



Research Paper

Comparative Analysis of Western Modernism, Postmodernism, and Iran's Philosophical and Literary Heritage

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Abstract

This study critically compares the evolution of philosophical thought in Western and Iranian intellectual traditions. In the West, medieval ecclesiastical dominance suppressed intellectual freedom, sparking modernity's emergence, which championed reason, empiricism, and individual subjectivity over metaphysical certainties. Modernity established new epistemological and ontological foundations, but its overreach led to contradictions, prompting postmodernism's critique of grand narratives and rationalist claims. Postmodernism, however, often descended into relativism, resulting in cultural fragmentation. In contrast, Iran's intellectual tradition, which harmonized rational philosophy, religious thought, and literary creativity from the 9th to 13th centuries, followed a unique trajectory. Without a centralized Church's oppression or the transformative upheavals of a Renaissance or Enlightenment, Iran's philosophical culture experienced cycles of vibrant inquiry and prolonged stagnation. Political instability and disconnection from global philosophical currents disrupted its epistemic development, leaving it unprepared for the abrupt arrival of modern science and technology as Western imports. This encounter destabilized traditional frameworks, triggering crises of authority, identity, and cultural continuity without providing a coherent, indigenous alternative. Employing rationalism, empiricism, and critical theory, this article traces the roots of this divergence and decline, proposing avenues for renewed intellectual engagement. It emphasizes feminist discourse as a critical lens for reevaluating modern and postmodern metanarratives and advocates for reconstructing dialogic, reasoned traditions to navigate between oppressive rigidity and chaotic dissolution in both Western and Iranian contexts, fostering balanced philosophical progress.



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تحلیل تطبیقی مدرنیسم و پست مدرنیسم غربی و میراث فلسفی و ادبی ایران
فرهاد وداد (نویسنده مسؤول)

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چکیده

این پژوهش به‌طور انتقادی تحول اندیشه فلسفی در سنت‌های فکری غرب و ایران را مقایسه می‌کند. در غرب، سلطه کلیسای قرون وسطی، آزادی اندیشه را محدود کرد که منجر به ظهور مدرنیته شد؛ مدرنیته‌ای که عقلانیت، تجربی‌گرایی و فردگرایی را به جای یقین‌های متافیزیکی قرار داد. مدرنیته، بنیان‌های معرفت‌شناختی و هستی‌شناختی نوینی را بنا نهاد؛ اما زیاده‌روی‌های آن به تناقضاتی انجامید که پست‌مدرنیسم به نقد روایت‌های کلان و ادعاهای عقل‌گرایانه پرداخت. پست‌مدرنیسم، هرچند، اغلب به نسبیت‌گرایی گرایش یافت و این منجر به تکه‌تکه‌شدن فرهنگی شد. در مقابل، سنت فکری ایران که از قرن ۹ تا ۱۳ با هماهنگی فلسفه عقلانی، اندیشه دینی و خلاقیت ادبی شکل گرفت، مسیر متفاوتی طی کرد. بدون وجود سرکوب مرکزی کلیسایی یا تحولات بنیادین رنسانس یا روشنگری، فرهنگ فلسفی ایران، دوره‌هایی از پرسشگری پویاتر و رکود طولانی را تجربه کرد. بی‌ثباتی سیاسی و جدال‌تادگی از جریان‌های فلسفی جهانی، رشد معرفتی آن را مختل کرد و آمادگی لازم برای ورود ناگهانی علم و فناوری مدرن به‌عنوان واردات غربی را از دست داد. این مواجهه، باعث بی‌ثباتی چارچوب‌های سنتی، بحران‌های قدرت، هویت و تداوم فرهنگی شد؛ اما جایگزین بومی و منسجمی ارائه نکرد. این مقاله با بهره‌گیری از عقلانیت، تجربی‌گرایی و نظریه انتقادی، ریشه‌های این واگرایی و افول را بررسی کرده و راه‌هایی برای احیای مجدد اندیشه پیشنهاد می‌دهد. همچنین، بر گفتمان فمینیستی به‌عنوان لنزی انتقادی برای بازنگری روایت‌های مدرن و پست‌مدرن تأکید کرده و از بازسازی سنت‌های گفتگو‌محور و عقلانی حمایت می‌کند تا بتوان میان سخت‌گیری سرکوبگرانه و فروپاشی آشفته، در هر دو بستر غرب و ایران، تعادل فلسفی و پیشرفت متعادل ایجاد کرد.

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1. Introduction

Modernism may seem like a contemporary and newborn concept. However, its foundational ideas can be traced within the profound historical, philosophical, scientific, and social transformations of both Eastern and Western civilizations. In fact, if we refrain from adopting a pessimistic view like some critics who regard modernity merely as a movement of ethnic and class domination, European imperialism, extreme anthropocentrism, environmental destruction, the dissolution of community and tradition, the rise of alienation, and the death of individuality within bureaucracy (کهون، ۱۳۸۸: ۱۲)، we realize that the image of the world offered by the European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century — based on scientific understanding of nature and a rational conception of human value, granting the highest right to life and individual liberty — had already found expression in the works of Ferdowsi, Sa'dī, Attār, Khayyam, Hafez, Rūmī, and other Iranian thinkers.

Ferdowsi emphasizes knowledge as a source of power (فردوسی، ۱۳۸۵: ۷)، asserting that wisdom grants capability and positioning intellectual strength as a universal foundation of agency. He further notes that knowledge keeps the heart of the elderly youthful, symbolizing both spiritual and intellectual vitality:

توانا بود هر که دانا بود ز دانش دل پیر برنا بود

Following Ferdowsi, Asadī Tūsī in the *Garšāsp-nāma* (اسدی توسی، ۱۳۵۴: ۱۸۲) extols knowledge as superior to all desires, inexhaustible in its transmission, and essential to the sustenance of the soul. He portrays wisdom as a path to freedom, emancipating the individual from servitude:

که ناید همی از دهش کاسته مدان به ز دانش یکی خواسته
رساند به آزادی از بندگی روان را بود مایه زندگی

In *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, Rūmī portrays the body as susceptible to disorder in the absence of reason's guidance (مولانا، ۱۳۸۴: ۷۷۳). He suggests that it is through divine grace that the soul ascends to a higher wisdom — one that transcends mere rational intellect, which itself falters without the illumination of spiritual insight:

چو تن را عقل بگذارد پریشانی کند این تن بگوید تن که معذورم تو رفتی که نگهبانی

عنایت‌های تو جان را چو عقل عقل ما آمد چو تو از عقل برگردی چه دارد عقل عقلای

In the first chapter of *Būstān*, Sa'dī, similarly, within a linguistic framework deeply informed by ethical reflection and rational discourse, offers a critique of the instrumentalization of religious concepts to justify violence and the transgression of fundamental human rights (سعدی، ۱۳۷۸: ۲۱۰). In these poetic articulations, while meticulously delineating the moral culpability of the individual transgressor from the inherent innocence of the surrounding community, he underscores foundational principles such as justice, compassion, and the imperative of personal responsibility:

نه بر حکم شرع آب خوردن خطاست وگر خون به فتوی بریزی رواست
که را شرع فتوی دهد بر هلاک الا تا نداری ز کشتنش باک
وگر دانی اندر تبارش کسان بر ایشان ببخشی و راحت رسان
گنه بود مرد ستمکاره را چه تاوان زن و طفل بیچاره را؟

These verses not only reflect Sa'dī's humanistic and sapiential outlook but also attest to the deep presence of justice-centered and rationalist thought in the Iranian intellectual tradition, centuries before the Enlightenment's formal emergence in the West. It may thus be argued that concepts later central to modernity — such as the sanctity of individual life, the rejection of prejudice-based violence, and the defense of human dignity — had already been thoughtfully articulated by Iranian thinkers.

Nevertheless, the modernity predominantly associated with Western history is linked to the Enlightenment era of the 17th and 18th centuries, alongside the rise of the Industrial Revolution. Thinkers like Francis Bacon, Descartes, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant sought to free knowledge from absolute dependence on tradition and religious authority, steering it toward rationality, empiricism, and individual autonomy. On this, Kant remarks:

Enlightenment (Aufklärung) is the emergence of humanity from its self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies

not in a lack of understanding, but in a lack of resolve and courage to use it without another's guidance. Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding! is thus the motto of the Enlightenment. (Kant, 1784: 481)

In this framework, science and philosophy emerged as independent tools for pursuing truth. Modernism became a project rejecting superstition, dismantling rigid power structures, and pursuing a rational, ordered, progressive world.

These intellectual shifts were soon matched by structural ones. The Industrial Revolution in mid-18th century Britain — with innovations like the steam engine and changes in production — transformed social life, giving rise to the working class, urbanization, and new social tensions. While improving living standards for some, it also produced alienation, inequality, and psychological strain.

For thinkers such as Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber, industrial modernity upended not only economies but also traditional religious and cultural foundations, confronting people with a complex and unstable new world.

A pivotal moment in this history was the conflict between science and traditional religion, exemplified by Galileo's trial. Using the telescope, Galileo confirmed Copernicus's heliocentric theory, contradicting the Church's cosmology. In 1633, the Inquisition placed him under house arrest. This case became a symbol of the struggle between empirical inquiry and religious authority. Yet the situation was more complex: Galileo presented heliocentrism as a probable model, not dogma. The trial reflected deeper tensions over permissible knowledge and the boundaries of reason. Later generations would reinterpret this event as emblematic of the ongoing contest between critical thought and inherited power structures. (Finocchiaro, 2010: xviii–xx)

Modernity's crises intensified in the 20th century. After the world wars, faith in rationality and linear progress faltered, giving rise to postmodernism. Central to this outlook were notions like epistemological relativism, the collapse of "grand narratives" — those sweeping ideological stories claiming to legitimize history or destiny, such as "only science can save humanity" — and the

insight that discourses themselves construct truths.

Philosophers like Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Derrida critiqued modernity's epistemic foundations, showing how ideas of truth, science, and progress are bound up in power relations, denying their supposed neutrality.

In the postmodern condition, the boundaries between reality and representation blurred. While this pluralism fostered intellectual freedom, it also brought crises of meaning, instability of values, and social disorientation in both secular and religious societies.

2. Superstition, Religion, and Invisible Boundaries

Every society relies on narratives that give meaning and cohesion to individual and collective life. In pre-modern societies, religion was among the most significant of these. Yet it's crucial to distinguish between sacred experience — a genuine connection with the transcendent — and beliefs shaped by social habits, historical fears, or systems of domination. The line between these realms is often invisible and deceptive; superstition thrives precisely along this blurred boundary.

Superstition can be understood as beliefs inconsistent with reason and empirical evidence, typically attributed to supernatural forces. It flourishes where intellectual ignorance, weak critical consciousness, and unchecked authority prevail, subtly merging with religion and eroding its authentic spiritual essence. In such contexts, religion is reduced from a moral and existential guide to a mechanism for regulating conduct, emotions, and especially social norms around sexuality.

Texts and interpretations emerge that turn religion into a tool for power, reinforcing social inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, or class. Narratives and hadiths of questionable origin — sometimes in direct contradiction to reason — have historically shaped religious discourse. The belief in a flat Earth, once present in early religious interpretations and used to justify persecution of scholars, exemplifies how superstition can invade the religious sphere.

Often, ancient traditions devoid of genuine religious roots are rebranded by authorities as sacred doctrine, perpetuating conflict between traditional religion and modern science. These tensions escalate when sacred texts, divorced from their historical and

cultural contexts, are treated as absolute and immutable. Many such claims, rather than reflecting divine wisdom, reveal the cognitive and cultural limitations of their time. Where scientific, psychological, and biological knowledge is lacking — and religious-political hegemonies prevail — religious paradigms can become saturated with implausible notions and prescriptive norms at odds with human dignity and existential value.

For instance, in *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat*, Al-Ghazali, drawing upon his religious convictions, articulates prescriptive regulations regarding women's appearance and presence in public spaces. He writes:

In truth, it is obligatory to refrain from looking upon the garments of women, from inhaling their fragrance, from listening to their voices — even from sending or receiving messages from them, or passing through places where they might behold you, though you may not see them — for wherever beauty exists, it sows the seeds of desire and ignoble thoughts within the heart.

Know that it is not sufficient for women merely to wear a chador and veil; for should their chador be white, or should they adorn themselves even beneath the veil, desire may still be stirred. (غزالی، ۱۳۳۳: ۴۶۹-۴۷۰)

In this proposition, the emphasis lies not on cultivating the individual's inner capacity for self-discipline and moral purification, but rather on the imperative to regulate the appearance and conduct of the Other — particularly women. Within this framework, the relationship between men and women is reduced to one fundamentally predicated upon sexual provocation and the necessity of its containment. Such a conception not only offers a reductive view of sexuality and human relations but also shapes societal perceptions of religion's role and position in structuring interpersonal dynamics. Through this lens, the woman is, by default, construed as a source of temptation, while the man is depicted as a being devoid of volition, subjugated to his carnal impulses and thus in need of protection from any potential stimulus.

In another example, in Al-Amali (شیخ صدوق، ۱۳۸۹: ۳۸۱/۲-۳۸۳), Al-

Shaykh Al-Saduq offers prescriptions regarding the timing of sexual intercourse for procreation. He writes:

Do not engage in intercourse beneath a fruit-bearing tree, for the child born thereof shall be malevolent and murderous... Do not unite in the final two days of the month, for the offspring will become a customs officer and an accomplice to tyrants, bringing about the ruin of many.

If you engage in intercourse on the night of Friday, your child will be an eloquent orator. If in the afternoon of Friday, your child will be distinguished and learned. And if after the night prayer on Friday, a child will be born who shall be numbered among the eminent.

In these narratives, the ethical and social destinies of individuals are attributed to incidental external factors — like the time and place of their parents' union. This view not only contradicts modern science but promotes a deterministic, irrational, and morally evasive outlook, reducing human potential and moral responsibility to arbitrary circumstances.

Morteza Motahhari, in his work, critiques such beliefs while also acknowledging that Darwin's theory can be reconciled with a religious worldview, arguing it need not inherently conflict with theism (مطهری، ۱۳۷۳: ۱۰۱-۱۰۵). Elsewhere, he identifies uninformed religious commentary as a major cause of religion's declining epistemic credibility, particularly when clerics without relevant expertise intervene in specialized domains, ultimately damaging religion's standing among intellectual and scientific communities (Ibid: 161-163).

Similarly, Al-Ghazali, through his emphasis on Sufism and rejection of rational inquiry, became a pivotal figure in curbing the development of philosophy and science. In Tahāfut al-Falāsifa, he dismissed philosophy as both futile and dangerous, opposing rationalist thinkers like Al-Farabi and Ibn Sīnā, and even casting suspicion on logic and mathematics as threats to faith. (دایرةالمعارف)

(بزرگ اسلامی، ۱۳۸۷: ۴۳۲-۴۳۱)

3. Fundamental Constituents of Postmodernism

Postmodernism, in its manifold theoretical and cultural expressions, articulates a critical strategy through the intricate

interplay of four constitutive motifs. (کهن، ۱۳۸۸: ۱۴ - ۲۱) These motifs underpin the analytical and theoretical scaffolding of postmodern discourse, shaping its engagement with cultural phenomena and epistemic structures. This framework not only contests the epistemological foundations of modernity but also adopts a profoundly skeptical—often negationist—posture toward notions of presence, reality, unity, and transcendence.

First Motif: The Refutation of Immediate Presence.

Postmodern philosophy asserts that no phenomenon can be apprehended directly, independent of linguistic, semiotic, or interpretive frameworks. As Jacques Derrida contends, sensory and perceptual experiences lack immediacy, mediated invariably through structures of signification. This position fundamentally undermines the notion of unmediated experience or “raw data,” challenging modernity’s trust in transparent access to reality.

Second Motif: The Disavowal of Origin and Foundational Structures

Postmodern discourse rejects the concept of an origin or underlying reality beneath phenomenal surfaces, deeming such notions epistemically inaccessible and potentially ontologically void. This radical critique, bordering on ontological negation, foregrounds language and discourse as the primary constructors of meaning, dismantling modernity’s metaphysical presuppositions. The pursuit of primordial truth is thus rendered a metaphysical illusion, necessitating critical disengagement.

Third Motif: The Dissolution of Conceptual Unity.

Emphasizing multiplicity and fragmentation, postmodernism destabilizes monolithic conceptions of self, essence, identity, and meaning. The self is reconceptualized not as a coherent entity but as a dynamic nexus of plural, mutable identities, constituted within discursive and historical contexts. This perspective subverts traditional notions of identity, framing them as contingent constructs shaped by intersecting discourses and power dynamics.

Fourth Motif: The Repudiation of Normative Transcendence

Postmodernism denies the existence of absolute, transhistorical values such as truth, goodness, beauty, or rationality, viewing them as historically contingent, socially constructed, and discursively mediated. Far from being universal, these values are often products of power relations and cultural hegemonies. By subjecting claims to universal truth to rigorous skepticism, postmodernism exposes them as potential mechanisms of ideological control.

Postmodernism — particularly in Derridean interpretations — asserts that no experience occurs independently of language, signification, or prior interpretive frameworks. This claim, however, stands at odds with the epistemological foundations of empirical science, which depends on direct observation, measurement, and data-driven inquiry. While tools and methods inevitably shape perception, this does not equate to a denial of external reality. Columbus's voyage to the Americas, though rooted in a miscalculation, nonetheless resulted in a tangible encounter with an objective, external world.

The repeatability of experimental results under controlled conditions further attests to the stability of the external world. Such consistency challenges the postmodern claim that sensory and scientific experience cannot access a stable reality. Additionally, the notion that there is no "raw data" presents epistemological difficulties. In natural sciences, data are often recorded prior to interpretation — a seismograph, for instance, registers the earth's movements irrespective of cultural or linguistic frameworks. These data, whether from earthquakes or nuclear tests, exist as objective realities before any meaning is imposed.

Were one to fully accept the idea that no phenomenon exists outside language, it would imply that the world itself did not exist before human language — a claim contradicted by both science and common sense. While postmodernism offers valuable insights in fields like literary theory and critical linguistics, it encounters serious contradictions when extended to empirical sciences. Thinkers such as Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida treat the search for foundational truths as metaphysical fiction, a stance directly

opposed to science's effort to uncover causal structures and patterns within the world.

For example, the structure of DNA is not a narrative construct but an observable, replicable reality. Denying the notion of origin in such contexts undermines not only scientific explanation but also moral responsibility, continuity, and authenticity. Moreover, postmodernism's rejection of unified concepts like "identity" and "self" reduces them to shifting constructs. Yet disciplines like psychology and cognitive science acknowledge a degree of coherence and stability in personal identity over time.

If the "self" were entirely fragmented and subject to shifting discourses, it would be difficult to explain moral responsibility or sustained personality traits. Communication itself relies on relatively stable patterns of meaning. While postmodern skepticism holds theoretical appeal, it proves impractical in educational, social, and empirical settings. Ultimately, postmodernism — especially in the works of Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Foucault — seeks to dethrone concepts such as truth, beauty, and reason from their transcendental status, framing them as products of power relations and dominant discourses. Though valuable as a critique of domination and ideological totalities, this approach faces significant epistemological and practical challenges when confronted with enduring human commitments to truth, coherence, and meaning.

4. Revisiting Modernity and Postmodernity in Light of Ancient Iranian Wisdom

Before analyzing the conceptions advanced by Iranian thinkers on human relations, spiritual refinement, moral cultivation, and a dynamic, virtuous society, it is imperative to undertake a systematic examination of the theoretical foundations of modernity and postmodernity. Understanding the epistemic and ontological assumptions underpinning these intellectual formations is an indispensable propaedeutic to articulating the positions of ancient Iranian wisdom, as they align with or diverge from the central tenets of modern and postmodern discourses.

4-1. Fundamental Principles of Modernism:

Modern thought is characterized by a constellation of interrelated principles that collectively define its epistemic and cultural orientation:

- Rationalism: An emphasis on the capacity of human reason as an autonomous instrument for the discovery of truth and the resolution of ontological and epistemological problems.
- Belief in Progress: Confidence in the feasibility and need for linear, cumulative advancement through science, technology, education, and rational institutions.
- Humanism: The centrality of the human being as a self-aware, autonomous subject of knowledge and agency, situated at the heart of the intellectual and metaphysical universe.
- Scientism: The epistemological privileging of empirical science as the sole legitimate pathway to reliable and objective knowledge.
- Objectivism: An affirmation of an objective reality independent of historical, social, and linguistic contexts, which can be apprehended through reason and empirical inquiry.
- Universalism: A belief in timeless and placeless principles, values, and norms—such as ethics, human rights, and logic—conceived as universally valid across all cultures and epochs.
- Anti-Traditionalism: A critical distancing from, and in many cases repudiation of, tradition, religion, mythology, and ancient authorities, in the pursuit of constructing new rational, secular, and scientific worldviews.
- Minimalist and Functionalist Art and Architecture: An aesthetic orientation privileging simplicity, formal clarity, order, and the prioritization of function over decorative excess.
- Emphasis on Structure and Coherence in Language and Narrative: Meaning is sought within coherent linguistic, logical, and narrative structures, reflecting a desire for epistemic and aesthetic order.

4-2. Fundamental Principles of Postmodernism:

Postmodern thought critiques and deconstructs modernist tenets, embracing contingency, plurality, and skepticism:

- Epistemological Relativism: Rejecting absolute truth, all knowledge is historically, culturally situated, shaped by relations of power.
- Deconstruction: The systematic unraveling of established structures of meaning, including dominant linguistic, semantic, political, and ideological discourses.

- Fragmentation of the Subject: A critique of the modern conception of a coherent, unified subject, emphasizing instead the plural, dispersed, and decentered condition of human agency in contemporary existence.
- Pluralism: An affirmation of the legitimacy of multiple voices, narratives, and worldviews, without privileging any single authoritative perspective.
- Anti-Grand Narratives: A repudiation of overarching explanatory schemes—such as those of progress, science, religion, and emancipation—that purport to offer totalizing interpretations of history and existence.
- Play of Meaning: The conception of meaning as inherently unstable, endlessly deferred, and produced through the interplay of signs, rather than as something fixed or determinate.
- Radical Skepticism: Profound doubt is cast upon formerly secure concepts such as ethics, identity, truth, and language, destabilizing the rational certainties of modernist thought.
- Ironic, Multilayered, and Intertextual Aesthetics: The blending of heterogeneous styles, self-referentiality, and playful intertextuality in artistic and literary creation.
- Attention to Margins and Micro-Narratives: A focus on marginalized voices, subaltern histories, and unofficial narratives, particularly those of minorities, oppressed genders, colonized peoples, and excluded social groups.
- Technologization and the Simulacrum: In the work of thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, the claim that reality has dissolved into layers of mediated images and representations, such that the boundary between the real and its simulation is effaced.

4-3. Typology of Knowledge in Traditional and Contemporary Epistemological Discourses

Rationalism, as a cornerstone of epistemology, has historically stood in contrast to empiricism. René Descartes posited reason as the source of epistemic certainty, exemplified in Cogito, ergo sum (“I think, therefore I am”), grounding indubitable truth in individual reason. For Descartes, reason encompasses perception, volition, imagination, and sensation, insofar as these occur within self-conscious agency (۱۳۸۲: ۴/۱۲۰-۱۲۱). (کاپلستون، ۱۳۸۲: ۴/۱۲۰-۱۲۱)

Immanuel Kant, while endorsing Newtonian physics, rejected David Hume’s radical empiricism, which claimed all knowledge

derives from sensory experience. Kant argued that objects, as Thing-in-itself (Ding an sich), are accessible only through sensory mediation, as pure thought alone cannot apprehend objectivity without the presence of an object in consciousness. However, Kant's use of the concept of primacy of meaning (der Vorrang der Bedeutung) is inconsistent across his works, applied in varying and at times contradictory ways (۲۸۳-۲۰۷/۶: ۱۳۸۲، کاپلستون).

Despite the analytical depth of Western rationalist traditions, these frameworks can be reinterpreted through Iranian intellectual heritage, where reason is more than a cognitive tool—it functions as a force for moral discernment, spiritual elevation, and cosmic harmony. In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, reason holds a uniquely foundational role, both epistemic and ethical. Ferdowsi hails reason as the highest divine gift, asserting that an ideal human life depends on the continual pursuit of knowledge and understanding (فردوسی، ۱۳۸۵: ۸):

خرد بهتر از هر چه ایزدت داد ستایش خرد را به از راه داد

Elsewhere, he emphasizes that joy and sorrow, increase and diminishment, all derive from the workings of reason (Ibid).

از او شادمانی ازویت غمست ازویت فرونی ازویت کمست

Nevertheless, Ferdowsi remains acutely aware of the limitations of reason, particularly where it is bound within the framework of sensory experience (Ibid: 7). As he writes:

خرد گر سخن برگزیند همی همان را گزیند که بیند همی

In this verse, Ferdowsi explicitly asserts that reason—despite serving as a tool for judgment and analysis—remains grounded in sensory experiences which are themselves fundamentally limited, rendering it incapable of apprehending absolute being. Centuries later, Immanuel Kant would reiterate this very point: that thought can only engage with objects when sensory data are available to it. In a similar vein, Khayyam writes (۱۰۲: ۱۳۸۴، خیام):

این بحر وجود آمده بیرون ز نهفت کس نیست که این گوهر تحقیق بسفت
هر کس سخنی از سر سودا گفتند ز آن روی که هست کس نمی‌داند گفت

Along the same trajectory, Abu Sa'id Abu'l-Khayr (ابوسعید ابوالخیر، ۲۳:۱۳۳۴), adopting a poetic idiom, observes:

دل گرچه درین بادیه بسیار شتافت یک موی ندانست و بسی موی شکافت
گرچه ز دلم هزار خورشید بتافت آخر به کمال ذره‌ای راه نیافت

Postmodernism, rooted in epistemic relativism, fundamentally challenges the foundations of rationalism and modern rationality — the very pillars upon which modernity, as both a social and intellectual system centered on science and progress, was built. From the postmodern perspective, modern rationality is not a neutral tool for the discovery of truth, but a mechanism for reproducing and legitimizing structures of power and domination. In this framework, reason ceases to be a path to objective truth and instead becomes an instrument for marginalizing alternative voices and entrenching hegemonic ideologies. As a counterpoint to this power-laden rationality, postmodern thought advances three core principles: pluralism, interpretability, and skepticism.

The first principle, pluralism, rejects the existence of any absolute truth or universal grand narrative. No overarching account, in this view, possesses inherent authority over others. All narratives — religious, ethnic, gendered, cultural, or personal — are seen as deserving of acknowledgment. This directly opposes the grand narratives of modernity, which sought to provide comprehensive, definitive explanations of the world.

The second principle, interpretability, holds that meaning is never fixed or final but always produced and reconstituted through historical, linguistic, and cultural processes. Meaning, in this sense, resides neither in the text, nor in the author, nor in authoritative institutions, but emerges through the dynamic interaction between reader and text.

The third principle, skepticism, provides postmodernism with its methodological foundation, adopting a critical, interrogative stance toward all institutions, principles, and epistemic structures. From this vantage, no truth is so secure that it cannot be questioned, contested, or reinterpreted (Lyotard, 1984: 38).

Within this epistemic paradigm, Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), critiques the totalizing grand narratives of modernity — such as Marxism and Enlightenment rationality — arguing that, despite their stated dedication to truth, these systems suppress diverse experiences and marginalize dissenting voices (Lyotard, 1984: 18-23). In place of such hegemonic tendencies, Lyotard advocates for narrative knowledge — a form of understanding grounded in localized, contextual stories that value personal, situated experience.

This emphasis on narrative resonates with Martha Nussbaum's conception of narrative imagination in her essay *Narrative Imagination* (1996). Nussbaum describes this faculty as a moral and intellectual capacity, enabling readers to imaginatively inhabit the perspectives of others — to envision their lives, emotions, and desires. She regards this imaginative empathy as foundational to cultivating humanistic values and civic responsibility. From this view, the *petits récits* (small narratives) favored by postmodern thought do not aspire to establish absolute truths but instead reflect the diverse, plural lifeworlds of individuals and communities (Nussbaum, 2017: 8/382-401).

A comparable sensibility can be discerned in both classical and modern Iranian literature. A compelling example appears in the poetry of Mehdi Soheili, particularly his 1968 piece *The Hunter* (صیاد). In this work, the reader is invited to empathize successively with various beings: a deer, a dove, and finally the hunter's own child. The poem implores the hunter to consider the grief of fledglings left motherless or to imagine the anguish he would feel should a stray arrow strike his own child.

These figures — the deer and the dove — carry deep symbolic weight within Persian literary and mystical traditions. The deer evokes innocence, vulnerability, and purity; the dove, peace, spiritual transcendence, and familial tenderness. Soheili's poem thus functions not as mere sentiment, but as a moral exercise in compassion and ethical imagination. It reflects precisely the kind of empathetic engagement Nussbaum identifies as essential for fostering humane, responsible citizens. In this way, *The Hunter*

serves as both a work of aesthetic resonance and a call to social conscience. (سپیلی، ۱۳۷۹: ۲۳۰-۲۳۴)

تو هنگامی که از خون می‌کنی رنگینِ پروبال کبوترها
چنین اندیشه‌ای داری — که این سیمین‌تنانِ آسمانی جوجه‌ای دارند؟
نمی‌دانی اگر مادر به خون غلتد — تمام جوجه‌ها بی‌دانه می‌مانند؟
الا ای مرد تیرانداز، ای صیادِ صیادفکن!
بگو با من — چه حالت می‌رود بر تو —
اگر تیری خدانکرده فرزند ترا بر خاک اندازد؟
و زین داغ توان‌فرسا — صدای ضجه‌ی تلخِ ترا در گنبد افلاک اندازد؟

Lyotard articulates the plurality of narratives as essential to an ethical conception of justice—one realized not through the imposition of a singular, monolithic truth but through the embrace of heterogeneity and divergent perspectives. For Lyotard, justice manifests when diverse narratives can be freely expressed, ensuring no voice is marginalized or silenced for conflicting with a dominant metanarrative.

In totalitarian regimes like the Soviet Union's Gulag system, vividly chronicled in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's work, grand narratives exert totalizing control, transforming individuals into narrators, audiences, and agents within a single, imposed storyline. Such regimes suppress imaginative autonomy, enforce conformity, and stifle individual agency. Lyotard argues that authentic democracy demands the empowerment of localized, situated narratives, where every individual and collective can articulate their own unique account. In this way, society becomes an open, decentralized nexus of interwoven narratives.

Lyotard cautions that any attempt to reinstate a "final narrator" or absolute truth leads inevitably to injustice, suppressing difference and foreclosing the emergence of novel experiences and alternative perspectives. Within his postmodern framework, justice is attainable only through the affirmation of narrative plurality and the rejection of totalizing systems. He terms this a kind of "postmodern iconoclasm"—a stance that actively contests entrenched authorities and fosters new narrative possibilities. The postmodern imagination, therefore, is positioned as inherently

ethical, just, and pluralistic, fundamentally opposing the homogenizing imperatives of both modernist and totalitarian ideologies (Taylor, Lambert, 2006: 184–188).

Within this framework, the concept of the self mirrors this narrative plurality. It is not a singular, unified essence but a network of multiple, often contradictory, and evolving selves, each shaped by contextual relationships with historical, cultural, gendered, and linguistic narratives. Identity, therefore, becomes a fluid, unfolding narrative, contingent upon interpretation and inherently bound to its situational context.

Yet, while postmodern thought conceptualizes identity as a narrative construct forged by the interplay of multiple forces and power relations, the question of origin and authenticity remains unresolved within this system. Intriguingly, this enduring preoccupation appears in classical Persian thought as well. In the poetry of Sanā'ī, the transformative journey of time and life is portrayed as incapable of producing enduring value without the presence and actualization of an inner essence, or “گوهر” (gohr). Crucially, this gohr is not a fixed or absolute essence but serves as the initial potential that makes self-becoming and meaningful transformation possible while maintaining coherence over time.

Sanā'ī evokes this through the metaphor of precious stones, asserting that, under proper conditions, time can transform a common stone into a gem—yet this transformation presupposes a latent inner potential within the stone itself. His invocation of culturally resonant sites like Badakhshan (famed for its rubies) and Yemen (renowned for its agates) anchors this metaphor within recognized geographies of refinement and rarity (سنایی، ۱۳۶۲: ۴۸۵–۴۸۶). Without this essential potential at the outset, no amount of time or external effort can produce a gem.

سالها باید که تا یک سنگ اصلی ز آفتاب لعل گردد در بدخشان یا عقیق اندر یمن
عالمی گردد نکو یا شاعری شیرین سخن عمرها باید که تا یک کودکی از روی طبع

In a similar vein, Sa'dī repeatedly emphasizes in his works the presence of a kind of essential nature (گوهر). With metaphorical and philosophical nuance, he distinguishes between appearance and essence, authenticity and superficiality. (سعدی، ۱۳۷۸: ۱۸۲–۱۸۳). In his

view, a valuable essence retains its worth even if it falls into mud and mire, while dust, no matter how high it may rise, remains without value. In this perspective, aptitude without cultivation is a cause for regret, while education without innate aptitude is ultimately fruitless. The intrinsic value of beings and things, beyond appearances and social status, is derived from this essential inner quality:

جوهر (گوهر) اگر در خلاب افتد، همچنان نفیس است و غبار اگر به فلک رسد، همان خسیس. استعداد بی تربیت دریغ است و تربیت نامستعد ضایع. خاکستر نسبی عالی دارد که آتش جوهر علویست ولیکن چون به نفس خود هنری ندارد، با خاک برابر است و قیمت شکر نه از نی است که آن خود خاصیت وی است.

In other words, intellectuals such as Sa'dī and Sanā'ī maintain that, along the bed of every river, stones of various sizes and forms can be found: some have become fragmented and angular under repeated blows, while others, through constant contact with sand, have been worn smooth. Yet, their essence remains unchanged: a white stone never transforms into one streaked with color, nor vice versa. External alterations, though perceptible and sometimes striking, lack the power to fundamentally alter an entity's intrinsic nature.

This outlook stands in clear contrast to postmodernist perspectives, which regard identity as constructed, dynamic, and the product of discursive forces. In opposition to this, the teachings of Persian wisdom traditions emphasize that every phenomenon possesses a kind of inherent essence; an essence that, though it may remain latent, undeveloped, or overlooked, retains the potential for recognition, actualization, and cultivation. Table (1) presents a comparative assessment between the core components of postmodern thought and the works of Sa'dī and Sanā'ī:

Category	Postmodernism	Sa'dī and Sanā'ī
Individual Identity	A construct shaped by relations of power, language, and social structures.	Rooted in an intrinsic essence, capable of cultivation but not entirely constructed.
Value	Relative, contingent upon context and circumstance.	Derived from an inner essence, even if ignored or obscured.
Education	A tool for producing values and sustaining social order.	Gains meaning only when aligned with innate potential; otherwise remains ineffectual.
Nature of Identity	Fluid, fragmented, performative.	Open to development, but must be grounded in real, inherent capacities.
Truth	Decentered, origin-less, perpetually open to reinterpretation.	Possesses an existence of its own, even if concealed in dust or ignorance.

table (1): a comparison of the core components of postmodern thought and the teachings of iranian philosophy in the works of Sa'dī and Sanā'ī

4-4. Comparative Theology in Modernism, Postmodernism, and Iranian Tradition

The rise of modernism in the West was less an outright rejection of religion than a structural reaction against the oppressive authority of the Christian Church, which, through domination and fear, organized medieval social life. Modernism sought to liberate thought from superstition, advancing rationality, empiricism, and scientific inquiry.

During the Middle Ages, thousands of intellectuals and ordinary citizens were executed for heresy. The Church's violent opposition to scientific discoveries was evident in cases like Giordano Bruno, burned at the stake for defending the Copernican system (Yates, 1999: 186–187), and Galileo, who was coerced to recant under threat of severe punishment (Speller, 2008: 343–345).

Church hostility extended beyond natural science into metaphysics and medicine. Doctrines rooted in Judaic and Hellenic mythologies attributed illnesses to sin or demonic forces, framing epidemics as divine punishments. Consequently, religious authorities resisted inoculation and rational medical interventions, contesting the authority of scientific paradigms.

The gradual detachment from religion during modernity should thus be seen not as a rise of atheism, but as a struggle to free human thought from the hegemonic grip of religious institutions, which had often replaced meaning with fear.

By contrast, Iranian intellectual history charted a distinct course. Thinkers like Ibn Sīnā sought to ground metaphysical and ethical inquiry in rational demonstration, empirical observation, and reflective reasoning, independent of unsupported sacred claims. In works such as *Kitāb al-Shifā'* and *Kitāb al-Najāh*, he advanced a model where reason and ethical reflection remained central:

The Possible, in and of itself and without regard to the conditions of its existence, will never be Necessary-Being. So long as its essence remains one of possibility, it cannot, by its very nature, possess necessity; rather, any necessity it acquires will be derived from another and conditioned by external circumstances. Thus, any contingent phenomenon is invariably dependent upon a reality beyond its own essence;

and whatever requires another reality or condition is, by definition, an effect, and therefore in need of a cause. (ابن‌سینا،

(۱۳۸۵: ۱۵۸)

This ontological reflection situates existence itself within a necessary relationality, whereby the order of being is constituted through an interplay of essence, contingency, and causality — a metaphysical architecture far removed from the dogmatic essentialisms of inherited theological systems.

In the extant works of Zakariyā-ye Rāzī as well, a discernible inclination toward empirical science is evident. The majority of his writings are situated within the field of medicine — from concise treatises such as *Kitāb fī al-Jadarī wa-al-Hasbah*, which scientifically differentiates between smallpox and measles, to comprehensive works like *Kitāb al-Hāwī*, regarded as an encyclopedic compilation of Rāzī's medical notes, observations, and clinical experiences, representing a form of philosophical inquiry grounded in experimentation and observation. (Richter-Bernburg, 1994: 6/377–392)

However, the Iranian intellectual tradition cannot be reduced merely to rationalism and empiricism; it is also profoundly intertwined with illuminationist philosophy (اشراق) and intuitive knowledge (شهود). For example, Bābā Ṭāher-ʿOryān does not consider the quest for truth as confined to realms beyond the natural world, but perceives it within every particle of manifest existence, without this presence being limited to the domain of the sensible (۱۳۵۵: ۱۷):

بصحرای بنگرم صحرا ته وینم	بدریا بنگرم دریا ته وینم
بهر جا بنگرم، کوه و در و دشت	نشان از قامت رعنا ته وینم

In a similar vein, ʿAttār proclaims (۱۳۸۶: ۶۸۱):

هرچه هست اوست و هرچه اوست توی	او تویی و تو اوست، نیست دوی
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In this regard, Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, in the *Masnavi-ye*

Ma'navi, states (مولانا، ۱۳۸۶: ۳۰):

ما چو نایبیم و نوا در ما ز تست ما چو کوهیم و صدا در ما ز تست

Yet, in contrast to deterministic tendencies, Rūmī equally acknowledges the role of human agency and moral responsibility (Ibid: 30-31):

زاری ما شد دلیل اضطرار خجلت ما شد دلیل اختیار
گر نبودی اختیار این شرم چیست وین دریغ و خجلت و آزرم چیست

This comparative analysis indicates that the various encounters with religion and theology — whether in the form of the rational rebellion of modernity or the semantic uncertainties of postmodernity — have their roots in enduring tensions between knowledge, power, and lived experience. However, to interpret these trajectories not merely as historical narratives but as conceptual and epistemological models, one requires methodological frameworks capable of reconstructing these intricate transformations in a dynamic, multilayered, and dialogical manner. Table (2) offers a comparative analysis of the foundations of modernity, postmodernity, and Iranian philosophy (حکمت ایرانی) across the domains of epistemology, anthropology, ethics, power, aesthetics, and teleology:

Axis	Modernity	Postmodernity	Iranian Philosophical Tradition (حکمت ایرانی)
Concept of Truth	Absolute, reason-centered, and empirically verifiable.	Relative, discourse-oriented, and context-dependent.	Rooted in inner knowledge (معرفت درونی), intuition (شهود), and balance between reason and the heart.
Human Being	An autonomous, self-grounded subject.	A decentered subject, shaped by language and cultural constructs.	A being in communion with existence (هستی), entrusted with truth, and ethically responsible toward the whole.
Ethics	Rational and universal.	Contextual, fluid, and conditional.	Anchored in inner virtue, compassion, moderation (اعتدال), and responsibility.
Power & Ideology	Scientific legitimization of power structures.	Deconstruction and unveiling of hidden power dynamics.	Critique of oppressive power and an appeal to justice and truthfulness.
Aesthetics	Order, harmony, and rational form.	Discontinuity, play, and polyphony.	Beauty as intertwined with meaning, simplicity, and existential depth.
Teleology	Progress and the mastery of nature.	Rejection of overarching meta-narratives of purpose.	Return to the self, connection with the totality of being, and cultivation of the inner world.

table (2): a comparative analysis of the foundations of modernity, postmodernity, and iranian philosophy in epistemological and philosophical domains

5. Analysis and Modeling of Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Iranian Tradition

Postmodern theology is often linked to figures like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Arnold J. Toynbee, Marx, and Mark C. Taylor, each

contributing to currents such as phenomenology, deconstruction, and post-structuralism, occasionally integrating these into theological debates. This approach resonates with postmodern skepticism toward metaphysics, absolute truths, and idealistic theism.

However, generalizing these connections demands caution. To directly position thinkers like Marx, whose focus was materialist and socio-economic, or Heidegger, whose primary concern was ontology, as formative figures in postmodern theology risks oversimplification. Their influences, while significant for broader postmodern thought, are not always directly theological.

Moreover, postmodernism itself extends beyond theory, deeply entwined with biological shifts, digital culture, and emerging technologies. Its emphasis on multiplicity and decentralized narratives reflects not just conceptual trends but the concrete, fragmented, and virtualized texture of contemporary global life.

Within this shifting context, theology no longer functions as a centralized, monolithic authority but becomes a dynamic, pluralistic field of diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretations, shaped by both elite discourse and everyday lived experience. Like a carrier wave in telecommunications, popular cultural currents actively reshape intellectual frameworks, producing new forms and meanings in real time.

Thus, the central question may no longer be “What is postmodern theology?” but “How do forms of transcendent belief emerge amid the chaos of fragmented meanings, media saturation, and decentralized experience?” These new expressions might surface in secular acts, poetic silences, or collective social ecstasies.

Accordingly, before analyzing postmodern theology itself or its effects, it is crucial to first investigate the foundations of both modernism and postmodernism—movements that, despite their relatively recent emergence, have profoundly transformed social relations and intellectual culture. By clarifying these origins, we can better discern their consequences and the shifting nature of belief in contemporary life.

As previously elucidated, the inordinate and dogmatic pressures imposed by ecclesiastical authorities, concomitant with the ascendance of scientific and technological advancements and interwoven with the socioeconomic transformations precipitated by the Industrial Revolution, led to the emergence and solidification of modernist thought in its most radical form—fundamentally antithetical to the Church’s self-proclaimed authority. This dynamic can be likened to Le Chatelier’s Principle (Milgrom, Roberts, 1996: 173–179) in chemistry, which states that when a system in equilibrium is subjected to an external force, it will react in such a way as to diminish the impact of that force and establish a new equilibrium.

Within this epistemic framework, one can distinguish between static systems—typical of pre-modern, tradition-bound societies aiming to preserve equilibrium through hierarchical order—and dynamic systems, which arise in modernity, marked by continuous flux, adaptive restructuring, and self-disrupting tendencies. Modern societies behave as dynamic systems: initially resisting change, then oscillating, and ultimately settling into successive non-equilibrium states.

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This can be likened to the oscillatory dynamics of an elastic system in mechanics: under tension (symbolizing oppressive pressures), the system deviates from equilibrium, oscillates with decreasing amplitude, and evolves irreversibly, shaped by time into a damped wave. Similarly, the interplay between ecclesiastical authority and modernist ideology produces fluctuations but never restores society’s original equilibrium, instead moving through unstable transitional states.

The failure of modernism to establish a stable, authentic order reflects this dynamic tension. As a result, the concept of entropy has become a key framework for examining the complexity, disorder, and non-linearity of evolving social systems — bridging thermodynamics and the open-ended transformations of human societies.

Entropy, broadly, signifies disorder, instability, and unpredictability — a gradual move from order toward imbalance and chaos. Originally a thermodynamic measure of a system’s

progression from organization to disorder, its scope has expanded to fields like chemistry, biology, social sciences, and sociology.

In statistics and probability theory, models such as the Cauchy distribution analyze phenomena associated with social entropy, especially in contexts of extreme, unpredictable fluctuations. Here, social entropy functions as a metaphor for the transformation of human systems — whether individual, collective, or environmental — from states of harmony and stability to dissonance, volatility, and precariousness.

It must be emphasized that social entropy is not a technical or mechanically governed principle but a sociological construct metaphorically drawn from thermodynamics. Unlike physical systems, social systems are driven by human agency, intentionality, and intersubjective actions, making their dynamics contingent on meaning, conflict, and history, and therefore irreducible to deterministic models of classical physics (Dinga, Tănăsescu, Ionescu 2020, 22(9): 1051).

In this context, modernism, as a system yet to reach equilibrium, faced the rapid acceleration of technology and knowledge alongside new demands and expectations that challenged its intellectual and cultural foundations. This state resembles a cook who, in rushing the process, turns up the flame too high—producing a dish superficially cooked but raw within.

Consequently, postmodernism did not emerge as a linear extension of modernity but as a crisis-driven, abrupt, and heterogeneous eruption within Western societies. Propelled by new digital and communicative technologies, it swiftly transcended borders and spread globally.

Confronted with this disordered intellectual and social current, many thinkers identified a school of thought termed postmodernism—a movement that, despite its pervasive influence, resists singular, coherent definition. Paradoxically, while it contests the notion of “semantic certainty,” it implicitly asserts a form of it. This paradox fostered a proliferation of diverse and often conflicting voices across human societies, much like the poetry of Rūmī, which celebrates differences in perception and narrative (مولانا، ۱۳۸۶: ۳۸۲).

عرضه را آورده بودندش هُود
آن یکی دالش لقب داد این الف

پیل اندر خانه تاریک بود
از نظرگه گفتشان شد مختلف

Among these emergent voices, one may identify currents that sought to redefine theology itself. Notably, two movements garnered greater attention than others: Radical Theology—associated with figures such as John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward—and Weak Theology, advanced by John David Caputo. Radical Theology, as a theological and philosophical school rooted in the Christian tradition, employs postmodern philosophy to critique the paradigms of modernity, asserting that the sacred is immanent within every aspect of creation.

Thomas Aquinas and his contemporaries were by no means unaware of the precise and essential distinction between nature and supernature. In their thought, nature was always oriented toward God, and the supernatural constituted the ultimate realization of this inherent orientation—not something externally superimposed upon it. Modern thinkers, however, have lost their grasp of the notion of the absolute gift of being: the idea that all of creation is inherently disposed toward participation in divine existence. As a result, the supernatural is often either construed as a ghostly, otherworldly domain, or as an artificial layer imposed upon a supposedly pure nature. (Milbank, Pickstock, Ward, 2002: 46)

On this basis, the rigid, absolute distinction between God and the world dissolves, and the metaphysical presence of God is conceived as encompassing all existence. In this view, when a person contemplates nature, they perceive a reflection of a transcendent source—a sign or symbol of the divine that imparts meaning and structure to phenomena. Radical Theology, accordingly, perceives nature, much like the verses of Bābā Ṭāher-ʿOryān, as suffused with the presence and signs of the divine.

In contrast, Weak Theology—a branch of postmodern thought—arose under the influence of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction. Here, God is not understood as an omnipotent being but as a weak, open-ended, indeterminate event. This God neither intervenes in nature nor history; instead, responsibility for shaping the world is entrusted to humanity. Just as Derrida spoke of justice as never

fully present yet always summoning humanity, Weak Theology envisions God as an unconditional, ethical call, absent in any actualized form.

John D. Caputo advances this position, arguing that human knowledge is inevitably shaped by historical and cultural contingencies, requiring theology to be articulated with epistemic humility, hermeneutic openness, and provisionality. He reconceptualizes the divine not as an omnipotent entity, but as a fragile, evocative force—an ethical summons that impels justice, compassion, and transformative praxis. In Caputo's paradigm, God appears not as a substance but as an event: a disruptive occurrence capable of unsettling established norms and revealing novel existential possibilities. This "weakness" does not signify privation, but rather a redemptive potency—the capacity to effect profound change, metaphorically capable of "moving mountains." Rooted in postmodern recognition of the finitude of human cognition, Caputo's theology calls for a shift from dogmatic certainty and authoritarian structures to vulnerability, receptivity, and an intensified engagement with the world.

In many respects, Caputo's position aligns with Alan Race, a theologian of religions. Both stress the necessity for theology to respond to modern philosophy, science, and historical consciousness; both consider religious language historically contingent and hermeneutically conditioned; both prioritize interpretation over literalism and view religious experience as theology's starting point. Moreover, both argue that religion must serve human transformation, reject dogmatic finality, and defer ultimate knowledge to the future and the eschaton.

Table (3) presents a comparative assessment of the views of modernism, postmodernism, and several Iranian thinkers regarding the concept of God:

Theme	Martin Heidegger	Weak Theology	Radical Theology	Attār and Rūmī	Bābā Ṭāher-Oryān
Concept of God	Primacy of Being over the divine; reticence before the question of the transcendent.	God as neither omnipotent nor absolute, but a weak, open, and indeterminate event.	God as the source of being and meaning; everything exists in participation with Him.	God as absolute Truth; all else is illusory.	All that exists is the very essence of God.
Human-God Relationship	Human as Dasein, characterized by openness to Being amidst existential thrownness.	A weak encounter, accompanied by human responsibility.	A participatory, inward, and meaningful relationship with God.	Unity of existence (وحدت وجود); abolishing distance between human and God.	Intuitive, through the heart and contemplation of phenomena.
Truth of Being	Truth disclosed in the clearing of Being, not as substance but as possibility.	Truth as an open experience in response to absolute absence.	Truth bears a sacred meaning denied by modernity.	God is Truth; all else is shadow and illusion.	Truth is hidden in the heart of nature.
Approach to Traditional Religion	Neither defense nor denial, replacing the question of God with the question of Being.	Distance from institutional religion; emphasis on ethics without metaphysics.	Rereading of religious tradition; rejection of secularism and modern relativism.	Critique of literalism and religious dogmatism.	Mysticism apart from institutional structures.
Language and Expression	Poetic ontology, elusive yet revelatory, language as the dwelling of Being.	Lacks systematic structure, influenced by Derrida.	Philosophical, influenced by Christian, Platonic, and Augustinian traditions.	Complex, symbolic, multi-layered, and intuitive.	Simple, poetic, rich in presence and feeling.
Path to Knowledge	Relinquishing metaphysical certitudes; attunement to Being through existential anxiety and silence.	Humility, acceptance of absence, ethics in the absence of absolute presence.	Recovery of meaning through return to tradition and transcendence of modernity.	Negation of the self, inner journey, union after separation.	The heart, simplicity, love, and intuition.

table (3): a comparison of the views of modernism, postmodernism, and iranian thinkers on god

However, a significant difference remains: while Race explicitly advocates a pluralistic position, Caputo—following Derrida—holds that the boundary between inclusivism and pluralism is “impossible to determine,” deliberately avoiding definitive oppositions. As a result, some have suggested that Race’s theology, too, could be “weakened” in light of Caputo’s thought—that is, further opened to the unknowable, the unforeseen, and the indeterminate.

Some scholars believe that Race’s reading of Christ can likewise be situated along this trajectory. In the chapter “Incarnation and the Theology of Religions” in his book *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, Race interprets Jesus and God not on the basis of classical ontological concepts, but as “love in action”—a reading that emphasizes experience and meaning over essence and substance. This interpretation, whose roots can also be traced within Weak Theology, defends a theological tradition in which religious truth manifests not through rigid certainties, but through a call to transformation and love. (Harris, Hedges, Hettiarachchi, 2016: 208-218)

6. Derridean Deconstruction, Digital Multiplicity, and the Crisis of Meaning in the Contemporary World

In the thought of Jacques Derrida, deconstruction is not simply a method for dismantling texts or structures of signification, but an epistemological tool for exposing the concealed, repressed, and unspoken layers of meaning within them. Challenging the identity-based foundations of Aristotelian and Cartesian philosophy, Derrida shows that meaning is neither static nor final. Instead, texts function through binary oppositions, absences, and gaps, with meaning emerging in the interstices between signs — perpetually deferred and displaced.

This notion of multiplicity gains new significance in the digital lifeworld. Just as deconstruction destabilizes semantic coherence, the networked digital environment transforms the foundations of meaning. Manuel Castells argues that where pre-modern and early modern societies organized meaning around stable units like family, class, nation, and church (or the entrepreneur, in Schumpeter's terms), the network society replaces them with decentralized, continuously reconfiguring networks. These, driven by informationalism and accelerated by digital signal processing, enact Schumpeter's "creative destruction," radically reconfiguring concepts and values (Börjesson, 1999: 14).

Devoid of rational foundations, virtual space and digital communications manifest this fluidity — a realm where millions of texts, images, and signs are endlessly produced and consumed without a shared referential system. Social networks and the online lifeworld thus become spaces without center or authority, where signifiers proliferate and singular or shared meanings are marginalized.

While this multiplicity might appear emancipatory — fostering cultural diversity and freedom from historical authorities — the absence of meaning-making structures has not deepened epistemic awareness. Instead, it has led to the collapse of shared perception, the erosion of social cohesion, and a crisis in the foundations of collective understanding.

In the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, the concept of the field (French: *champ*) — borrowed from physical sciences such as

magnetic and electric fields — is defined as a structured social space governed by its own power relations and distinctive rules. Within each field, agents compete based on their resources, symbolic capital, and social positions, and this competition generates dynamic transformations within the field's structure. Unlike traditional geographical or social notions, the field is based on relationships and reciprocal actions, not fixed locations. Bourdieu's theory, by synthesizing notions of group dynamics and symbolic production, elucidates the mechanisms of formation and function of social phenomena. In this way, the concept of the field offers a new and effective framework for analyzing complex contemporary societies and can reveal the internal logic, rules, and interconnections between various social spaces. Nevertheless, in domains such as social security management and digital space governance, this concept has been relatively neglected and insufficiently applied in analytical practice. (Cai, Sun, Xia, 2019: 259-260)

Inspired by general systems theory's vision of interconnected social, natural, and technological domains, decentralized and networked configurations exhibit dynamics analogous to thermodynamic systems. Just as thermodynamic equilibrium corresponds to a state of minimized potential energy—exemplified by an object descending to a lower energy state—online social structures gravitate toward a dynamic equilibrium, where content requiring minimal cognitive exertion and offering maximal immediate gratification achieves optimal dissemination. This reflects an entropic tendency toward high-probability states, akin to information entropy, wherein cognitive ease fosters widespread adoption (Kahneman, 2011: 105), yet stands in contrast to the ethical equilibrium of rationalism, which prioritizes inner virtue.

This condition progressively widens the gap between the wise and the general masses. Within such an environment, the proliferation of signifiers — as a fluid, dynamic, and uncontainable force — dismantles social cohesion. Ambiguity and uncertainty, in the absence of referential standards, cast the fate of this pluralistic society into a haze of confusion and directionlessness, while simultaneously providing fertile ground for provocation,

misunderstanding, the reproduction of violence, social exclusion, and the persistence of structural inequalities. Derrida, too, warns that without critical reflection and a careful reading of the textual voids, meaning is easily ensnared by cliché, ideology, and structures of domination.

In a similar vein, Claude Lévi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss, 1963: 21-35) argues that a profound understanding of human behavior is not achieved through superficial observation but through the excavation of the fundamental structures of language and society — structures that harbor unconscious or pre-linguistic meanings. He privileges the term ethnography over sociology, regarding it as a methodologically richer and more precise means of uncovering the internal logic of cultures. From his perspective, language is not merely a tool for communication but the very foundation upon which social systems are constructed; and its underlying structures are decisive in shaping meaning, identity, and human behavior.

In contrast to structuralist perspectives, Derrida emphasizes that meaning within a text is inherently unstable, perpetually suspended, deferred, and differentiated—a concept he articulates as *différance*. In this view, words do not derive meaning from any inherent essence, but only through their relational reference to other words. No signifier ultimately points to a final, stable signified. As such, meaning becomes a processual, fluid, and relational phenomenon that emerges only within the dynamic interplay between text and reader.

A comparable approach — though rooted in a vastly different intellectual tradition — can be found in the works of Maḥmūd Shabestarī, a 14th-century Persian mystic and poet. In his celebrated mystical poem *Gulshan-i rāz* (شبه‌ستری، ۱۳۶۸: ۹۷), Shabestarī contends that true meaning does not reside in words themselves but is revealed through intuitive, experiential insight. Language, he argues, is inherently inadequate to capture the depths of mystical experience, and words inevitably falter in expressing the ineffable.

چو محسوس آمد این الفاظ مسموع	نخست از بهر محسوسند موضوع
ندارد عالم معنی نهایت	کجا بیند مر او را لفظ غایت
هر آن معنی که شد از ذوق پیدا	کجا تعبیر لفظی یابد او را

چو اهل دل کند تفسیر معنی به مانندى کند تعبیر معنی

Thus, both Shabestarī and Derrida — though separated by centuries and worldviews, one grounded in mystical introspection and the other in modern post-structuralist philosophy — converge on the intrinsic limitations of language in conveying meaning. Through the medium of poetic symbolism and mystical intuition in the case of Shabestarī, and through the critique of logocentric philosophy in Derrida, both invite us to reflect on the fact that meaning is never fixed or fully present, but always emergent, deferred, and contingent upon context and lived experience.

On this basis, Derrida's analysis of text and structure can be regarded not merely as a theoretical tool, but as a fundamental warning against the cultural condition of the contemporary world — a culture in which the profusion of signs and the continuous reproduction of meaning, rather than leading to enlightenment and awareness, paradoxically result in ambiguity, confusion, and the aimless accumulation of information. Within such a context, deconstruction is not solely a critical gesture, but a possibility for reclaiming reflective thought, rereading the concealed layers of meaning, and reviving critical dialogue in the face of history, tradition, and the neglected gaps of semantic assumptions.

While Derrida deconstructs texts, social reality is increasingly exposed to superficial consumption, existential loneliness, and a kind of algorithmically-driven, artificial joy — experiencing a gradual semantic disintegration. The paradox of our era lies in the fact that at a time when postmodernism invites us to question the foundations of meaning, and Derrida interrogates the hidden structures beneath texts, somewhere in a distant corner of the earth, a gardener still sings for the blossoms on his trees — without knowing the terminology of contemporary philosophy. This image starkly reveals the contrast between the complexities of theoretical structures and the lived, local realities of everyday human experience.

Tradition-breaking or deconstruction is neither a modern aberration nor a historical anomaly. Rūmī, too, transcended the rigid structures of rhyme and meter — which superficially define

the essence of poetry — and engaged in a kind of pre-modern deconstruction. In his work, *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi* (مولانا، ۱۳۸۴: ۱۴), he consciously set aside the formal shell, not through the total negation of structure, but with a belief in the latent capacities of meaning within a renewed order. In truth, Rūmī's understanding of breaking with outdated structures was not a kind of anarchic radicalism, but an effort to elevate meaning through emergent forms and open interpretations:

رستم از این بیت و غزل ای شه و سلطان ازل مفتعلن مفتعلن مفتعلن کشت مرا
قافیه و مغلطه را گو همه سیلاب ببر پوست بود پوست بود درخور مغز شعرا

He challenges tradition, not to deny or destroy meaning, but to liberate it from worn-out constraints and reveal it within a new order — a reconsideration and fresh interpretation of the hidden layers and overlooked possibilities that time has left behind, in order to build a more coherent and resilient system.

Continuing this line of thought, it must be acknowledged that certain modern attempts to redefine foundational concepts have produced notions that not only lack clear epistemological foundations and internal coherence, but have also fallen into a kind of confusion and self-referentiality within a web of empty representations. One such notion is equality — a concept that, as a pillar of social order, has lost its original meaning and function, and has been reduced to a level that conflicts with the logic of nature and the institutionalized structures of society. The interpretation of equality to mean that every individual, regardless of abilities, biological conditions, and natural structures, should be equally entitled to occupy any social position, is not only at odds with the fundamental principles of biology and physics but also with the functional logic of social systems — without this necessarily implying a value judgment, positive or negative.

For instance, the physical structure of a marathon runner is not the same as that of a heavyweight weightlifter. These kinds of bodily differences are likewise evident in the biological distinctions between women and men, where anatomical variances and differences in the center of gravity result in differing physical

abilities. However, these biological distinctions do not entail any kind of value hierarchy, but rather signal a diversity of functions within the natural and social order — functions that, within their own specific context and situation, hold meaning and necessity.

This principle of functional distinction is equally evident in the dynamic between the right and left hands — a structural differentiation that signifies neither deficiency nor superiority, but reflects a purposeful division of labor meant to ensure coherence in human action. Such a logic is not limited to the anatomy of the human body, but extends to the broader, more intricate spheres of thought, decision-making, and governance.

In this context, Parvin E'tesami — a poet situated at the intersection of tradition and modernity in early twentieth-century Iran — articulates a vision of social roles that neither wholly conforms to patriarchal expectations nor subscribes uncritically to homogenizing egalitarianism. In her poem «فرشته انس», she engages critically with the dominant gender discourses of her time and, at the same moment, anticipates and problematizes certain strands of contemporary feminist thought that tend to overlook the value of difference as complementarity rather than hierarchy. In her view, men and women are complementary to one another, and each, according to their abilities and circumstances, should assume their share of responsibility within this principle — without reducing it to a rigid, mechanical notion of absolute equality (اعتصامی، ۱۳۷۸: ۱۸۶).

She writes:

وظیفه زن و مرد، ای حکیم، دانی چیست؟ یکیست کشتی و آن دیگریست کشتیبان
بروز حادثه اندر یم حوادث دهر امید سعی و عملهاست هم ازین هم ازان

These verses reflect a perspective in which the differentiation of roles is grounded in a rational and functional division of labor aimed at social equilibrium, rather than being based on a value-laden hierarchy. Within this framework, multiple roles are defined according to individual merits and capabilities, just as the two hands of a person — despite their differing functions — complement one another, with neither considered superior nor inferior to the other. Were both hands placed on the same side of

the body, much like certain interpretations of feminism that tend toward homogenizing roles within the social structure, natural and balanced movement would become impossible. This, indeed, is the harm that certain feminist perspectives have inflicted upon the body of social equilibrium by disregarding the diversity of natural structures and complementary roles.

In such a context, Derridean deconstruction — especially in relation to the pluralistic, accelerated digital world of today, where signs and meanings are reproduced at exponential rates — can function as a tool for exposing discursive fissures, semantic fault lines, and conceptual silences. Deconstruction, in this sense, is not an instrument for dismantling meaning, but an effort to liberate it from the confines of ossified forms, entrenched orders, and timeworn clichés. Yet, if this philosophical practice is stripped of epistemological reflection, ethical responsibility, and historical awareness, it risks opening no new horizons. Rather, it may contribute to escalating social entropy and the disintegration of semantic order, exacerbating confusion, ambiguity, and instability.

7. Conclusion

In summary, considering the arguments presented herein, it can be observed that the intellectual history of the West was profoundly shaped by the long shadow of ecclesiastical authority during the Middle Ages. The Church's rigid dogmatism and its suppression of inquiry and dissent eventually provoked the rise of modernity — an epoch that sought to liberate thought through reason, empiricism, and the assertion of individual subjectivity against imposed metaphysical certainties. Modernism, by exalting reason, universality, and the human capacity for mastery over nature and history, laid the groundwork for unprecedented scientific, philosophical, and artistic developments.

Yet, in its zeal, modernity overburdened these very ideals — transforming reason into an instrument of domination, universality into exclusionary standards, and order into oppressive social systems. This internal contradiction gave rise to postmodernism as a necessary critical reaction. Postmodern thinkers challenged the grand narratives of modernity, deconstructed its claims to objectivity, and exposed the latent power structures beneath its

rationalist facades. However, postmodernism itself eventually lost direction — descending from constructive deconstruction into destructive relativism, and from incisive critique into philosophical nihilism and cultural fragmentation.

In contrast, the Iranian intellectual tradition, which had once harmonized rational philosophy, religious thought, and literary creativity — particularly during the 9th to 13th centuries — followed a markedly different, though equally fraught, trajectory. Deprived of both the oppressive hegemony of a centralized Church and the liberating upheavals of a Renaissance and Enlightenment, Iran's philosophical culture experienced periods of flourishing dialogic inquiry, followed by long phases of stagnation. Political instability, internal fundamentalism, and a gradual severance from the global circulation of scientific and philosophical developments led to an interruption in its epistemic evolution.

When modern science and technology arrived in Iran — accompanied not by a native philosophical infrastructure, but as a sudden, imported artifact of Western modernity — it posed profound challenges. Bereft of the intermediate intellectual phases that had prepared the West for modernism and its discontents, Iran was confronted with the technical fruits of modernity without having passed through its epistemological debates or sociopolitical transformations. As a result, the encounter with modernity destabilized traditional frameworks without providing a coherent alternative, engendering crises of identity, authority, and cultural continuity.

The real challenge today lies in rethinking intellectual, social, and political structures in a manner that avoids both oppressive rigidity and chaotic dissolution. Ultimately, the task is to preserve the value of difference without converting it into inequality, and to critique inherited frameworks without abandoning reasoned coherence. As Rūmī wisely counseled, one must think beyond inherited categories and conventions — but never beyond reason itself. In a world marked by rapidly shifting signs and destabilized meanings, this balance between structure and freedom, difference and equality, and critique and coherence is not merely a philosophical ideal, but an urgent social necessity.

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