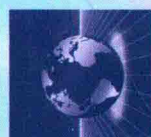


Masoud Mohammadi Alamuti

Critical Rationalism and Globalization

Towards the sociology of the
open global society

RETHINKING
Globalizations



Critical Rationalism and Globalization

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Masoud Mohammadi Alamuti



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Masoud Alamuti's highly original study of globalization is remarkable for its breadth of vision and for its skilful integration of sociological theory and normative argument. His controversial thesis that critical rationalism can lead us to an open global society that is both peaceful and just is a much-needed antidote to the pessimism that globalization so often attracts.

Peter Jones, *Emeritus Professor of Political Philosophy,
Newcastle University, UK.*

This important book boldly blends critical rationalism with social theory to arrive at a powerful defense of openness to individual and collective learning as a key to conceiving and devising a just order for the emergent global society. One can only hope that readers will resist any temptations to dismiss Masoud Alamuti's ideas as overly idealistic or unrealistic. If they do, they can benefit enormously from an author who challenges us to reconsider long-standing, but increasingly anachronistic and/or normatively dubious understandings of society, national sovereignty, and tolerance. Another virtue of his book is that it goes beyond critiquing the existing order of interstate-relations, outlining the contours of an admittedly radical, yet arguably more humane alternative. I highly recommend this timely, thought-provoking contribution to an evolving debate.

Volker H. Schmidt, *Professor of Sociology,
National University of Singapore.*

Critical Rationalism and Globalization

Critical Rationalism and Globalization addresses how the access to critical reason enables people to shape a new social order on a global scale.

This book demonstrates how the philosophy of critical rationalism contributes to the sociology of Globalization, through uncovering the role of critical reason in arriving at an agreement on *common values and institutions* on a global scale. It discusses how value consensus on the institutions of sovereignty and inter-state law has prepared the ground for the rise of a *global system of national societies* after the end of World War II. *Masoud Alamuti* argues that uneven openness of national economies to global trade and investment should be comprehended in the framework of the post-war legal and political context. Using the concept of rationality as *openness to criticism*, the book proposes a *normative theory of open global society* in order to show that the existing value consensus on the cult of sovereignty suffers from the recognition of the possibility of rational dialogue among competing ways of the good life. *Masoud Alamuti* argues that once the people of the world, across national communities, open their fundamental ways of the good life to mutual criticism, they can create common global values necessary for the rise of a *just social order* on a global scale.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars of Globalization Studies, Global Sociology and International Relations.

Masoud Mohammadi Alamuti is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Management and Planning Studies (IMPS), Tehran, Iran.

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To my father Hojatollah Mohammadi Alamuti

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Preface

[C]ritical rationalism is not merely an account of science, but a complete philosophy. ... [S]cience is Enlightenment, genuine knowledge about reality. The methods of science—expressed by critical rationalism—are universally applicable precisely because these methods are not mere rules regarding the effective use of an instrument, but principles of rational problem solving in general.

(C. Fred Alford 1987: 454)

[The] idea of an open society is an attempt to transform the European idea of freedom into a *sociological construction* that can be seen as an ideal type in the sense of Max Weber. ... [T]he idea of such a society is an ideal, so that a concrete society can approximate it more or less. ... [T]his ideal can be used as a *standard for criticizing the existing social order* and also as a *guide for attempts to reform them*.

(Hans Albert 2006: 8, emphasis added)

This book realizes my long-term goal of addressing the role of human reason in the creation of a just and free global society. As reflected in the title of this book, *Critical Rationalism and Globalization*, the philosophy of critical rationalism is used to introduce the function of human reason. The subtitle *The Sociology of Open Global Society* shows that this book aims to turn the ideal of an open global society into a normative theory of global society for arguing how people of the world can create a just and free society on a global scale.

Globalization is usually defined as the *compression of time and space* through the emergence of new information technologies connecting distinct communities around the globe. This book, however, attempts to introduce globalization as social change on a global scale. Moreover, it aims to redefine the social change necessary for transforming the existing global order into an open global society.

I have taken the central issue of the sociology of globalization as the question of how human actors' access to critical reason enables them to shape a new social order on a global scale. This question covers the role of reason in the rise of global order, as well as in the transformation of this order into an ideal global society.

This book argues that if globalization amounts to *social change on a global scale* and if such social change should be addressed by a theory of society, the

contribution of human reason to the emergence of global order must be shown through a theory of society. If this is correct, the question of how people's access to critical reason enables them to create social order and to change it should be answered before discussing the way in which rationality and globalization are linked.

During the development of my sociological thinking, the central role of *common values* in the emergence of social order led me to question whether the contribution of critical rationalism to the sociology of globalization can be understood through uncovering the role of reason in order to arrive at an agreement on a set of common values and institutions on a global scale. In other words, it must be asked whether the existing global order is underpinned by a *value consensus* among national societies, and, if so, whether people are capable of revising such a value consensus in order to create an ideal social order on a global scale.

The critical stage in the development of my arguments in this book was reached when I understood that, although at least one of dominant themes in modern sociology, Talcott Parsons's theory of society, has paid close attention to the function of common values in the emergence of a peaceful social order, it does not address the role of reason in the initial creation of shared values. This observation led me to recognize that an *oversocialized conception of the human actor* who merely internalized a given value system to make social order possible has prevented modern sociology from detecting the role of human reason in social change through its capacity for revising the existing value consensus.

With this sociological diagnosis, it became clear to me that a theory of social change showing the reason why human actors are capable of reshaping social order through criticism of its moral foundations is required for the formulation of a sociology of globalization. Therefore, I devote Chapters 4 and 5 to the introduction of the new models of human action and social change that are necessary for showing the reason for which a new sociology of globalization requires the philosophy of critical rationalism.

It might be interesting for the reader to know that it was the failure of modern sociology to address the question of social change that led me to consider the contribution of critical rationalism to the sociology of globalization and to a normative theory of global society.

My sociological inquiries have empowered me to realize that the relationship between rationality and globalization cannot be addressed when human actors are depicted merely as *value-takers*, rather than *value-makers*. Not only should human actors be regarded as independent actors who have already organized their social relationships on a domestic scale through a value consensus, but they should also be viewed as independent actors capable of thinking independently of their social conditions and of acting to achieve the creation of an open global society.

With this background in mind, I have realized that, despite its origin in the philosophy of critical rationalism, Karl Popper's theory of open society is not

capable of addressing the question of social change from a *closed society* to an *open society* because it proposes a concept of critical reason according to which the existing value consensus, as the source of social integration, cannot be subjected to rational criticism. I have learnt that this sociological failure originates in Popper's reading of critical rationalism in terms of *irrational faith in reason*.

From this perspective, this book can be viewed as a new critique of Popper's theory of the open society and as the first systematic attempt to use the concept of rationality as an *openness to criticism*, as William Bartley has defined it, in order to formulate a social theory of open global society in which one of the major upshots is a new sociology of globalization.

It is remarkable that it was Bartley who recognized, better than anyone, that Popper's concept of rationality does not provide a reasonable defense of rationality. Nevertheless, Bartley himself was not concerned with the sociological consequences of Popper's irrational faith in reason. However, it has become clear to me that Bartley's theory of critical rationalism has an undetected potential for reformulating modern sociology so that it works for the sociology of globalization. I have addressed the difference between Popper's and Bartley's concepts of critical rationalism in Chapter 2.

Perhaps it is the use of Bartley's concept of rationality as *openness to criticism* for the formulation of the theory of social change from a closed to an open society that has enabled this book to present a new sociology of globalization. Inspired by this concept of rationality, I have defined the transition from a closed to an open society as *social learning from error* during which people open their moral beliefs and social institutions to rational criticism.

This book views globalization as the process through which a *global system of national societies* has been created and argues that this new social order can be transformed into an open global society. The idea of an open global society is used not only for criticizing a global system of national societies, but also for introducing attempts to reform it.

In this book, I have tried to show that people should not passively accept a global order which cannot help them to attain their goals. They are capable of activating their critical reason to create a just and free global society.

Masoud Mohammadi Alamuti
Münster, Germany
July 2014

Preface from series editor

How are we to transform the world, and overcome the legacies of past centuries of division, war, extreme inequality, and oppression? How are we to achieve a new unity of humanity in a future global social community, a true ‘global society’? On what basis can we establish a set of globally shared common values, beyond the present “cult of (national) sovereignty”, that can profoundly change the social, economic, and political organisation of the world? How can we move all humanity towards a permanent peace, global social justice, good planetary environmental stewardship, and the full equality of all persons and peoples in the world?

In this ambitious work, Masoud Mohammadi Alamuti addresses these questions with a serious and meticulous scholarship. Rather than dismiss such questions as merely “unrealistic”, Alamuti rather invites us to take them very seriously, and to investigate, with him, new approaches to knowledge and human action which, he argues, could be the keys to unlock a new era in global history. He undertakes this exploration with a strong and consistent methodological and historical optimism. Yet, realistically, he acknowledges that even the ultimate goals that he professes would not constitute a state of perfection without contradictions. The historical goals Alamuti professes are of the highest order, and witness to his progressive and cosmopolitan values.

In the course of his argument, Alamuti leads the reader through an intense and often provocative critical encounter with an impressive array of leading past and present social and political philosophers and theorists. The theme and role of “rationality” looms perhaps largest throughout this work, and Alamuti offers us a fresh interpretation of the universal potential of “critical rationalism” to radically transform the present world order. It is by his insistent linking of the critical rational faculty, which he argues is inherent in all people, to the process of dialogue and learning, that may constitute the pivotal argument in this book. This position reflects Alamuti’s bold reconceptualization of human action, based upon the potential to rationally criticise both “tradition” and competing truth claims (through “conjecture and refutation”) and thus learn through mutual dialogue and reflection on experience. He is quite clear, however, about what he regards as the inherent dangers of moral relativism, and reveals its close relation with the liberal ethics of modernity now prevailing in the organisation of the world.