths and the weaknesses, in the struggle to remold world outlook in the interview with Raymond Lotta, "You Don't Know What You Think You 'Know'." <http://revcom.us/a/323/you-dont-know-what-you-think-you-know-en.html>
- 48 Ajith specifically argues that the international proletariat can only exist as national proletariats. For a refutation of this view see "Communism or Nationalism?" by the Revolutionary Communist Organisation of Mexico (OCR), *Demarcations*.
- 49 As quoted by Mao in "On Practice," "Lenin said, 'The abstraction of *matter*, of a *law* of nature, the abstraction of *value*, etc., in short, *all* scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and *completely*.'" Mao Tsetung, "On Practice," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1967, p. 299.
- 50 V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1973, pp. 111-114.
- 51 *Observations*, p. 45.
- 52 "Against," p. 24.
- 53 See Interview with Lotta, "You Don't Know What You Think You 'Know,'" section on "Learning From, Advancing Beyond the Cultural Revolution."
- 54 *Observations*, pp. 3-5.
- 55 "Against," p. 70.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 59 There are similar cases as well where revisionists make a true statement such as "everyone is equal before the truth" for counter-revolutionary ends. The leading capitalist-roader in China Liu Shaoqi also stressed that "Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao all made mistakes." Here, too, while it is one thing to criticize Liu's counter-revolutionary purposes in raising this banality to combat the so-called "cult of the personality" (in reality to oppose Mao's revolutionary line), it would be quite another to try to deny the truth of the specific words he raised.
- 60 "Against," p. 56.
- 61 Richard Rorty, a leading neo-pragmatist, famously said, "If you take care of freedom, truth will take care of itself." For Rorty, "freedom" meant assuring the political conditions (bourgeois democracy) through which agreement and consensus will be forged. Once this consensus is achieved, "truth takes care of itself," that is, there is no reason for disputes over how to define and understand truth, which he considered a pseudo-problem. Ajith shares much with this approach when he concedes to class truth. Ajith is relying on shared class experience, feelings, and struggle to bring about a consensus, in this case a class consensus, that can serve as the basis for determining what is considered

true. This is a version of the consensus theory of truth, which rejects the correspondence theory of truth, a basic feature of materialism. Take care of the political conditions of the proletariat and its interests and the truth will take care of itself, this is the unavoidable conclusion if one fails to insist on the correspondence theory of truth.

62 "Against," p. 57.

63 Ibid., p. 58.

64 *Chairman Mao Talks to the People, Talks and Letters, 1956-1971*. Pantheon Books, New York, 1974. Edited with an introduction by Stuart Schram. Translated by John Chinnery and Tiejun, pp. 235-236.

65 Karl Marx, letter to Engels, 27 June 1867, *Selected Correspondence* (emphasis in original).
https://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1867/letters/67_06_27.htm

66 Mao, "On Practice," *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1967, p. 298.

67 See the OCR's "Communism or Nationalism" for a discussion of Ajith's attack on Avakian's understanding of the proletarian revolution as a "single world process." *Demarcations*.

68 In *Making Revolution, Emancipating Humanity*, Part 2, Avakian wrote, "Revolution arises out of a complex interplay of contradictions, within the particular country and internationally, and the interpenetration between those levels or dimensions. Yes, there are certain things and certain patterns we can identify. Yes, the role of Christian Fascism is a very important element in the 'mix' right now. And, yes, it could play a 'stage manager' role. Yes, there is something very real in the analogy between what is going on now and the period before the Civil War in the U.S., in the mid-19th century. Speaking in broad terms, there is a point to the analogy to a 'coming civil war.' But this has to be understood in living dialectical terms, and in materialist terms. Not with a dry, dead, uninspiring religious and dogmatic approach.

"What really is involved, and what we really have to grasp firmly and apply consistently, is a materialist and dialectical understanding of the relation between the objective and subjective factors, with *all* the complexity involved in this, with *all* the interpenetration of the different layers of that 'multi-textured' reality."

<http://revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution2/>

69 "Against," p. 24.

70 Ibid., p. 77.

71 V. I. Lenin, "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism," *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, p. 23. If anything, here Lenin underestimates the element of rupture that Marx represented from earlier thinkers.

72 "Against," p. 58.

73 Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1970, p. 61. "In this way arose feudal Socialism: half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history." And on p. 64: "In countries like France, where the peasants constitute far more than half of the population, it was natural that writers who sided with the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, should use, in their criticism of the bourgeois *régime*, the standard of the peasant and petty bourgeois, and from the standpoint of these intermediate classes should take up the cudgels for the working class. Thus arose petty-bourgeois Socialism."

74 From the Report to the 10th Congress of the Communist Party of China: "Chairman Mao teaches us that 'the correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything.' If one's line is incorrect, one's downfall is inevitable, even with the control of the central, local and army leadership."

https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/10th_congress_report.htm

75 Mao Tsetung, "Remarks at a Briefing," March 1964, From *Long Live Mao Tse-tung Thought*, a Red Guard Publication. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_16.htm

76 Marx saved Ricardo's insights from his own followers who were ready to dump these same insights because they did not fit into their ideologically-cast economic theories. This shows at one and the same time that the truth discovered by other classes needs to be recognized, upheld and where necessary recast by communist thinkers, and that there is indeed a tendency on the part of the exploiting classes to bury scientific truths when they seem to pose a contradiction to their frameworks. See Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. 2, pp. 164-214 and 373-425, and Vol. 3 pp. 87-90.

77 Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feurbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1976, p. 1: "In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, published in Berlin, 1859, Karl Marx relates how in 1845 the two of us, then in Brussels, undertook 'to set forth together our view' – the materialist conception of history which was elaborated mainly by Marx – 'as opposed to the ideological one of German philosophy, in fact, to settle accounts with our former philosophical conscience. The resolve was carried out in the form of a critique of post-Hegelian philosophy.'"

Also, p. 25: "For we live not only in nature but also in human society, and it too no less than nature has its historical development and its science. It was therefore a question of bringing the science of society, that is, the totality of the so-called historical and philosophical sciences, into harmony with the materialist base, and of reconstructing it on this base."

78 *Observations*, p. 54.

- 79 Mao, *Selected Works*, Vol. 5, "Talks at a Conference of Secretaries of Provincial, Municipal and Autonomous Region Party Committees," January 1957, pp. 367-368. "Stalin had a fair amount of metaphysics in him and he taught many people to follow metaphysics."
- 80 Bob Avakian, "Bringing Forward Another Way," Part 15. Footnote 2. <http://www.revcom.us/avakian/anotherway/anotherway15-en.html>
- 81 http://demarcations-journal.org/issue03/letter_to_participating_parties_of_rim_revolutionary_communist_party_usa.pdf
- 82 "Against," p. 63.
- 83 Ibid., p. 64. "Compared to scientific abstractions in specific fields, the abstractions of ideology and philosophy certainly do represent a higher level. This is so because the universal categories they put forward are themselves derived from a diverse set of universalities contained in laws governing specific fields of social life and natural phenomena. An ideology or philosophy will be wrong in its abstractions if they are not grounded in natural and social reality. But that doesn't change the fact that they represent a higher level of abstraction."
- 84 Mao, *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1967, p. 94. "Marxism embraces but cannot replace realism in literary and artistic creation, just as it embraces but cannot replace the atomic and electronic theories in physics."
- 85 Bob Avakian and Bill Martin, *Marxism and the Call of the Future, Conversations on Ethics, History, and Politics*, Open Court Press, Chicago, 2005, p. 162-164.
- 86 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>
- 87 Engels, *Anti Duhring*, p. 31.
- 88 Bob Avakian, *Away With All Gods*, p. 214 in the footnote.
- 89 *Marxism and the Call of the Future*, pp. 161-162.
- 90 "Against," p. 63.
- 91 In this preoccupation, Ajith holds similar views to those of the founding fathers of American pragmatism. William James says, "The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instances in our life, if this world formula or that world formula be the true one." From William James, *Meaning of Truth*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard Press, 1978, p. 30. Can you get any closer to "political truth" than that?
- 92 "Ruminations and Wranglings \equiv A Correct Understanding Of The Relation Between Science And Philosophy." In the original, only the word "simply" is in italics. <http://revcom.us/avakian/ruminations/BA-ruminations-en.html>
- 93 "Against," p. 63.
- 94 *Observations*, pp. 34-42.
- 95 *Marxism and the Call of the Future*, p. 199.
- 96 Ibid., p. 226.
- 97 "Against," p. 77.
- 98 Ibid., p. 77.
- 99 "The Current Debate on the Socialist State System – A Reply by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA." *Demarcations*.
- 100 "Against," p. 61.
- 101 Ibid, p. 77.
- 102 Ibid, p. 60.
- 103 Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Foreign Languages Press, 1972, p. 153: "In a word, every ideology is historically conditional, but it is unconditionally true that to every scientific ideology (as distinct, for instance, from religious ideology), there corresponds an objective truth, absolute nature. You will say that this distinction between relative and absolute truth is indefinite. And I shall reply: yes, it is sufficiently 'indefinite' to prevent science from becoming a dogma in the bad sense of the term, from becoming something dead, frozen, ossified; but it is at the same time sufficiently 'definite' to enable us to dissociate ourselves in the most emphatic and irrevocable manner from fideism and agnosticism, from philosophical idealism and the sophistry of the followers of Hume and Kant. Here is a boundary which you have not noticed, and not having noticed it, you have fallen into the swamp of reactionary philosophy. It is the boundary between dialectical materialism and relativism."
- 104 *Marxism and the Call of the Future*, p. 162.
- 105 See *And Mao Makes Five*, Banner Press, Chicago, 1978. Text 17, "Study Well the Theory of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," p. 192. Text 19, "On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie," p. 209.
- 106 See "The (new) Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist and the Crossroads Facing the International Communist Movement" by Robert Borba, *Demarcations*, especially pp. 17-23 for a detailed review of Ajith's apology for revisionism. http://demarcations-journal.org/issue03/the_new_communist_party_of_nepal_maoist_and_the_crossroads.pdf
- 107 "Against," p. 60, footnote 214.
- 108 Ibid., p. 62.

- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 60.
- ¹¹⁰ Even Ajith's concrete political example of a "universal truth" is very revealing of his own stubborn dogmatism and a wrong epistemology. "To give an example, the Communist International pointed out that imperialism transforms and makes feudalism its social base in an oppressed country. That lesson was derived from the social analyses of numerous colonial and semi-colonial countries. As such it contains a universal truth that helps communists in preparing their programs and guiding their practice." "Against," p. 61, Ajith's footnote 217. Communists have and must continue to discuss the relationship between imperialism and feudalism in the countries that it oppresses, and this article is not the place to enter a major discussion of this important question or of its history. However, one thing that should be obvious to all but the most hidebound dogmatists is that this is a fluid and dynamic relationship and that the 21st century world looks quite a bit different in this regard than the period the Comintern analyzed or when Mao developed his theses concerning the revolution in China. If one takes the proposition that imperialism "makes feudalism its social base" as a "universal truth," or considers it as an "ideological principle" which thus only differs in "application" from one situation to another, it is highly doubtful that such thinking will "help communists in preparing their programs and guiding their practice."
- ¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 60 (emphasis in original).
- ¹¹² *Away With All Gods*, pp. 205-207.
- ¹¹³ Ardea Skybreak, *The Science of Evolution and the Myth of Creationism, Knowing What's Real and Why It Matters*, Insight Press, Chicago, 2006, p. 214.
- ¹¹⁴ "Against," p. 68.
- ¹¹⁵ Zhang Chunqiao, *On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1975, p. 24.
- ¹¹⁶ "Against," p. 71.
- ¹¹⁷ Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, p, 83: "In any case, even the application of the Hegelian 'inner purpose' – i.e., a purpose which is not imported into nature by some third party acting purposively, such as the wisdom of providence, but lies in the necessity of the thing itself – constantly leads people who are not well versed in philosophy to thoughtlessly ascribing to nature conscious and purposive activity."
- ¹¹⁸ Note in the citation from *Capital* below, how an overwhelmingly materialist explanation of the historical process of overthrowing capitalism is secondarily marred by an application of the "negation of the negation" as well as tending toward a mechanical, deterministic interpretation of scientific law. "Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated. ... This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labor of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation." <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch32.htm>
- ¹¹⁹ Gonzalo, "On the Rectification Campaign Based on the Study of the Document Elections, No! People's War, Yes!," *A World to Win*, issue 19, 1993.
- ¹²⁰ Among the idealist philosophers' fundamental assumptions is to take mind and/or consciousness "prior" to material reality, if not temporally at least logically "prior." Even some "materialists" as well hold that matter's properties are such that they specifically provide, even require, the appearance or the existence of intelligence or consciousness in order for matter to be contemplated. Since the mid 20th century there has grown among cosmologists, physicists, astrophysicists, and others a school of thought advocating what has been generally referred to as the Anthropic Principle. This principle interprets observed empirical data about the universe as establishing a correlation between the existence of intelligence and conscious observership and the material/physical structure and features of the universe. In fact, this is related to the plethora of "Design" arguments that the universe is planned. The Anthropic Principle thus joins a type of argument that can be traced back to ancient times when science and philosophy had not yet been differentiated and were also mixed with metaphysics to give meaning to the order of things and, indeed, to all existence.
- ¹²¹ "Against," p. 69.
- ¹²² Cited in the introduction to *Primeval Steps & Future Leaps*, by Ardea Skybreak, Banner Press, Chicago, 1984, p. 7.
- ¹²³ This is how the biologist David Hanke describes the harmful effects of teleology: "Natural selection slipped seamlessly into the place of the Creator, the Natural Selector, as the acceptable new face of the Great Designer... Periodically there are well-meaning attempts to justify the use of teleological reasoning as virtually harmless and an aid to thinking... teleology, the biologist's crutch, is bad not so much because it is lazy and wrong (which it is) but because it is a straitjacket for the mind restricting truly creative scientific thinking... Feelings are deceiving, truth, some of it counter-intuitive, is out there waiting." "Teleology: the Explanation that Bedevils Biology," in

Explanations, edited by John Cornwell, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 143-155. Hanke shows how the scientific theory of Darwin can be perverted, to use Hanke's term, into a harmful crutch. Some secondary errors or weaknesses in Darwin's theory (for example the emphasis on gradualism) were seized upon and developed in a way that led to the errors that Hanke describes. The same teleological perversion of Marx's scientific theory can also take place and indeed some have done exactly that.

¹²⁴ Bob Avakian, *For A Harvest of Dragons*, RCP Publications, Chicago, 1983, p. 27.

¹²⁵ Cited in *For A Harvest of Dragons*, p. 27. "Marx to P.V. Annenkov" (December 28, 1846), Marx and Engels, *Selected Letters*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1977, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Bob Avakian, *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*.
<http://revcom.us/avakian/birds/birds01-en.html>

¹²⁷ "Against," p. 69 (emphasis added).

¹²⁸ Mao Tsetung, "Speeches at the Second Session of the Eighth Party Congress, May 8-23, 1958," *Long Live Mao Zedong Thought*, a Red Guard Publication. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_10.htm

¹²⁹ For further study we refer the reader to the document of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, "Notes on Political Economy, Our Analysis of the 1980s, Issues of Methodology, and the Current World Situation," 2000. Particularly see the section "Taking the Self-Criticism Further... Against Typical Motion and Absolute Thresholds."
http://revcom.us/a/special_postings/poleco_e.htm

¹³⁰ Lin Piao, *Long Live the Victory of the People's War*, Foreign Languages Press, 1969, Chapter VI. Lin Piao had been officially designated Mao's successor in 1969. Later, in 1971, Lin died in an aborted coup attempt against Mao.

¹³¹ *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 31. "Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes."

¹³² Bob Avakian, *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy*, RCP Publications, Chicago, 2008, pp. 61-62.
http://revcom.us/Comm_JeffDem/Jeffersonian_Democracy.html

¹³³ "Against," p. 67.

¹³⁴ *Capital*, Volume III. <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm>

¹³⁵ Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, p. 366.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

¹³⁷ Frederick Engels, 1884 Preface to the First German edition of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, by Karl Marx, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1966, p. 6. Emphasis added.

¹³⁸ *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*, p. 228. "Engels spoke of moving from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom, and said that freedom is the understanding of necessity. This sentence is not complete, it only says one half and leaves the rest unsaid. Does merely understanding it make you free? Freedom is the understanding of necessity and the transformation of necessity. One has some work to do."

¹³⁹ Even Mao was not immune from these influences, as we can see in his statement that "state power and political parties will die out very naturally and mankind will enter the realm of Great Harmony."
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_65.htm

On the basis of Mao's further study of socialist society and the class struggle under socialism and no doubt further philosophical reflection as well, he developed a much deeper and more correct view on the transition period and communism itself: "[W]ill there still be revolution in the future... what do you say? In my view, there will still be the need for revolution." https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_56.htm

The problem is that too many people in the communist movement either did not notice Mao's developments on these points that came forward especially during the GPCR, or dismissed them as "platitudes" as Ajith does. If, as Ajith argues, there was no ambiguity or error in Marx and Engels' treatment of these subjects, why did Mao feel it necessary to correct them? If Mao's own understanding had not developed, why are there no longer any references to "Great Harmony" to be seen during the GPCR under Mao's leadership or in his many references to communist society in his later writings?

¹⁴⁰ Bob Avakian, "The Material Basis and the Method for Making Revolution, A Talk given in 2014."

<http://revcom.us/avakian/material-basis/the-material-basis-and-the-method-for-making-revolution-en.html>

¹⁴¹ "Against," pp. 68-69.

¹⁴² This is evident in the 18th century mechanical materialism of Diderot and other philosophers and the materialism practiced by increasing numbers of scientists in the 18th and 19th centuries. The success of the Newtonian system in describing the orderliness of nature was expanded upon by Maupertuis and Lagrange to achieve a more detailed description and all-encompassing handle on natural phenomena. The materialism of this epoch believed that it had discovered an inherent, "god-given" order to nature. Inevitability, determinism, and the ultimate orderliness of things was predicated on this view (similar to Ajith's "logical, orderly and consistent interconnection of various aspects of social life").

- ¹⁴³ Bob Avakian, "Marxism and the Enlightenment," *Revolutionary Worker*, no. 1129, December 2, 2001. http://www.revcom.us/a/v23/1120-29/1129/bavakian_9.htm
- ¹⁴⁴ "Against," p. 71-72 (emphasis in original).
- ¹⁴⁵ Bob Avakian, *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* Banner Press, Chicago, 1986, pp. 28-30. New edition published in 2014, Phoneme Publishers, Delhi.
- ¹⁴⁶ Bob Avakian, "Imperialism and 'Internationalism' – Reactionary and Revolutionary Challenges," *Revolutionary Worker* no. 1130, December 9, 2001. <http://rwor.org> http://revcom.us/a/v23/1130-39/1130/bavakian_challenges.htm
- ¹⁴⁷ "Against," p. 19.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Marxism and the Call of the Future*, p. 144.
- ¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 144, 146-147.
- ¹⁵⁰ Marx. *Capital*, Vol. 1, chapter 31. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch31.htm>
- ¹⁵¹ "Against," p. 66.
- ¹⁵² *Observations*, p. 28. "As *Preaching* points out, religion presents all kinds of fantastic things but insists that these things are not only true but the essence of truth, and the operative and defining and determining principles of reality. So, in response to the question, 'can we do without myth?' the answer is that we have to do without myth in the religious sense, or myth that presents itself as true, myth that presents itself as embodying the defining and organizing principles of reality.
- But we can't do without – humanity never could do without and we don't *want* to do without – myth in another sense. To put it another way, we can't and don't want to do without *metaphor* – in art, and in life more broadly. Which is another way of saying that we can't, and don't want to, do without the imagination." Also in "Materialism and Romanticism: Can We Do Without Myth?," Bob Avakian, *Revolutionary Worker* #1211, August 24, 2003. The reference is to *Preaching from A Pulpit of Bones, We Need Morality But Not Traditional Morality*, also by Avakian, Banner Press, New York, 1999. <http://revcom.us/a/1211/baonmyth.htm>
- ¹⁵³ *Observations*, "Discussion with Comrades on Epistemology: On Knowing and Changing the World," pp. 46-47.
- ¹⁵⁴ "Against," p. 71.
- ¹⁵⁵ Here it must be pointed out that the concept of "totalitarianism" is in fact an unscientific, anticommunist ideological construct that was pressed into service by the imperialist powers at the end of World War 2 to vilify and discredit communism, particularly the Soviet Union. Any serious engagement with the actual character of Soviet society when it was socialist from 1917 until the mid-1950s, its liberatory achievements in the face of incredible obstacles, shows the equation of capitalist-imperialist Nazi Germany with the socialist Soviet Union under Stalin to be grotesque and absurd. See chapter 6 in *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, pp. 167-190, and the Set the Record Straight website, <http://revcom.us/movement-for-revolution/SRS/index.html>
- ¹⁵⁶ *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 55.
- ¹⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction*, Pantheon, New York, 1978. "Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter, and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations."
- ¹⁵⁸ *Away With All Gods*, pp. 204-205.
- ¹⁵⁹ Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory of Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979. Also see Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1979, pp. 23-32 and 64-65, in reference to "pragmatics of scientific knowledge" and "social pragmatics."
- ¹⁶⁰ *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, pp. 33-34. The bourgeoisie pitilessly tore "asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation."
- ¹⁶¹ This thinking, including his anti-Semitism, led Heidegger to become a supporter of the Nazi regime and play an active role in "purging" the universities of "non-Aryan" elements. After the war Heidegger was rehabilitated by the West German authorities and the U.S. imperialists.
- ¹⁶² The postmodernists have a tendency to strip these often useful observations from the underlying material reality. See Avakian's *Democracy, Can't We Do Better Than That?* for a scientific treatment of the emergence of "Jeffersonian Democracy" in early U.S. history.
- ¹⁶³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1979, p. 108. Said has insights in this regard, despite one-sided criticisms of Marx for "Eurocentrism."
- ¹⁶⁴ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, 2002.
- ¹⁶⁵ After the war some of the leading lights of this school dropped their "anticapitalism." Jürgen Habermas continued

the Frankfurt school, both in "deepening" the critique of "instrumental reason" and in launching a critique which morphed into a full-scale attack against historical materialism as a science. Habermas concluded that historical materialism was an "impossible project" which could not be "rectified," and instead he advanced a new theory, "communicative action." This new theory was forged through mixing Kant, Freud, Marx, and Weber. This worldview is supposed to lead to new relations among human beings that will mitigate and resolve conflicts and antagonisms in society. Ultimately it is nothing more than an attempt to renovate bourgeois democracy. Habermas ended up completely rejecting Marxism while becoming an open and enthusiastic supporter of Western formal (bourgeois) democracy. The end result is that Habermas became recognized as the number one public intellectual, the high priest, of German imperialism.

¹⁶⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, Polity Press, Cambridge (UK), 2008, p.136. "Western culture has witnessed a transformation of religious consciousness since the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Sociologists describe this 'modernization' of religious consciousness as a response of religious traditions to the challenges posed by the fact of religious pluralism, the emergence of modern science, and the spread of positive law and secular morality. In these three aspects, traditional communities of faith must process cognitive dissonances that either do not arise for secular citizens, or arise only in so far as they adhere to the doctrines anchored in similar dogmatic ways."

¹⁶⁷ The writings of Kant in general, and in particular his influential article "What Is the Enlightenment?" (which both upholds the Enlightenment but warns against taking it too far), have been one important source of theoretical and philosophical inspiration for Foucault, the Frankfurt School, and many others. It is worthwhile to recall that Kant, writing amidst the intellectual upheaval and social turmoil raging in Europe in the period before the French revolution, tried to respond to the controversies relating to the nature, the sources, and the possibilities of knowledge. The debate was particularly fierce between the empiricists and the rationalists. The former claimed that knowledge is obtained through experience alone and hence necessarily tainted and marked by the position and condition of the agent of the experience (the observer). The rationalists, on the other hand, argued that knowledge derives from the exercise of reason and that sound reasoning provides absolute knowledge of the world unblemished by the subjective distortions and limitations of the experiencing agent. Kant tried – in his own expression – to "legislate" between fiercely feuding epistemic camps, but his eye was focused on the storm brewing throughout European societies. His concern with how to legislate becomes all too apparent in his second critique of "pure reason." In his first critique Kant discusses the conditions for the possibility of experience and knowledge and tries to limit the "overarching ambitions" of reason, warning against venturing beyond its "legitimate" realm. The essential element in his "transcendental idealism" is the claim that what makes knowledge possible for human beings is the inherent transcendental structuring capacities of the mind. This capacity, in Kant's view, shapes and constructs what is "given off" by the world as phenomena, as objects of experience, which thus appear to people as extended in space and occurring in time. In Kant's view, space and time are not objective but rather the human mind's contribution to the construction of what we experience as reality. Necessity and causality do not objectively exist for Kant. Rather Kant believed that only the human mind's structuring schemata permit people to "experience" one event "causing" another.

¹⁶⁸ See Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, pp. 436-438, for a discussion of Kant's dualism.

¹⁶⁹ It is easy to see an affinity between Ajith's attitude towards the role and the potential of political Islam in the oppressed countries expressed in "Against Avakianism" with the enthusiasm of Michel Foucault for the "spiritual politics" of the ayatollahs' Islamic theocracy as an alternative to what the Western powers and particularly the U.S. had been backing up until the 1979 revolutionary crisis in Iran. This is not the place to try to rehearse a complete analysis of Foucault's conceptual commitments and philosophical affiliations that impelled him to embrace the role and figure of Iran's ayatollahs stepping onto the political stage, yet it is useful to indicate that fault lines as exhibited in Foucault's method and analysis find their echo in some of the characteristic pronouncements of Ajith's "Against Avakianism."

For Foucault, "power" and "knowledge" are reciprocally related ("power defines knowledge") while for Ajith "truth has a class nature." Foucault values the "will to know" and separates this from a scientific appropriation of knowledge. This was exemplified for Foucault by political Islam, which he applauds for "transgressing the limits" of what exists by their religious zeal. Similarly, Ajith amends the scientific way of understanding the world with his defense of "pre-modern thought" and, like Foucault and the other postmodernists, harbors a deep-seated suspicion for and rejection of the Enlightenment and the scientific world outlook associated with it.

¹⁷⁰ "Against," p. 64.

¹⁷¹ Ajith, "Islamic Resistance, the Principal Contradiction and the 'War on Terror,'" *New Wave*, no. 3, February, 2007, p. 24. <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-ML-Naxalbari/TheNewWave/nw-3.pdf>

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁷³ Actually Ajith does mention in passing "the rape and murder of a young woman in a bus in Delhi," his only oblique reference to the condition of women in his 60,000 word essay "Against Avakianism."

¹⁷⁴ Bob Avakian, "Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution," *Revolution*, no. 184. <http://www.revcom.us/avakian/driving/>

- ¹⁷⁵ "Against," p. 66.
- ¹⁷⁶ Islamic Resistance, the Principal Contradiction, and the 'War on Terror.'"
- ¹⁷⁷ "Against," p. 3.
- ¹⁷⁸ Avakian, Bringing Forward Another Way, *Revolution* no. 213, October 10, 2010.
<http://revcom.us/avakian/anotherway/>
- ¹⁷⁹ Avakian, "The Basis, The Goals, and The Methods of the Communist Revolution," March 8, 2006.
<http://revcom.us/avakian/basis-goals-methods/>
- ¹⁸⁰ *Away With All Gods*, p. 113.
- ¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.
- ¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 231
- ¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.
- ¹⁸⁴ "Against," p. 66.
- ¹⁸⁵ "Islamic Resistance, the Principal Contradiction, and the 'War on Terror.'"
- ¹⁸⁶ In fact, the Islamists insist on the "community of believers" and not on recognizing what they consider secular concepts such as nation. Their reactionary program divides oppressed nations along the lines of religious beliefs.
- ¹⁸⁷ Avakian, "Bringing Forward Another Way." "As a matter of general principle, and specifically sitting in this imperialist country, we have a particular responsibility to oppose U.S. imperialism, our 'own' ruling class, and what it is doing in the world. But, at the same time, that doesn't make these Islamic fundamentalist forces not historically outmoded and not reactionary. It doesn't change the character of their opposition to imperialism and what it leads to and the dynamic that it's part of – the fact that these two 'historically outmodeds' do reinforce each other, even while opposing each other. And it is very important to understand, and to struggle for others to understand, that if you end up supporting either one of these two 'historically outmodeds,' you contribute to strengthening both. It is crucial to break out of that dynamic – to bring forward another way." <http://revcom.us/avakian/anotherway/>
- ¹⁸⁸ Avakian has several writings on religion, here are only a few: *Away with All Gods*, *Bringing Forward Another Way*, and *Preaching from a Pulpit of Bones*, Banner Press, New York, 1999.
- ¹⁸⁹ "Dialectics are replaced by eclecticism – this is the most usual, the most widespread practice to be met with in present-day official Social-Democratic literature in relation to Marxism. This sort of substitution is, of course, nothing new: it was observed even in the history of Greek philosophy. In falsifying Marxism in opportunist fashion, the substitution of eclecticism for dialectics is the easiest way of deceiving the people. It gives an illusory satisfaction; it seems to take into account all sides of the process, all trends of development, all the conflicting influences, and so forth, whereas in reality it provides no integral and revolutionary conception of the process of social development at all." ("The State and Revolution," *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 405.) Cited in "On Developments in Nepal and the Stakes for the Communist Movement: Letters to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, 2005-2008," in the letter of March 2008 from the RCP, USA to the CPN(M) <http://revcom.us/a/160/Letters.pdf>
- ¹⁹⁰ Ajith objects to the recognition of the centrality of Avakian's role in the international struggle to understand the revisionist coup in China. Ajith makes reference to unnamed and untranslated persons who made important contributions to unmasking and struggling against the coup in China. No doubt some significant criticisms were made, some of which we are aware of and others we would benefit to learn about, but this does not diminish the unequalled depth and scope of Avakian's treatment of the subject. See in particular, *Mao's Immortal Contributions*, RCP Publications, Chicago, 1979, and *The Loss in China and the Revolutionary Legacy of Mao Tsetung*, RCP Publications, Chicago, 1978, both by Bob Avakian.
- ¹⁹¹ See *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage – A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*. Chapter II, "The First Stage of Communist Revolution.," p. 16. RCP Publications, Chicago, 2009.
<http://www.revcom.us/Manifesto/Manifesto.html>