

Bob Avakian on the Covid Pandemic

- ▶ **VACCINES ARE A DECISIVE MEANS FOR DEALING WITH COVID— THEY ARE *NOT* A “CONSPIRACY” OR A “PLOT” BY THE GOVERNMENT AND BIG CORPORATIONS**

The Importance of a Scientific Understanding and Approach

- ▶ **On COVID, The Importance Of Getting People Vaccinated, And The Very Real Problem Regarding Rampant Individualism**
- ▶ **Important Points of Theory and Method Regarding Freedom and Restrictions on Freedom**

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Bob Avakian

3 Articles on the Covid Pandemic

3 VACCINES ARE A DECISIVE MEANS FOR DEALING WITH COVID— THEY ARE *NOT* A “CONSPIRACY” OR A “PLOT” BY THE GOVERNMENT AND BIG CORPORATIONS

The Importance of a Scientific Understanding and Approach

15 On COVID, The Importance Of Getting People Vaccinated, And The Very Real Problem Regarding Rampant Individualism

19 Important Points of Theory and Method Regarding Freedom and Restrictions on Freedom



Bob Avakian: A Radically Different Leader— A Whole New Framework for Human Emancipation

Bob Avakian (BA) is the most important political thinker and leader in the world today.

Bob Avakian is completely different than the endless stream of bourgeois politicians who are put forward as “leaders,” whose goal is to maintain one variation or another of this system of capitalism-imperialism that is founded on and perpetuates itself through cruel and literally life-stealing exploitation, murderous oppression, and massive destruction, in all parts of the world. BA is a revolutionary who bases himself on the scientific understanding that this system must finally be overthrown through an organized struggle involving millions of people, and replaced with a system that is oriented to and capable of meeting the most fundamental needs of humanity and enabling humanity to become fit caretakers of the earth.

Bob Avakian is the architect of a whole new framework of human emancipation, the new synthesis of communism, which is popularly referred to as the “new communism.”

VACCINES ARE A DECISIVE MEANS FOR DEALING WITH COVID— THEY ARE *NOT* A “CONSPIRACY” OR A “PLOT” BY THE GOVERNMENT AND BIG CORPORATIONS

*The Importance of a Scientific
Understanding and Approach*

by Bob Avakian

As I have noted recently, there is a serious problem in this country that many people are refusing to get the vaccines against COVID, when in fact these vaccines have been clearly demonstrated to be safe and effective against serious illness and death from COVID. If the great majority of people in this country were vaccinated, this would mark a huge step toward getting the COVID pandemic under control—even as it is also necessary for people all around the world to be vaccinated as well, with special importance to getting people vaccinated in the poorer oppressed countries of the world, where vaccination rates, and access to the vaccines, are terribly limited now (for example, in Africa only something like 2 percent of the people have been vaccinated, mainly due to the extreme shortage of vaccines). So the refusal to get vaccinated, on the part of so many people in this

country—where vaccines are widely available and are free—is enabling the pandemic to keep going, killing large numbers of people in this country, especially Black people, Latinos and Native Americans, and enabling the virus to continue to mutate, with the prospect of producing even more dangerous variants. And, as I have emphasized:

people are not just refusing to get the vaccines because of any legitimate concerns about the safety (or the effectiveness) of the vaccines. Far too many people—especially lunatic anti-scientific fascists but far too many others as well, including among those hardest hit by the COVID pandemic—are refusing to get the vaccines because of *a combination of crazy conspiracy theories, other anti-scientific garbage, and rampant individualism*.¹

Among these “crazy conspiracy theories” and “other anti-scientific garbage” are the claims that COVID is not real—is a “hoax”—or that it is not really that serious (is not worse than a cold or the flu) and nobody, or not that many people, are actually dying from it... OR that it is real, and dangerous, but it has been deliberately manufactured by forces in the government of this country (and/or some other country) or by some other sinister (and seemingly secret) forces with the intent of killing off certain people (which people depends on which conspiracy theory is being put forward). And so on. For all, or any, of these conspiracy theories to be true would require the involvement of huge numbers of people conspiring in this—not just powerful people, but ultimately millions of ordinary people, including large numbers of scientists and even greater numbers of doctors and health care workers, not only in this country but in many other

phenomenon but, once again, in the transformation of necessity into freedom through struggle.

And this, from the article *Bob Avakian On The Law, Justice, And Ending Oppression And Exploitation*, is also very relevant.

The criminal legal process is not—or should not be—a contest between individuals but a confrontation between the state and people whom the state seeks to deprive of freedom on the basis that they have violated societal norms that are embodied in criminal statutes. The whole point of a legal system is, or should be, to *remove* disputes or perceived wrongs from the sphere of individual grievance—and the corresponding attempts to settle such grievance through individual acts of revenge or reciprocal wrongdoing—by providing a framework in which *society*, through established institutions and statutes, which are to be applied and work equally in regard to all, can adjudicate such disputes or claims of wrongdoing. (Emphasis—italics—in the original)

For further reading: The *Supplementary Excerpts from Bob Avakian*, and *Further Supplementary Excerpts*, which accompany the articles *Bob Avakian On Fascist Lunacy and “Woke Folk” Insanity: A New “Two Outmodeds,”* and *I’m So Sick of this Whole “Identity Politics” and “Woke” Thing, REVOLUTION AND EMANCIPATION—NOT PETTY REFORM AND REVENGE: On Movements, Principles, Methods, Means and Ends*—and in particular the excerpts from *Hope For Humanity On A Scientific Basis on individualism*—are very relevant and important.

and where we have not yet gotten. Even when we have made the leap to socialism, it reflects where we are and where we have not yet gotten in terms of the social relations and in fundamental terms the production relations, but also the role of the superstructure in such a socialist society.

The above excerpt is from *Constitution, Law, and Rights—in capitalist society and in the future socialist society, Selections from the writings of Bob Avakian including excerpts from the Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)*. It is originally from *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon, Part 1*. Note also the following from the (same Part 1 of) “Birds and Crocodiles”:

Here we see once more the profound importance of the understanding that freedom does not lie in the absence of necessity and constraint—nor of coercion of one kind or another. Nature coerces us all the time, in case anybody hasn’t noticed. But even social coercion is not something that we’re going to move entirely beyond: the essential question is whether or not that takes place in the form of social antagonism rooted in fundamental relations of exploitation and oppression. But, to put it in general terms, necessity will always confront human beings; there will always be both constraint from nature in the larger sense and social constraint on individuals and on members of society collectively, and there will always be struggle over how to deal with those contradictions. Freedom will always lie not in the evasion or the absolute absence of these things, and of necessity as a general

countries as well—all collaborating to promote such a conspiracy. NO. Come on—get real—this is all bullshit!

The work, and the overwhelming evidence-based understanding, of scientists, and the experience of huge numbers of people—including those who have in fact died from, or been made seriously ill by, COVID, as well as their family members, and the large numbers of doctors and health care workers who have made great personal sacrifices to treat people with COVID, and have in significant numbers been stricken with COVID themselves—all this has made very clear that COVID is very real, can in many cases be very deadly, and has been (and is being) spread not by some shadowy forces of sinister conspiracy, but by the means that science has demonstrated to be true: the COVID virus spreads mainly *through the air*, when people are in close proximity to each other, simply breathing, coughing, etc. (especially in indoor environments), and particularly when people are not wearing masks, when one or more person is infected with COVID, or when someone is just a “carrier” of the virus (even if they themselves are symptom-free, as can be the case with many vaccinated people).

And the scientific evidence—and widespread experience—is also very clear: the vaccines that have been developed to combat COVID are safe and very effective in preventing serious illness and death from this virus. And, if the great majority of people were vaccinated, in the U.S. and worldwide, this devastating pandemic could be brought under control. So, get the vaccine!—and also wear a mask and social distance wherever and whenever medical science indicates that this is necessary.

As I have emphasized previously:

there is no good reason NOT to get these vaccines—and refusing to do so not only puts those refusing at risk of serious illness and possibly death, but also *exposes others* to the same risks.²

Along with lunatic conspiracy theories about the vaccines, spread particularly (but not only) by fascist followers of Donald Trump, Fox “News,” etc., one of the common forms of opposition to the vaccines is the idea that the vaccines are not really (or not so much) a means to actually combat COVID but are essentially a conspiracy by the government and the big pharmaceutical companies to control people and to make big profits from the pandemic (whether the pandemic is seen as real, or a “hoax”). This is a kind of “populist” notion, which essentially reduces the problem in society to simply one of people being oppressed and harmed by powerful forces above them—big government and big corporations—a notion that, in somewhat different forms, is taken up by people on the right, but also on the so-called “left” (among some “woke” and “progressive” people). This is a basically *unscientific* understanding of things, both specifically in relation to COVID and the vaccines and fundamentally in terms of the essential nature of this system we live under, the system of capitalism-imperialism, and how this system actually functions.

It is of course true that corporations (and other big capitalist enterprises and financial institutions) dominate the economy under this system. As I have previously pointed to:

Also From Bob Avakian: Important Points of Theory and Method Regarding Freedom and Restrictions on Freedom

The following are helpful in getting a deeper sense of the basic content, and the method and principles, involved in the article ***On COVID, The Importance Of Getting People Vaccinated, And The Very Real Problem Regarding Rampant Individualism***. All are available at revcom.us.

First, the following:

On the basis of a constitution, laws embody and involve both protection and coercion, in regard to members of society and their rights. As I spoke to earlier, in socialist society for example, you can't go and decide that somebody has something that you want and it's unfair for them to have it, so you're just going to arbitrarily take it. There are laws which will prevent that....

So, we have to understand this once again as materialists: As long as you have laws, and as long as you have a constitution setting rules, this is going to involve both the protection of rights and the protection of people in society and, at the same time, coercion in regard to individuals and generally the members of society. This, once again, flows from a materialist understanding—it reflects where we are

This is a system dominated by capitalist corporations, banks and other financial institutions controlling vast sums of money, all of which is based on *exploiting* people—masses of people here, and billions of people throughout the world, including huge numbers of children.

But also very importantly:

These capitalists are locked in cutthroat competition with each other, and this drives them to penetrate every part of the world, especially the poorer countries, in order to exploit people even more viciously, while leaving many people without a way to work at all, within the regular (“formal”) economy.³

For these reasons, in an overall sense, these capitalist corporations (including the major pharmaceutical companies—“Big Pharma”) will seek to turn everything—including the health needs of the people—into a means for making greater profit and out-competing rival capitalists, even as some governments (and other institutions) have made some efforts to encourage cooperation in order to promote the development and distribution of vaccines (and other measures to deal with COVID).

Another important part of the picture is that this rivalry among capitalists also takes place along “national” lines—with contention between different capitalist-imperialist countries. At the same time, with the domination of this system of capitalism-imperialism, the world is divided into a handful of capitalist-imperialist countries and a large number of poor oppressed countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia—the Third World.

All this is why, despite some governments' efforts to curb the effects of this in dealing with COVID, capitalist competition and striving for greater and greater profit, and for a top-dog position in the world, gets in the way of and undermines the cooperation that is necessary—and that many scientists are actually striving to achieve—in dealing with the pandemic. It is why things like the vaccination rate (and access to the vaccines) is so low in the Third World.

But that is only part of the picture, and does not get to the heart of the situation with the vaccines and the fact that the government (or some in the government) of this country (and other countries) would actually *want* to get people vaccinated as a major means of “getting on top of” the COVID pandemic.

It is true that, because their system is based on exploiting and oppressing people, the governments of capitalist countries want and need to control the people. But, first of all, these governments do not need something like vaccines to do this—they already have many means of doing so, including the ways that people's use of social media and the internet generally provide these governments with easy access to extensive, even intimate details about people's lives, the ability to track where people are at any given time, their movements, and so on. At the same time, however, the role of capitalist governments is not simply to control people, but *more fundamentally it is to ensure the firm foundation and stability of capitalist rule and the more or less orderly functioning of this system, particularly in the “home” countries (such as the U.S., Germany, Russia, Japan, China, etc.) where the major economic and political institutions of the different capitalist-imperialist powers are “anchored.”*

see it as an expression of their “individual freedom” (and “personal choice”).

Along the same lines, it is worth noting that, in opposition to civil rights laws, people who owned businesses, such as stores and restaurants, and wanted to discriminate by refusing to serve Black people, would very frequently argue that it was a matter of their “freedom” to discriminate in this way (their right to do what they wanted with their business). And we have seen the same kinds of arguments from people who want to discriminate against other oppressed groups. Should *that* “individual freedom,” to discriminate in that way, be upheld?

It would be impossible to live in any society where “individual freedom” (or “personal choice”) were absolute. The question is: Are expressions of individual freedom, or restrictions on individual freedom, good or bad—do they make for a better, or worse, society?

This is why no woman should ever be forced to bear a child against her will, and it should therefore NOT be legal to deny women the right to abortion. And, on the other hand, it is why it SHOULD be legal to require (mandate) that people get vaccinated against COVID (except those for whom it would actually pose a demonstrable health problem) and mandatory to wear masks in situations where there is a real possibility of contracting, and spreading, COVID.

people (as well as Latinos and Native Americans) the hardest, and with the heaviest death toll; and it is a fact that the vaccines against COVID have been clearly demonstrated to be safe and to be overwhelmingly successful in preventing serious illness and death from COVID. **So, there is no good reason NOT to get these vaccines—and refusing to do so not only puts those refusing at risk of serious illness and possibly death, but also exposes others to the same risks.**

And people are not just refusing to get the vaccines because of any legitimate concerns about the safety (or the effectiveness) of the vaccines. Far too many people—especially lunatic anti-scientific fascists but far too many others as well, including among those hardest hit by the COVID pandemic—are refusing to get the vaccines because of *a combination of crazy conspiracy theories, other anti-scientific garbage, and rampant individualism*. People insist that “it is a matter of personal choice” whether to get the vaccine—and those refusing to get the vaccine argue (often angrily and belligerently) that “it is a matter of my personal freedom.”

This is nonsense—very harmful nonsense! Individual freedom is not absolute—as almost everyone will agree when this is posed to them in terms that do not run up against their individualism. For example, few will argue that someone should have the freedom to drive 100 miles an hour through a school zone when children are crossing the street. And any reasonable person will agree that it is not okay for white supremacists to lynch Black people—or for the police to wantonly murder Black people—simply because they feel like it—because they

Therefore, when faced with a serious pandemic like the current COVID crisis, *it is objectively in the interests of the ruling capitalists and their governments in countries like this actually to bring this pandemic under control, because it is highly disruptive of the overall functioning of the economy and of the society as a whole—and major disruptions like this can raise big questions among people about the ability of this system to maintain the orderly functioning of society and meet people’s basic needs*. And getting this pandemic “under control” is also objectively in the interests of the ruling capitalist-imperialists in their efforts, in the “international arena,” to secure and strengthen their position.

For these reasons, normally the entire capitalist ruling class in this country, and its political representatives, in both the Republican and Democratic parties, would be united in their desire to take the necessary measures to “get on top of” this pandemic—especially to get the population vaccinated, and to enforce things like mask mandates where that were deemed necessary.

But these are not “normal times.”

This Rare Time—How the Profound Bitter Divisions Within the Ruling Class Are Deepening the Crisis, And What Is the Way Forward Out of This Madness

This is a time when a section of the ruling capitalist class in this country, represented by the Republican Party—which has all along resisted even partial concessions to the fight against racial and gender oppression, and other struggles against discrimination and injustice—has become convinced that these changes have now gone too far, that they threaten

to destroy what has held this country together and enabled it to dominate the world. As a result,

The Republicans have become a *fascist* party—a party based on open and aggressive white supremacy, male supremacy, and other oppressive relations—a party convinced that only it deserves to rule, moving to manipulate elections and suppress votes in order to gain and hold onto power, refusing to accept the outcome of elections it does not win, determined to gut and pervert “the rule of law,” trample on people’s rights, and adopt what amounts to an *undisguised* capitalist dictatorship, ready to use violence not only against masses of people but also against its rivals in the ruling class.

These Republicans have mobilized a significant section of people who believe, with an intense, irrational passion, that *white supremacy, male supremacy*, and other oppressive relations (as well as unrestrained *plunder of the environment*) must be firmly upheld and enforced. They have been driven to a state of vicious insanity, embracing all kinds of lunatic conspiracy theories, along with a crazed Christian fundamentalism, as a response to the threat they see to their entitled (or “god-ordained”) position and their insistence that further concessions to the struggle against oppression will destroy what has “made America great.”⁴

It is for these reasons that the fascists in the Republican Party, and in the larger society, have eagerly and viciously promoted and rallied behind lunatic conspiracy theories about and rabid opposition to the COVID vaccines (and other

From Bob Avakian: On COVID, The Importance Of Getting People Vaccinated, And The Very Real Problem Regarding Rampant Individualism

Extreme individualism—the concept that “I have a right to do whatever I want, in line with my sense of my personal freedom”—is a tremendous problem in this society today, among all sections of the people. And one of the worst things about this is that *this extreme individualism is actually a point of unity between some Black people, and other oppressed people, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the genocidal racist fascists. What a terrible situation where some Black people and other oppressed people can actually find themselves in the same place as those fascists who regard them as inferior sub-humans and want to deny them basic rights, lock them up permanently, or outright exterminate them!*

This has come out sharply around the question of COVID vaccines—in opposition to getting the vaccines. While there is, particularly among Black people, some awful history with medical experiments, and some bad experience, historically and right to today, with medical authorities and medical treatment, it is a fact that the COVID pandemic has, in this country, hit Black

measures such as mask wearing) and have spread this *anti-scientific disinformation* as widely as they can throughout society. *Since it is Biden and the Democratic Party which now dominate in the federal government, the fascists are determined to sabotage and undermine the ability of Biden and the Democrats to govern effectively—this is more important to the fascists than dealing with the COVID pandemic and achieving some kind of relative “stability” and “normal functioning” of the economy and the society overall.*

For the *masses of people* in this country—as opposed to the capitalist-imperialist ruling class, and all its representatives—*our* interests lie with the great majority of humanity, who continue to be devastated by this pandemic, with already more than 4 million deaths worldwide and an intensification of the suffering that the functioning of this system of capitalism-imperialism and its domination of the world forcefully imposes on people everywhere. From this perspective, it is definitely in our interests and of immediately great importance to promote scientific knowledge about vaccines (and COVID generally) and win as many people as possible to get vaccinated; to fight with real determination against the fascist obstruction and resistance to COVID vaccines, and to insist that vaccines be *mandatory*—and masks as well, in situations where science indicates that masks are necessary—and that the vaccine actually be made available, in the necessary quantities, to people throughout the world, without consideration of cost and profit, and in opposition to all reactionary political objectives, including rivalry among capitalist-imperialist powers.

In most fundamental terms, what this pandemic has further revealed about the utterly bankrupt and outmoded (“past

its date of expiration”) nature of this system—and more particularly how the rare situation that now exists, with the “deepening and sharpening conflicts among the ruling powers,” which have been sharply expressed in relation to the COVID pandemic, and in countless other ways—all this **“provides a stronger basis and greater openings to break the hold of this system over masses of people.”**⁵

The way forward—the only way forward—out of this madness is *revolution: a real revolution to overthrow this monstrous system of capitalism-imperialism, and bring something much better into being. It is this, ever more urgently needed, revolution that all those who hunger for a world without all the unnecessary suffering to which the masses of humanity are subjected under the domination of this system must work for tirelessly, on a consistently scientific basis*—seizing on this rare situation where such a revolution becomes possible, even in a powerful country like this.

As an important “background” for what I have written here, the following from V.I. Lenin—leader of the first successful socialist revolution, in Russia, who also made crucial contributions to the development of communist theory—is of very definite and immediate relevance and importance:

People always were and always will be the foolish victims of deceit and self-deceit in politics until they learn to discover the *interests* of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises. The supporters of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by

the defenders of the old order until they realize that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is maintained by the forces of some ruling classes.

This is from V. I. Lenin, “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism” (March 1913, *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, pp. 23-28, Progress Publishers) as cited in my book *The New Communism*, Insight Press, 2016, p. 11. (Emphasis in the original.)

ENDNOTES

1. From Bob Avakian: **“On COVID, The Importance of Getting People Vaccinated, And The Very Real Problem Regarding Rampant Individualism.”** Available at revcom.us.
2. **“On COVID, The Importance of Getting People Vaccinated, And The Very Real Problem Regarding Rampant Individualism.”**
3. From Bob Avakian—*Revolutionary Leader, Author of the New Communism: THIS IS A RARE TIME WHEN REVOLUTION BECOMES POSSIBLE—WHY THAT IS SO, AND HOW TO SEIZE ON THIS RARE OPPORTUNITY.* Available at revcom.us.
4. **THIS IS A RARE TIME WHEN REVOLUTION BECOMES POSSIBLE.**
5. **THIS IS A RARE TIME WHEN REVOLUTION BECOMES POSSIBLE.**