



BOB AVAKIAN:

The Revolution We Are About Should Not Only Encompass But Welcome the Arundhati Roys of the World

Editors' Note: The following is taken from a Question and Answer session, in connection with 7 Talks given earlier this year by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party. The titles of these 7 Talks and information on how to access them, along with the Q&A (and Closing Remarks), are found on page 9 of this issue of *Revolution*. What is reprinted here is the transcription of one of the questions, followed by Chairman Avakian's answer. Only minor editing has been done. In a few places explanatory comments have been inserted, within brackets, in the body of the text, and footnotes have been added at the bottom of the page.

Arundhati Roy is the author of the prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things*, as well as other fiction and non-fiction works. She is a social critic and social activist both in India and on the world stage, including in her opposition to the war in Iraq and other crimes of the imperialist system.

Question: My question deals with some of the material from the two series "Views On Socialism and Communism" and "The Basis, the Goals and the Methods of the Communist Revolution." [These are two previous talks by Bob Avakian, in 2005.] I've been thinking about two things: one is a statement by Arundhati Roy in an interview where she basically said—this is a paraphrase—"I support the Maoists in India, even though I would probably be the first person they would kill."

Second, I've been thinking about this in relation to the need to make a distinction, as you emphasized, between those who are actively plotting to overthrow the socialist state and those who are just dissenting, or even vehemently opposed to it, but not actively plotting to overthrow it. My question is, taking into account the socialist experience and the very secondary aspects where Arundhati Roy might have a point based on what happened in China, and also taking into account the particularity of India and the particularities of this country, what should communists say to the Arundhati Roys of the world in relation to this contradiction, and why should they believe us?

Bob Avakian: Well, let me start out by saying—I can't speak for these Indian Maoists that she's talking about, but let me start out by answering it this way: To the degree that there is truth, any truth, to what she's saying, to the degree that there would be any truth to that, there should *not* be. The revolution that we are about should certainly be able to encompass the Arundhati Roys—in fact, not only encompass but welcome them in their role—as maddening as it might be at times! Because she's going to be proceeding from a different world outlook, but we have to understand that that's part of what we not only have to recognize is objectively going to be there for a whole period of transition, but also, especially the more that we relate to it correctly, it can contribute to where we're seeking to go. That's the whole point about not only allowing but *welcoming* and *fostering* dissent. That's the whole point epistemologically about how all truths are good for the proletariat—everything that's actually true can help us get to communism.

The role of people like that is one that should be embraced within the kind of socialist state, the kind of dictatorship of the proletariat, that we should be striving to establish and to carry forward. So it should *not* be true [that people like Arundhati Roy would be regarded and treated as enemies of the revolution].

One of the things we should say to them—we should struggle with people like her over her world outlook and her political outlook, and struggle with her that she ought to be a communist herself! But, given that we may not win that struggle, at least not for a while, we have to correctly understand what's correct about what people like that raise in the particulars that they raise, and what's incorrect about it. But more than that, what role this plays in contributing to the kind of process—intellectual ferment, political ferment, the

whole elasticity that we want in socialist society. And we have to, first of all, ideologically, orient *ourselves* the right way toward this.

This has to do with fundamental questions of epistemology, has to do with "embraces but does not replace." [This refers to a statement by Mao Tsetung that Marxism embraces but does not replace the various spheres of human endeavor and knowledge.¹] This has to do with the fact that, at any given time, while in an overall and ultimate sense consistently and systematically applying the communist world outlook and method, in the best possible way, enables you, ultimately and in a fundamental and all-around sense, to get more deeply to the truth than any other world outlook and methodology—qualitatively so—this doesn't mean that at any given time you necessarily have the truth about something. That's a contradiction we have to learn to handle much more correctly than it has been handled in the past of our movement, and in the history of the socialist countries.

So, people like Arundhati Roy or others may be raising criticisms coming from a different perspective—a different ideological perspective, and a different political perspective—than the leading forces inside socialist society; but they may still bring forward important truths. And even if they don't, in any particular instance, it's important that there be the kind of atmosphere where they are encouraged to bring forward their ideas, and to be part of, and to create, and to help stimulate the intellectual and the political ferment that we need—which we, with our methodology, have to be continually sifting through, embracing, integrating, and more deeply synthesizing in the correct way.

I've said this before: If you really get this epistemology, you *want* people to challenge you. Do you want to know the truth, or do you just want to impose your will? Do you really want to act in the interests of the masses of people in abolishing the "four ells" and moving humanity to a whole new stage? [The "four ells" refers to a formulation by Marx in which he gives a basic summation of the aims of the communist revolution.²] Or do you just want to get into a position where you can do what you think is right [without having a solid, scientific basis for knowing whether it is really right or not]? There is a fundamental difference, ideologically and epistemologically, between those two worldviews. And if you really get this communist epistemology, as I understand it, you do understand why everything that is

Continued on page 8

1. Bob Avakian has emphasized the importance of this principle—"embraces but does not replace"—and has developed and applied it in a sweeping way as an important aspect of communist theory of knowledge (epistemology) and methodology generally. This is discussed, for example, in the book by Bob Avakian *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* (Insight Press, 2005).

2. In *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*, Marx wrote that the socialist state, or the dictatorship of the proletariat, is the necessary transit to the abolition of all class distinctions (or class distinctions generally); the abolition of all the production relations on which those class distinctions rest; the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to those production relations; and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that correspond to those relations.



Continued from page 7

actually true will help you get to communism. This doesn't mean everything that is actually true makes it *easier* in the short run. People point out your mistakes, and it may make difficulties, and their pointing them out may make difficulties. Not just because they're voicing them but because it will resonate with other people who have grievances and even other forces in society who will misuse the legitimate grievances of others. But if you're afraid of that, then you can't get to where we need to go.

The reason that people should believe us is, first of all, because *we* should believe it ourselves. As I've said before, this is not a gimmick. This is not a way of tricking people who are afraid we're going to impose our will on them into thinking, "Oh no, we're a nice bunch of liberals. Don't worry."

No. We're not liberals. But we're not going to impose our will, or seek to, in that kind of way, for much more fundamental reasons. So we should believe this *ourselves*, first of all. It doesn't mean we don't struggle for what we think is correct at a given time. If you don't do that you're not worth anything to anyone worth anything. But even while you're struggling vigorously for what you understand to be true, you have to maintain your critical faculties, your critical thinking, your openness to others [who are] contesting your ideas, no matter what viewpoint they're coming from, to see if there's truth in what they're raising in opposition to you.

It gets very complicated. One of her big things, Arundhati Roy, is opposing a lot of these dams in India. Well, the way they do build these dams in these societies run by exploiting classes, and under the overall domination of imperialism, has horrendous effects on people. But, you know, when you get to socialism, you've got to develop the economy. And you don't do this without a lot of contradictions, some of them becoming quite acute! Might it be necessary to dislocate some people in the course of developing the socialist economy and move them to another place? Yes. But you have to do that in a whole different way than it's done under these exploiting systems. And you have to do it in a way that ultimately rests on the voluntary action of masses of people, based on their understanding and being won to the greater good.

There was a struggle like that—I talked about this in the Memoir, about when I was in China the first time and visiting the area where they built the Red Flag Canal. [This refers to *From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey From Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist, a Memoir by Bob Avakian* (Insight Press, 2005).] They diverted a river through a mountain. And the effect of that on the villagers who lived alongside where the river had gone was negative [in a narrow, short term sense]! They didn't flood their village out, but it did mean that they weren't getting the same irrigation they'd gotten before. It didn't mean they didn't get any, but this was done for the larger good of being able to provide irrigation for agriculture to a much larger area and much greater numbers of people.

And they had to win people to that voluntarily. They had to struggle through the ideological and political questions and struggle against the "small owner mentality" that the peasants were still caught up in to a large degree, because in the old society that's where they were—they were exploited largely under the feudal system but as small landowners, and if they didn't have land they were trying to get it, because that's the way they could live. And there's a certain ideology that goes along with that, generally a sort of petty bourgeois ideology. They had to struggle through those questions ideologically.

Well [referring to socialist society], you get an Arundhati Roy coming in and raising things that may divide sharply into two. Some of them may be legitimate criticisms of the way you're going about it, and some of them may be wrong, because she's not seeing the larger picture. So, you're going to have to struggle through and sift out those things. But to the degree that someone like that is wrong, what is your orientation toward that? That's the fundamental question of outlook and philosophy and epistemology. Is that going to contribute—directly or indirectly, positively and negatively—to our getting to a deeper understanding of reality, and a deeper understanding of how to transform reality in the interests of achieving the "four alls" and emancipating humanity? Or is it not? If you understand that it is, then you have a certain orientation toward it, which is the one we should have. If you don't understand that it is, then you just think "these goddamn people are always making trouble, every time we try to do something they come around and stand in the way of what we're trying to do, literally or figuratively." And there'll be some truth to that. But these contradictions have to be handled non-antago-

nistically. Unless someone comes around, when you're trying to carry out an economic project, and they actually start blowing up the machinery—then they've carried it over to another realm. Then they're not merely arguing with you about it, or waging protests, then they're going into another realm. And then you have to act accordingly. But even while doing that, there's still a difference between having to act accordingly in those circumstances and what your attitude should be in an overall sense toward this phenomenon in general—of people raising disagreements, criticizing what you're doing, pointing out shortcomings.

Look, you know Mao said we have to toughen our skin. You do have to toughen your skin if you're going to do this the right way. People disagree with you, they criticize you—they're not always so polite, sometimes they're downright fucking nasty. But you still have to have an orientation of sifting through to see what's true, *and* you have to have an orientation of creating an atmosphere in society which is favorable to this happening—or we're not going to get where we need to go.

The reason Arundhati Roy should believe us is that a) *we* should believe it; and b) our practice, our methodology, the way we carry out things, should flow from and be consistent with that—and it should be borne out! Everybody, when they hear somebody say something that's controversial, or something that they're not inclined to believe, or is not sure is true, tests people out in various ways. That's part of the process too. You engage in discussion and struggle, but you also observe and interact with people. This is what happens, not just with this or that prominent individual, but with people generally, the masses of people. The masses of people have the same questions: "Why should we believe you?" "That sounds good, but how do we know it isn't going to go over here where we've been told this always goes?" Or "I heard your people over there in China did X, Y and Z." The first time I talked with Mobile Shaw he told me, "Well, one of the brothers from the neighborhood told me 'I heard your people in China did all this kind of stuff to people.'" [Willie "Mobile" Shaw was a member of the RCP who died last year. He grew up in and lived his whole life in the Nickerson Gardens Housing Projects in Watts, Los Angeles; after working with the revolutionaries there for a period of time, he joined the Party. The hardship of his life conditions led to his having a serious illness, and he died on November 24, 2005, due to complications following surgery. See the pamphlet, *Statement by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, on the Occasion of the Death of Willie "Mobile" Shaw.*]

Masses out there are hearing this stuff. It's not just a few people who read about it more extensively. So there's a question of do you really deeply—not just believe in some quasi-religious sense, do you grasp deeply the truth—that by toughening our skin, and not only in sort of a "grit your teeth" way, but actually encouraging and fostering the atmosphere where there will be intellectual and political ferment, that we can sift through and get further along and actually get where we need to go ultimately? And if we don't do that, we won't get there. This is the fundamental question.

Now we do have to have a solid core—this goes to the other part of what you raised. If people want to get up and give speeches about how we ought to go back to capitalism, and they attack the leadership and so on of the new society, and we don't allow that, then we're going against the atmosphere we need to create. It's very tricky because, for example, in Cuba—which is not a socialist country, it's a revisionist country, sort of social-democratic social-welfare for some of the people, enforced with ultimately a bourgeois dictatorship—one of the ways they exercise coercion, which is effectively state coercion, is when they get dissidents and so on they mobilize these neighborhood committees and masses of people to surround these people raising criticism and basically try to effectively—or figuratively if not literally—shout them down. Well, I'm not saying that there's never a role for mobilizing the people who are the firmest supporters of revolution under socialism: are you just going to let the reactionaries run wild, or the people who are dissenting get out there and you never mobilize people on your side of the dispute? But even that has to be approached very carefully and from the correct orientation, because even that can provide an atmosphere that becomes tantamount to, and effectively the same as, imposing the state to suppress dissent. If you create an atmosphere which chills dissent even in that form, you are effectively doing the same thing as if you brought the state down against it.

But that is different than people who actually [carry out physical sabotage and similar acts]. I'm sorry, but we're living in class-divided society in socialism. We might wish that weren't true, but there are a lot of things we wish

weren't true. That's the story with Progressive Labor Party. They used to have—back in their not so terrible days, just bad days, they used to have a slogan “Fight for Socialism.” I knew some people from PL who were called to the HUAC hearings (or the equivalent hearings of congressional committees to “investigate subversives”) and I have to give them [PL] credit—they went back and raised a ruckus and challenged all these southern cracker congressmen and senators who were heading all these committees investigating communism, they [PL] pointed out what was going on in the states of these congressmen and senators in terms of the oppression of Black people and other things. And I remember one of them telling me a story: Because you're being called by the committee, you get flown in at the expense of the government and put up in a hotel. So they were in a hotel and going up an elevator one night during the course of the hearings; they had on their “Fight for Socialism” buttons, and this drunken congressman got on the elevator with them, with each arm around a prostitute, and looked at their buttons and said “Oh, ‘fight for socialism!’ I used to be for socialism. Is that like Norman Thomas and the Socialist Party?” And they said, “No, this is like Mao Tsetung.” See, this was in their not so terrible days. So they used to have that slogan, “Fight for Socialism.” Then they decided that socialism's a big mess, so now let's just go directly to communism—let's not bother about socialism. They might as well say: “Why don't we all just go to heaven? Why bother with earth, it's full of a lot of mess?” It's just rampant idealism!³

So we're going to have these class conflicts [in socialist society], and these reactionary forces who are going to meet, and not just grumble but plot. And they're actually going to implement things. It's like I said—the bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionaries are not going to just sit back and say: “Let's see what happens. They say this is a better society in every sphere, not just economically but politically, culturally, socially, philosophically, morally. Let's see if they can make that be true.” They're going to actively plot, because they *don't want* it to be true, and they don't want it to be fulfilled. And when they actively plot and go from plotting to actually carrying it out—you see, this actually happened in the Soviet Union. People blew up plants. Blew up factories. Because that sabotage would undermine the economy and would drive the masses away from supporting and being enthusiastic about the new system—not only the new economic system but the new political system. Well, if you allow that to go on, then you might as well just hand power back to these people and save yourself the trouble and save the masses of people the trouble and just say, “Go ahead and do your worst to the masses of people.”

So there is a distinction there. These boundaries, once again, are conditional and relative, but they're real. There is a difference between raising a lot of criticisms and arguing that this system is no good, and so on and so on—and actually actively plotting and then carrying out plots to sabotage it. And [in socialist society] in law, and in the Constitution and in the way it's carried out, that distinction has to be made, and the masses and the vanguard have to understand the importance of that distinction. Those are two different types of contradictions. One of them should be handled non-antagonistically, and the other is antagonistic and has to be dealt with by the force of the state, or you might as well just give it up.

So if we can actually grasp this deeply, and lead growing sections of the masses to grasp this deeply, then there should definitely be a place and a welcoming atmosphere for all the Arundhati Roys, even with all their cantankerousness—which will get raised a lot against us instead of against the people it's rightly raised against now. But even all that cantankerousness should be strategically and fundamentally welcomed and embraced as part of what we're seeking to do, because it's the world we want to get to and because it's the way to *get* to that world. So there should be not only room, in some negative sense, but there should be an atmosphere where these people feel welcome even while they often express very sharp differences over particularities. And we should be striving to win them over at the same time, to raise their sights. To say to them: “Instead of simply standing outside being a critic, get inside and raise your criticism, but also contribute more fully to making this be what it should be, and can be.” And while they're still on the outside, then we have to approach them in the ways I'm talking about, and not in the ways she fears she would be approached. □

3. As discussed by Bob Avakian in his Memoir, *From Ike to Mao, and Beyond: My Journey From Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist*, there was a certain period, in the 1960s, when Progressive Labor Party was generally associated—and at times associated itself in a general way—with China, but PL never had a deep grasp of, nor consistently put forward, what was pathbreaking about China as a revolutionary socialist society and Mao Tsetung as its leader, nor did PL provide consistent and vigorous—and scientifically based—answers to the distortions and slanders with which China and Mao were attacked at that time. By the early 1970s, PL had completely turned against China as a socialist country and then, as spoken to here by Bob Avakian, PL gave up on the idea of socialism altogether.

NEW PRESENTATIONS

by BOB AVAKIAN

Chairman of the RCP, USA

- ◆ Why We're in the Situation We're in Today... And What to Do About It: A Thoroughly Rotten System and the Need for Revolution
- ◆ Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy
- ◆ Communism: A Whole New World and the Emancipation of All Humanity—Not “The Last Shall Be First, And the First Shall Be Last”
- ◆ The NBA: Marketing the Minstrel Show and Serving the Big Gangsters
- ◆ Communism and Religion: Getting Up and Getting Free—Making Revolution to Change the Real World, Not Relying on “Things Unseen”
- ◆ Conservatism, Christian Fundamentalism, Liberalism and Paternalism... Bill Cosby and Bill Clinton... Not All “Right” but All Wrong!
- ◆ “Balance” Is the Wrong Criterion—And a Cover for a Witch-hunt—What We Need Is the Search for the Truth: Education, Real Academic Freedom, Critical Thinking and Dissent
- ◆ Question and Answer session with Concluding Remarks

**Download audio files online
at bobavakian.net
and revcom.us**

**Download the PDF of this ad at revcom.us
Get the word out everywhere!**

Works by Bob Avakian

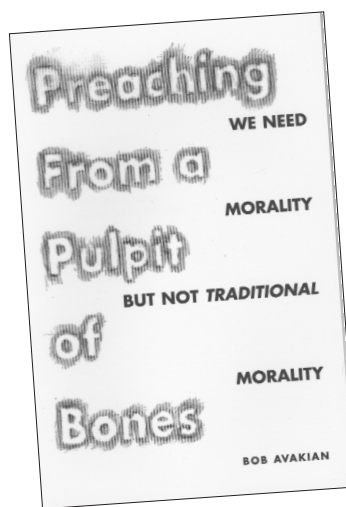


From Ike To Mao and Beyond ***My Journey From Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist*** ***A Memoir by Bob Avakian***

Bob Avakian has written a memoir containing three unique but interwoven stories. The first tells of a white middle-class kid growing up in '50s America who goes to an integrated high school and has his world turned around; the second of a young man who overcomes a near-fatal disease and jumps with both feet into the heady swirl of Berkeley in the '60s; and the third of a radical activist who matures into a tempered revolutionary communist leader. If you think about the past or if you urgently care about the future ... if you want to hear a unique voice of utter realism and deep humanity ... and if you dare to have your assumptions challenged and your stereotypes overturned ... then you won't want to miss this book.

Insight Press \$18.95 (Illinois residents add 9% sales tax)

Order online at insight-press.com



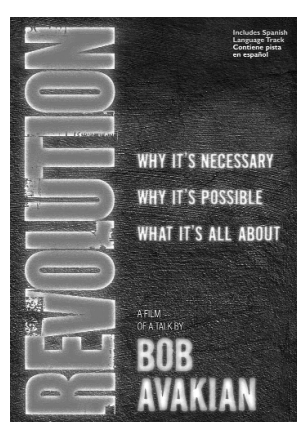
Preaching from a Pulpit of Bones: We Need Morality But Not Traditional Morality

This provocative book includes a scathing refutation of the reality behind conservative Christian fundamentalist morality, a critical look at the limitations of "liberation theology," including a discussion of Jim Wallis' book, *The Soul of Politics*, and an inspiring look at morality from a revolutionary perspective. This work is even more timely today than it was when it was published in 1999.

Bob Avakian says in the Prologue that "From whatever vantage point one looks, it is unmistakable that there is what could be called a 'moral crisis' in America. There has been, to a significant degree, 'a breakdown of traditional morality.' But the answer to this – at least the answer that is in the interests of the majority of people in the U.S. and the overwhelming majority of humanity – is not a more aggressive assertion of that 'traditional morality' but winning people to a radically different morality, in the process of radically transforming society and the world as a whole."

Insight Press \$18.95 (Illinois residents add 9% sales tax)

Order online at insight-press.com



REVOLUTION: **Why It's Necessary,** **Why It's Possible,** **What It's All About**

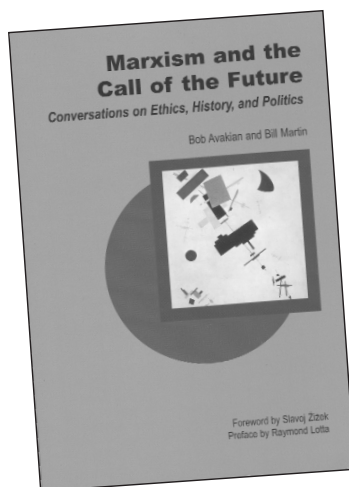
In 2003 Chairman Bob Avakian delivered an historic talk in the United States, now available in video. This talk is a wide-ranging revolutionary journey. It breaks down the very nature of the society we live in and how humanity has come to a time where a radically different society is possible. Full of heart and soul, humor and consciousness, it will challenge you and set your heart and mind to flight.

Specify format:

•DVD (Eng/Span) •VHS (Eng) •VHS (Span)

Three Q Productions • \$34.95 + \$4 shipping

Order online at threeQvideo.com



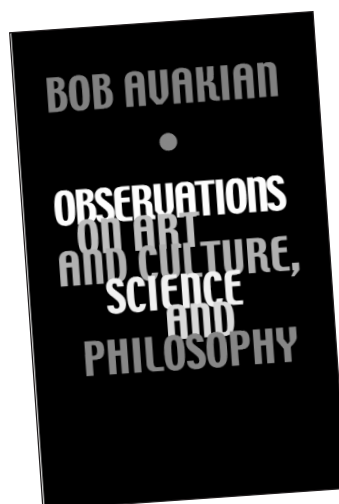
Marxism and the Call of the Future: Conversations on Ethics, History, and Politics

by Bob Avakian and Bill Martin

This book offers readers a rare chance to witness a fascinating encounter between a radical social theorist and philosopher and a visionary communist leader and thinker. The challenging and unpredictable dialogue bristles with insights and provocations. Avakian and Martin wrestle with big questions that have to do with the state of the world and the possibility for radical change. The scope and relevance of Marxism, and the nature and reach of communist revolution, are at the heart of this rich and lively dialogue.

Open Court Press \$37.95

Order online at opencourtbooks.com

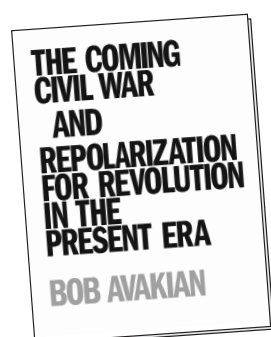


Bob Avakian: Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy

This provocative collection of reflections and observations by Bob Avakian on art, culture, science and philosophy offers a rare treat. Excerpted from formal talks as well as more informal discussions and conversations, many of the texts in this collection allow the reader to experience firsthand the freewheeling Bob Avakian – in the process of developing his thinking and reenvisioning the communist project on a wide range of controversies, from the dictatorship of the proletariat to discussions of truth, beauty, science and imagination.

Insight Press \$14.95 (Illinois residents add 9% sales tax)

Order online at insight-press.com

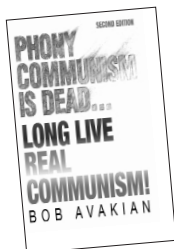


Collection of Articles by Bob Avakian

The Coming Civil War and Repolarization for Revolution in the Present Era

This is a series of excerpts from conversations and discussions, as well as more formal talks, by Bob Avakian. As the title indicates, these excerpts address questions of literally world-historical magnitude. There is a deep analysis of the stakes of this moment—and a bold and comprehensive strategy for meeting the challenges and wresting a revolutionary future out of that challenge. Everyone and anyone at all concerned about the current direction of society should dig into this pamphlet.

RCP Publications \$2



Phony Communism Is Dead... Long Live Real Communism!

Could We Really Win?

Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?



...and other books and pamphlets are available from RCP Publications (PO Box 3486, Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL 60654) and at Revolution Books stores and outlets.

Download audio files of various talks by Bob Avakian at bobavakian.net and revcom.us

Books and films available at Revolution Books stores and outlets, other bookstores in your area, and online. Or order direct from the appropriate publisher:

Insight Press, Inc., 4064 N. Lincoln Ave., Suite 264, Chicago, IL 60618 • insight-press.com
Open Court Press, P.O. Box 9307, La Salle, IL 61301 • 800-815-2280 • opencourtbooks.com
RCP Publications, P.O. Box 3486, Chicago, IL 60654 • 773-227-4066
Three Q Productions, 2038 W. Chicago Ave. #126D, Chicago, IL 60622 • threeQvideo.com