Derrida's Shadow in the Light of Islamic Studies: An Analysis of Binary Relations in the Qur'an

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Abstract

Jacques Derrida believed that metaphysics in the West has involved installing hierarchies, orders, and binaries in which one party enjoys the presence of a feature that the other party wants. Every succession relies on the idea of originariness, and thus the identity of the latter depends upon the former, for the presence of one element takes priority to its absence. This is how a binary opposition comes to being. Although basing his ideas on Saussure's philosophy of language, Derrida objected to the latter's "binary opposition" on the grounds that the interpretations predicated on this thought were called into question because there is no true opposition between a pair of notions. This protest led him to create binary pairs.

This article reveals the problems accompanying the conception of the binary pair and offer alternatives. The researcher does not mean to reject the binary pair itself; however, underlining this idea in a way that obstructs other paths will be questioned and some supplementary notions for the binary opposition and binary pair will be proposed.

Keywords: Islamic studies, the Qur'an, postmodernism, Jacques Derrida, binaries, relations

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Introduction

For more than half a century postmodern reading, unlike other critical approaches demanding application, has attempted to show that all texts deconstruct themselves from within.[1] One of the main notions marking this revolution is the impression of the "binary pair" posed against binary oppositions. This idea leads to pluralistic, unbound meanings, for the keystone of postmodern thought generally traces the (pre-)Christian era, the time of deities and divinities, when truth was not embodied in one emblem but in at least two or three deities. However, the history of binary pairs in literature can at least be traced back to William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606), in which the witches say that the world is where "Fair is foul and foul is fair."[2] From then on one should move toward the Romantic period, when contraries were very important in poetics. Although William Blake, one of its eminent forerunners, said "without Contraries is no progression,"[3] in his *Milton* (1804) he went on to say "[t]here is a place where Contrarieties are equally True."[4] These examples are given just to draw attention to the fact that the concept has a historical background.

In the present article, the endeavor is made to indicate the problems of emphasizing binary pairs alone. Clearly Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), as this notion's advocate, is the major thinker in my postmodernist discussion, despite some references to other sources. To do so, I first try to answer why such reconsideration, an undertaking that provides three possible responses, is desirable. Then it comes to the features of "relations" in Islamic thought. Bearing these specifications and the Derridean argument in mind, I will bring forth just ten Qur'anic conceptual relations, even though they shape a doubly more numerous family. Such suggestions will play the role of alternatives, which can walk along with binary pairs and binary oppositions that by now have been introduced to critical theory.

The significance of this article can be seen in diverse readings of the Qur'anic verses "it is He Who spread out the earth, placed firm mountains and rivers on it, and made a *binary*[5] of every kind of fruit; … *There truly are signs in this for people who reflect*" (Q. 13:3, emphasis added)[6]; or, more generally, "We created binaries of all things [two spouses: male and female] so that *you might take note*" (Q. 51:49, emphasis added); or, "Did We not create you in binaries?" (Q. 78:8). In other words, binaries are presented here as samples of divine signs on which we are invited to think. More momentously, God appreciates Himself for creating binaries in "Glory be to Him Who created all the binaries" (Q. 36:36). In fact, there are a variety of binaries, for "He has created you variously" (Q. 71:14), and even in different names, for

example "even": "By the even and the odd" (Q. 89:3). To add to their signif-
icance, it is worthy of note that in the last verse God swears by binaries.

Literature Review

Predicated on my search in local and international databases, no Islamic critique
of Derrida exists. On the contrary, scholars like Ahmed Achrati[7] and Ian Al-
mond[8] try to see points of similarity between postmodernism generally, or de-
construction specifically, and Sufism, which they consider to the Islamic view
proper. They argue about the dissolution of subjectivity, the shackles of reason,
and the mysterious nature of things, to name a few, as common denominators.
It should also be mentioned that the former categorizes Friedrich Nietzsche,
Martin Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard, as well as Gilles Deleuze, under the
umbrella term *postmodernism* and does not deal with Derrida only.

However, there are some critical works on this French philosopher's ideas,
not including postmodernism, from other perspectives. For example, Andrew
Bowie argues that Derrida's mistake was to see metaphysics with respect to
the subject's presence or *primacy*: the "privilege" accorded to the subject as
self-presence "is the ether of metaphysics."[9] Nevertheless the subject, as a
predicate of "transitive being" – a being that needs another being for its mean-
ing – cannot be reflexively present to itself because it is preceded by an origin
over which it has no control.[10]

Walter J. Ong says that, in terms of referentiality, a word's referentiality
cannot be abrogated if it has no similarity in shape with an object because it
is words, not signs, that refer to the thing. He adds: "Our complacency in
thinking of words as signs is due to the tendency, perhaps incipient in oral
cultures but clearly marked in chirographic cultures and far more marked in
typographic and electronic cultures, to reduce all sensation and indeed all
human experience to visual analogues."[11]

Even Frank Kermode, an admirer of Derrida, agrees that "a continual at-
tention to the operations of *différance* … may not be humanly supportable,"
as the future is beyond human reach, and suggests that "even if this is the way
things really are, most of us may still have to behave as if they were other-
wise."[12] In a like vein, E. D. Hirsch maintains that the unattainability of mean-
ing, or what Derrida calls "undecidability," cannot be proven by experience,
experiment, and ratiocination.[13] A close issue caused by the refutation of ref-
erentiality is the birth of too many meanings. Jurgen Habermas criticizes Der-
rida for overextending one of languages' functions, namely, the poetic, to all
discourses[14] because, he states, to profit from the poetic language's metaphor,

irony, metonymy, and the like in a philosophical or scientific text is absolutely different from writing a piece of literature, especially poetry.

Another controversial dialog took place between John Searle and Derrida in "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida." The latter assumes that because writing is able to function in the absence of the writer, the reader, and the context of production, it is not the communication of the writer's meaning to the reader. The former, however, argues that if this were the case, then it is not the iterability of the linguistic elements that discern writing from orality, but rather the relative permanence of the former that makes it possible to separate the utterance from its origin. He points out that any regulated system of representation, whether spoken or written, must be repeatable, for "otherwise the rules would have no scope of application." Moreover, written discourse is not discerned from speech by the receiver's absence from the sender, for "written communication can exist in the presence of the receiver, as for example, when I compose a shopping list for myself or pass notes to my companion during a concert or lecture."[15]

Finally, Perez Zagorin comments on representation's two mistakes. First, while language is arbitrary in regard to the association of a particular phoneme with a special signifier and the concept it designates, it is not arbitrary with respect to reference or meaning. Once a language is in existence, nothing is arbitrary because the letters of the word *promise* always mean the act of promising. Second, although it is true that anything can be re-described, it cannot be done so in just any way. If the Amazon River is the longest river in the world, it can be re-described as located in South America, as flowing through several countries, and in many other ways as well, but never as the shortest river in the world.[16]

On the other hand, I did find some scholarly works that speak of relations mainly in terms of the opposition between key concepts in Islamic, generally, and Qur'anic, specifically, contexts. Based on my investigation, such works adopt this relation only between the terms and then try to interpret them in a contrastive or comparative way. For example, Muzhgan Sarshar's *Values and Anti-values: Opposition in the Qur'an* first defines two types of opposition (i.e., simple and combinative) and then delves into practical samples.[17] Another prominent work is Toshihiko Izutsu's *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, for in chapter 11, "Good and Bad," he examines good-doing versus evil-doing (*birr* vs. *fasād*, *ma'rūf* vs. *munkar*, *khayr* vs. *sharr*, *ḥusn* vs. *sū'*, *ṭayyib* vs. *khabīth*, as well as *ḥarām* vs. *ḥalāl*). By discussing each category, he opens up some minor words or those that could be posed in the same rubric.[18]

The last book is Fazlur Rahman's *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, which encounters the matter of opposition in a very marginal attitude. The only ex-

ample that could serve the purpose of the present study is the historical analogy rumored among the Makkans between usury and welfare or usury and alms; hence, the Qur'an clarified its opposition to money growing "several-fold" (*adʿāfan muḍāʿafah*) by prohibiting usury (Q. 3:130) and rejecting the alleged equation between usury and lawful commerce (Q. 2:275-80). It also underlined the antithesis between usury and alms in almost similar wording (*fayuḍāʿifahu ... aḍʿāfā*) (Q. 2:245).[19]

Argument

Problems with Binary Pairs

To start with, a question of significance could be why binary pairs should be reconsidered from the Islamic viewpoint. Such pairs have three general defects that never were cleared: The first one is contradiction, which is there when we find Derrida repelling binary oppositions but at the same time creating novel ones. Just as in the case of two examples, refuting binary oppositions generates a new one between binary opposition and binary parity. Moreover, he provides anchorage for writing rather than for speech.[20] Having another opinion in her preface to *Of Grammatology* and believing that this is "a very hasty view"[21] because neither writing nor speech is privileged for Derrida, Spivak neglects his comment in *Writing and Difference* that there is "writing in speech,"[22] not the other way around. This contradiction implies the necessity of having binary pairs along with binary opposites. Nonetheless, not only does he not attempt to solve this problem, but he also supports and enjoys it: "Difference in general is already contradiction in itself."[23]

This quotation conducts us to the point that Derridean binary pairs themselves are more often than not contradiction-and-binary-opposition makers. When one party, previously dethroned from merit, reveals the same privilege, it stands beside the other to make a pair; in this case, despite incongruity, both signify one thing. For instance, Raman Selden tries to show that in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* the letter "A" on Hester's chest does not only refer to profanity (Adultery) but sacredness (Angel).[24] But how can something be both sacred and profane? Therefore, beside the paradox, the argument makes another binary opposition.

Incomprehensiveness, the second reason, is itself a trio: First, Derrida objected to the binary opposition, for example, of speech and writing in western philosophy but did not take Islamic philosophy into consideration, although there is no contrast between speech and writing in it.[25] In Qur'anic exegesis, neither one is privileged over the other. The Qur'an was revealed orally, the

holy book itself is a written text in our hands, and both have their own values in Islamic hermeneutics. In other words, undertaking exegesis is not practical with only one of them. While interpreting a verse, the critic sometimes has to be aware of "the condition of revelation" (*sha'n-i nuzūl*) as well as syntax and other formal features of the Arabic language. Here, as we see, speech is hidden in writing and Derrida's statement is thereby reversed: There is "speech in writing" due to orality's temporal priority, for the scripture was first revealed and then put into ink. Nevertheless, when we understand that before being revealed to Prophet Muhammad the Qur'an had once been included in another book, the "preserved tablet (*lawḥ maḥfūz*)" (Q. 85:21-2) that contains all information about everything in all worlds,[26] the equation again alters: Now, there would be *ecriture* (writing) in *parol* (speech).

Yet, the matter of priority in time, which Derrida maintained that throughout the history of western philosophy hinted at privilege, does not make sense either intellectually or conventionally. If it were so, then the first revealed Qur'anic chapters would be more important than those revealed later; however, the antepenultimate Chapter of Unity (*Sūrah Tawḥīd*) is evaluated as one-third of the entire the Qur'an.[27] In other words, we grasp the meaning of one sign by its relation in the context – whatever it is; opposition, difference, or those I am going to speak of below – to another entity. For instance, evil is perceived when it is collated with good: "These two groups are like the blind and the deaf *as compared* with those who can see and hear well: can they be alike? *How can you not take heed?*" (Q. 11:24, emphasis added). This verse spotlights the fact that the two groups are contrary, and the opposition comes out of the comparison. It then questions in an exhortative way why people do not mind the juxtaposition to differentiate the two.

The last ground for revising Derrida's ideas is deconstruction's suffering from illogical demonstration. The French thinker was of the opinion that no succession is ever simply linear; it is always also hierarchical: Good both comes before evil and is privileged over it. In every case, what is (considered) secondary is defined in terms of the lack of presence, albeit trying to define "good" without any recourse to the notion of evil is impossible. Treating of two issues seems essential here.

First, in a deconstructive mode this is to aver that the presence of good turns out to depend on a relationship with the absence of evil. Hence, presence is in some sense secondary and contingent on a structure of "supplementarity." This, of course, holds true for not only the concept of "good," but also for every positive or originary one.[28] That is why I shall call Derrida's ideas the "metaphysics of absence," for according to Hans Bertens he comes "in defence of absence,"[29] not presence. He verifies this in his "Freud and the Scene

of Writing" by disputing the onto-theological exclusion of trace in western philosophy through "repression": "The repression of writing [occurs] as the repression of that which threatens presence and *the mastering of absence*."[30] In Bertens' words, a point is leading; the word "defence" stands to be very determinative inasmuch as, once again, one side overweighs the other in Derrida's perspective.

> An opposition of metaphysical concepts (speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the face-to-face of two terms, but a hierarchy and an order of subordination. *Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to neutralization*: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an overturning of the classical opposition, and a general displacement of the system. It is on that condition alone that deconstruction will provide the means of intervening in the field of oppositions it criticizes.[31]

In the deconstruction of binary oppositions, the economy of present advantages and disadvantages, it sounds that either/or should give way to both/and. But what is problematic here is that Derrida again speaks of hierarchies for he does not like to "neutralize" the binaries of opposition into binary pairs, but prefers "overturning" them into new binary oppositions, although indirectly.

In Islamic thought, however, the reverse case is espoused: When goodness is relinquished, evil is born even it is Goodness, Godness, who can do this operation. Goodness that is proper to God, which is situated on a different plane altogether, is not the moral opposite of evil. As it is on the same level as the Real or Truth,[32] the only opposite of the Good is unreality or nothingness. Therefore, while it is at one with the positivity of the Absolute, evil derives solely from a negative capacity to repudiate the Good, the Real. In other words, the good is identified with the Creator, while evil is a modality of the created.[33] In this way, the Good is in everything and everywhere. Whenever it is cancelled out, evil emerges. The opposite is not applicable, as Derrida upheld that when there is no evil there would be the Good, and that the privileged term depends for its meaning upon the suppressed one[34] since the Good is ever-existing. Moreover, God has not created evil, but only the conditions within which it emerges. Evil, as such, has no ultimate ontological principle.[35]

It is worth dwelling on Derrida's beliefs for a while. Primarily, he supposed that no succession is only linear, for all of them are hierarchical. Nevertheless, not only does the Qur'an inform us of linearity in creation, but it also states that first there was darkness, not light, which postmodernists take to be privileged[36]: "Praise belongs to God Who created the heavens and the

earth, and made darkness and light" (Q. 6:1).[37] In the genesis as such, linearity and hierarchy do not go hand in hand; therefore, it does not seem correct to base our argument on "priority." The Islamic stance toward the absence of any order regarding this binary will be elucidated below.

The way Derrida read Plato's "world of ideas" as privileged over the "world below," due to the lack of presence in essence, also fails to see the other side: By prioritizing the former, Plato simultaneously gives precedence to "the unseen" over "the seen," while in Derrida's viewpoint "the seen," accompanied with presence, is prioritized "from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl," or simply by all metaphysicians.[38] In fact, Plato uses the word *image*, presupposing "seeing," for what we find in this world. Although Derrida tried to justify this by saying that *eidos*, the root of *idea*, means "metaphorical sight,"[39] I have pointed out elsewhere that he mostly determined the literal meaning of seeing, physical presence, as the problem.[40]

Qualities of Qur'anic Relations

Now it is time to count the characteristics of binaries in Islamic thought. The history of western philosophy, Derrida assumed, necessitated one party being privileged in a *fixed*, opposite relation of a binary. He then attributed parity to the two sides so that their single fixed relationship would not vanish. Nevertheless, binaries in Islamic theosophy are mostly epistemological, not ontological. By epistemological, it is intended that binaries do not obey the same rule if they are of identical nature or existence. In reality, an Islamic scholar can only distinguish between two binaries with the same qualities; in other words, even if they have the same features, two binaries do not necessarily belong to one category. This distinction requires theological knowledge, which is an essential element of Islamic philosophy, for it is one of the jurisprudential basics that analogy cannot be used to voice an opinion.[41]

Binaries are not always created in the assumed condition, but, on the other hand, they have been made so by the human mind. The best illustration ot this might be that of God and Satan: The latter was not created as God's enemy, but as a prominent and favored jinn. He did not become an opposite of God even after his fall, and yet the human mind has reckoned him in this way. This issue will be discussed further in one of the binaries below. By this instance, we conceive of the fact that binaries are not indissoluble; in other words, they can convert to another group, a fact that yet again implicates their epistemological, as opposed to their ontological, being.

The third trait could be inferred from the aforementioned verse (Q. 89:3), in which many commentators have interpreted "even" as all binaries of crea-

tures and "odd" as God, who is One and Unique.[42] In addition, the same hermeneuts believe that the verse refers to odd and even numbers, making the whole system of relationships. Simply put, relations are not restrained to binaries only.[43] Complexity is added when we detect binaries even in other numbers. The Qur'an also proclaims that "you will be sorted into three classes [in the Last Judgment]: Those on the right … Those on the left … And those in front – ahead indeed" (Q. 56:7-10). Here, the word for "classes" is *azwāj*, the plural of *zawj* (binary). This indicates that binaries could be extracted even from within groups.

The first kind of kinship between two entities is the "singular pair,"[44] in which two opposites are gathered in one yet do not become one. Multitude and oneness are opposites, but existence is at the same time both One and Many in God: "He is God, the One" (Q. 112:1). Islamic scholars interpret the Arabic word for "One" (*Aḥad*) as "Unique but Many"; nothing is superadded to God nor is He separate from others.[45] This does not mean that He has some parts, any counterpart, or is divisible. Although Allah is One, He exists everywhere and in everything; that is to say, He is pervasive (*basīṭ*). As an example, one can refer to "I [God] … breathed My spirit into him [humanity]" (Q. 15:29); simply said, this means that He exists in humanity.[46] Indeed nothing, not even the most outward aspects of material existence, can be excluded from the divine Reality, for "He is the First and the Last; the Outer and the Inner" (Q. 57:3).[47] Derrida also, as the first rather common point, adopted the creed that no true opposition exists between pairs of conceptions.[48] Yet we should note that, as will be explained below, that difference sometimes leads to opposition and sometimes does not. In this way, the title of the present article would indicate that some conceptual shadows of Derrida could be detectable in Islamic thought.

The second category, "couples," includes two different beings. Here, neither opposition nor parity matters, whereas difference does. The controversial cases of man and woman, or white and black (as race, not a skin color), are the best ones, for they embodied in "We [God] created you [humanity] all from a single man and a single woman and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize [not oppose] one another" (Q. 49:13). From different beings, a man and a woman, He created different tribes, which could be white, black, American Indian, and so forth, whom the western and eastern texts and contexts have long taken as opposites. Once more, I remind the reader that Derrida also admitted the concept of difference. However, as in the previous case, I should accent the contingency of difference as a sort of relation, not as the only single one.

The third kind of "binary opposition," which contains two absolute oppositions, is one in which the existence of one signifies the non-existence of the other.[49] Here, it is noticeable that one is privileged: "These two groups [unbelievers and believers] are like the blind and the deaf as compared with those who can see and hear well: *can they be alike*?" (Q. 11:24, emphasis added). This verse takes believers and unbelievers as opposites and likens them to the hearing and the seeing on the one hand, and the deaf and the blind on the other. In essence, one cannot be both a believer and an unbeliever at the same time. The rhetorical question at the end addresses common sense; that is, even if the language betrays or could be interpreted in another way, per Derrida's presumption, common sense does not allow two opposite things to become a pair by themselves. However, as mentioned before, opposites can turn to one another: "[I]t is He [God] who gave you life, will cause you to die, then will give you life again" (Q. 22:66). A person cannot be both dead and alive because death and life make a binary opposition. This verse asserts that human beings were dead God breathed His spirit into them, after which they became alive and then, at the end of life, they die once again. Nonetheless, in the hereafter once more they will be given life, but this time an eternal life.

Despite Derrida's assumption that the supplementary equals the contradictory,[50] "counterpoints" in the Qur'an are two complimentary entities, neither of which is prioritized. And yet both are accepted and can exist at the same time: "Did they not see that We gave them the night for rest, and the day for light?" (Q. 27:86; similar to Q. 28:73; 30:23; 69:40). Here, there is no negative connotation for "the night"; indeed, night and day are not presented as traditional opposites. They are complimentary, for they make one twenty-four-hour day: "You [God] merge night into day and day into night" (Q. 3:27). Likewise, they could exist at the same time at dawn and at twilight.[51]

"Neither pair" contains two entities, neither of which exceeds the other in rank and both of which are condemned. According to Islamic theology, one can be neither a colonizer nor a colonized, for "*[p]ermission* to fight is given to those against whom war is made because they are *oppressed*."[52] In other words, "these people are not allowed to be oppressed."[53] Umar Nasafi also interprets *udhina* as "commanded," which conveys the unacceptability of being in an oppressed position.[54] The interpretation of this verse also directs us to two of the angles of binaries expounded above: to be "epistemological" and "dissoluble." Mahmud al-Zamakhshari glosses over this verse, saying that before its revelation, Muslims were not allowed to fight against those who were oppressing them.[55] Therefore, via this verse one binary turned into another and, as such, relations were not acknowledged by nature. Indeed, these turning points withstand ontology.

"Metaphorical binaries" are poetic or, generally speaking, literary concepts that throughout literary history have been posited as opposites with no actual and factual contrariety. Most of the time, these oppositions are shared among various nations in world literature. As they are conventional, occasionally one is superior and sometimes neither are superior. Qur'an 2:257 could exemplify this relation: "God is the ally of those who believe [in Him]; He brings them out of the depths of darkness [heresy] into the light [faith]." As we observed before about the night (darkness) and the day (light), neither of them bettered the other. But here, darkness is undermined by light.[56]

Then, we have "hierarchy" as the seventh group, in which one is superior despite there being no opposition or parity between the two. A controversial example could be the relation between God and Satan, which is a "superficial binary opposition" in western culture. On the surface they are two opposite forces: the origin of good and the source of evil, respectively. Nonetheless, in the Islamic tradition the Devil is nothing before God, just one of His creatures: "[Satan] said, "Give me respite until the day people are raised from the dead" (Q. 7:14) or, "We [God] assign Satan for whoever turns away from the revelations of Lord of Mercy" (Q. 43:36). In these two verses, Satan's request and God's respiting and appointing him show that his power is under God's control. Another illustration could be that of God and His servant): "[Jesus] said, 'Surely I am a servant of God; He has granted me the Scripture; made me a prophet'" (Q. 19:30). Also, "It is He [God] Who has sent down clear revelations to His servant [Prophet Muhammad]" (Q. 57:9). In these two verses, God's highest creatures, Prophet Muhammad and Jesus Christ, are called His servants.

'Abd, the Arabic word for servant, derives from *'ibādah*, the Arabic word for worship, thereby exhibiting the hierarchy. One may say that there is a difference between God and humanity after all, so this follows Derrida's supposition of difference between any two entities. However, in this case the difference is not meaningful, for it is so obvious from the Qur'anic stance that anyone can discern it. There is nothing new, as a matter of fact, in discovering that humanity is different from God and thereby apprehending their meanings by the difference. One may state that howsoever huge we consider this difference to be, it is, after all, still a difference. Yet the point is that Derrida took difference to equal to opposition, which does not apply to the God-humanity relation: "[T]he phonic element, the term, the plenitude that is called sensible, would not appear as such without the difference or opposition which gives them form."[57]

In "contranyms," we have one word with two opposite meanings. Here, in order to understand the significance, the difference between two signs or

marks does not matter. Contranyms are extant in all languages. For instance, the English word *cleave* means both "to divide" and "to stick," and *quiddity* signifies "essence" and "trifling point."[58] The Arabic word *ishtaraw* means both "bought" and "sold": "These are the people who *bought* the life of this world for the hereafter"[59] and "These are the people who *sold* the hereafter for the life of this world."[60] Referring to Claude Levi-Strauss, who saw both meanings of the same nature or as "equivalence," Derrida rejected such justification.[61] I agree with Derrida that "equivalence" is not applicable, either lexically or separately, although I do not see any contradiction or opposition in such a lexical structure[62] and refer readers to the identical (similar) meaning of the two translations above. In other words, although the meanings of the above words are neither the same nor contradictory, it is the *context* that determies their resemblance.

The linkage among signs goes beyond binaries, for sometimes we should consider a tripartite affinity to understand the meaning of a sign, which might be called "triptych." Javadi Amuli holds that the true meaning of "justice" is seen when three components are tightly concatenated. In this condition, the absence of one makes the meaning of justice shaky. The first part is "just rules": "God commands you …, if you judge between people, to do so with justice" (Q. 4:58). The verb "commands" indicates the necessity of justice as a general rule for humanity. The just ruler is the second one: "[God] said, "My pledge does not hold for the unjust [to become divine leaders]" (Q. 2:124). Justice-seeking people make up the last component of the triangle: "We sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance, so that people could uphold justice" (Q. 57:25). If we have a just ruler and just rules with no justice-seeking people, the government becomes of 'Ali, the first Imam, in nascent Islam; in other words, justice is not fulfilled completely, Amuli adds. As 'Ali himself says, the difference between my government and others" is that in the latter "people woke up in fear from the governer's cruelty, and I woke up in fear from my subjects" [cruelty]."[63] To have the other binary fomulas – to have a just ruler and justice-seeking people without just rules results in a chaotic society; justice-seeking people with just rules, but without a just ruler, have no executive person to do justice – also leads to injustice.[64]

The last kinship to explain here is among four signs, called "knitted binaries," including two binaries, any of the previous ones, from each one entity is not mentioned. As the connection is made when two of them crisscross, the relationship among the four would be discovered: "This is a revelation, an illuminating Qur'an to warn anyone who is truly alive so that God's verdict [of punishment] may be passed against the disbelievers" (Q. 36:70). Ac-

cording to this verse, human beings are either alive or disbelievers. Thus we can find out that those who are alive are believers and that the disbelievers are judged as the dead. In a similar way, *ḥayyā* (alive) is paraphrased as "the wise,"[65] so the unbelievers may be weighed as "the ignorant."

Conclusion

In this study, I tried to look into Derrida's concept of the binary pair through an Islamic lens, delving into three foibles of the view and counting three features/fortes of the Qur'anic relations. Contradiction, incomprehensiveness, and illogical demonstration are among the possible disadvantages of the French philosopher's perspective, and *epistemological*, *dissoluble*, as well as *various* are three adjectives that can be used to attribute to the Qur'anic binaries or relations. Then ten rubrics were introduced as a handful of many others, within which the postmodern concept was discussed in detail. The argument confirms that the binary pair and binary opposition cannot, on their own, lead to a comprehensive apprehension of texts; however, they can be possible strategies for this aim.

After this research, I would like to see more thought on some samples of the binary pair and the binary opposition. In other words, bearing these alternatives in mind, we should investigate the "metaphysics of presence" versus (or along with) absence. The priority of writing over speech or vice versa beside chance and causality are two important matters tightly connected with the subject. Process and fixity, as well as institutionalization and uninstitutionalization are also in this line. I hope this change can vary the direction of hermeneutics, exegesis, and literary criticism.

Endnotes

1.   Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 264.
2.   William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (Middlesex: Echo Library, 2006), 1.1.11.
3.   William Blake, *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1988), *Marriage* 33; pl. 3.
4.   Blake, *Complete*, *Milton* 128, bk. 2.
5.   As *binary* in English signifies "something made of two things or parts," it could be seen as a general word when collated with its synonyms, such as *brace*, *duad*, *duo*, *dyad*, *pair*, *couple*, or *couplet*, among others. F. C. Mish, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 2004). In Arabic, *zawj* may be taken as its possible equivalent, for this word

also shares this generality. Husein al-Raghib al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm, 1412 AH), 384; Isma'il al-Sahib, *Al-Muḥīṭ fī al-Lughah* (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1414 AH), 7:148; Muhammad ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-Lughah* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Mala'in, 1408 AH), 1:473.

6.   All Qur'anic translations, unless otherwise mentioned, are by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). I have made some slight changes, such as interpolations, in brackets.

7.   Ahmed Achrati, "Arabic, Qur'anic Speech, and Postmodern Language: What the Qur'an Simply Says," *Arabica* 55, no. 2 (April 2008): 161-203.

8.   Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Ibn Arabi* (London: Routledge, 2004).

9.   Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Sussex: Harvester, 1982), 16.

10.   Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Taylor, 2001), 68.

11.   Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 74.

12.   Frank Kermode, "Endings, Continued," in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989): 71-94; 72-73.

13.   E. D. Hirsch, "In Defense of the Author," trans. Farhad Sasani, *Zībāshinākht* 14 (2006): 123-39; 134.

14.   Jurgen Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1998), 207.

15.   John Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," *Glyph* 2 (1977): 198-208; 199-200.

16.   Perez Zagorin, "Rejoinder to a Postmodernist," *History and Theory* 39, no. 2 (May 2000): 201-09; 205-06.

17.   Muzhgan Sarshar, *Values and Anti-values: Opposition in the Qur'an* (Tehran: Sushia, 2006).

18.   Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University, 2002), 203-49.

19.   Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1989), 27.

20.   C. E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 78.

21.   G. C. Spivak, preface to *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), lxx.

22.   Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2002), 47.

23.   Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 101. Paul de Man, another postmodern thinker, says that "contradictions, however, never cancel each other out, nor do they enter into the synthesizing dy-

namics of a dialectic." Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 102.

24. Raman Selden, *Practising Theory and Reading Literature: An Introduction* (Hertfordshire: Billing, 2003), 79-80.

25. Muhammad Khamini, *Mullā Ṣadrā: Hermeneutics and the Understanding of Divine Words* (Tehran: SIPRIn, 2006), 48-49.

26. M. H. Tabataba'i, *Tafsīr-i al-Mīzān*, trans. M. B. Musavi Hamadani, 5th ed., 20 vols. (Qum: Daftar-i Intisharat-i Islami, 1995), 7:182.

27. M. Mahdavi Damghani, *Ruḍat-u al-Wāʻiẓīn* (Tehran: Nashr-i Nei, 1987), 180; Sheikh Saduq, *Khiṣāl*, trans. Y. Jaʻfari (Qum: Nasim-i Kowthar, 2003), 2:392; M. H. Tabataba'i and M. H. Fiqhi, *Sunan-u al-Nabī* (Tehran: Kitabfurushi-i Islamiyah, 1999), 268.

28. Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 102.

29. Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, 2d ed. (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 96.

30. Derrida, *Writing*, 247, emphasis added.

31. Derrida, *Margins*, 329, emphasis added.

32. *The Real*, *The Truth*, and *The Absolute* are God's different names.

33. Rida Shah-Kazimi, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ʻAli* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 75-76.

34. Keith Green and Jill LeBihan, *Critical Theory and Practice: A Coursebook* (London: Routledge, 1996), 215.

35. For a valuable discussion on ethical principles, see Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious*. In addition, Plato deals with this matter in the dialog between Socrates and Cephalus in *The Republic* (256-312).

36. Bertens, *Literary*, 101.

37. It is worth noting that this is the case in all Abrahamic scriptures. For instance, "and darkness [was] upon the face of the deep … And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:2-3).

38. Jacques Derrida, "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion," *Limited Inc*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 93.

39. Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2001), 77.

40. Mahdi Shafieyan, "The 'Metaphysics of Presence' and Contemporary American Poetry Performance" (Ph.D. diss., Tehran: IAUCTB, 2012).

41. Nasir Makarim, trans., *The Holy Qur'an*, 2d ed. (Qum: Dar al-Qur'an al-Karim, 1994), 6:101.

42. I. ʻAmili, *Tafsīr-i ʻĀmilī* (Tehran: Saduq, 1981), 8:560; R. Sutudih, *The Translation of Majmaʻu al-Bayān fī Tafsīr-i al-Qur'ān* (Tehran: Farahani, 1981), 10:485; H. Kashifi Sabzawari, *Mawāhib ʻAlayh* (Tehran: Iqbal, 1990), 1:1356; Makarim, *Tafsīr-i Nimūnih, Noor al-Anwār 2*, on CD, 27 vols. (Qum: C.R.C.I.S., 1998), 26:445, among others.

43. Mahmud Zamakhshari, *Tafsīr-i Kashshāf*, trans. Masʻud Ansari (Tehran: Ququnus, 2011), 4:929-30.

44. I have coined these terms for the ten sorts of relation based on their literal mean-
     ings and the provided definitions. In this regard, their prior possible critical, lit-
     erary, or philosophical meanings have not been intended. Likewise, I have not
     used the already-known words in rhetoric, such as *antithesis*, *merism*, *oxymoron*,
     ṭibāq, or *zeugma,* to name a few, because this study addresses the conceptual
     relations between/among words, not their apparent figurative connection.
45. Tabataba'i, *Tafsīr*, 20, 670-71.
46. Along with the Qur'an, referred to above, the Bible bears the same concept: "And
     God said, Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26) and "behold, the king-
     dom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Derrida also confirms this point: "Man's
     spirit is holy because the holy God deposited it in him" (Derrida, *Acts*, 164).
47. Shah-Kazimi, *Justice*, 147. Heidegger talks of being's dual nature as disclosed
     and hidden, which accords with what the Abrahamic scriptures state. Spinoza
     also believed that, as Lawrence Cahoone clarifies, the whole of existence is nu-
     merically one, and called it *deus sive nature*, whatever we call him pantheist,
     panentheist, or immanentist. There is a difference, of course, in that He exists
     everywhere but everywhere is not Him. He is in human beings, but human be-
     ings are not Him, as, for instance, humans are driven many times by an evil
     drive too; that is, as far as one is godly, one gets close to Him. In interpreting
     Spinoza and explicating panentheism, Schelling tells us that nature is one part
     of God, but that God is not limited to nature and is more than that. For Spinoza,
     God is not only the spirit or mind, but also mind and body together, the argument
     that rejects the binarity between the two. Lawrence Cahoone, "Modern Intel-
     lectual Tradition: From Descartes to Derrida" (Virginia: The Great Courses,
     2010), lecture 5.
48. Derrida, *Writing*, XVI.
49. The same point can be found in Aristode's "first philosophy" or ontology, the
     study of the features common to all beings, such as the fact that no being can
     both be and not be at the same time. M. Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Ox-
     ford: Blackwell, 1999), 126.
50. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hop-
     kins University Press, 1976), 245.
51. Spinoza's psychophysical parallelism suggests mind and body working in par-
     allel, according to Cahoone. For instance, when one's toe is struck by a hammer,
     simultaneously one's mind orders the limb to ache. Cahoone, "Modern Intel-
     lectual," lecture 5.
52. M. H. Shakir, *The Qur'an* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1999), 22:39,
     emphasis added.
53. In Islamic traditions, we also have Imam Sadiq's famous quotation that "neither
     determinism nor free will [is accepted], but a state between the two." B. Ja'fari,
     trans., *Iḥtijāj*, 2 vols. (Tehran: Islamiyah, 2003), 2:529.
54. Najmuddin 'Umar al-Nasafi, *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*, trans. 'Azizullah Juweini (Tehran:
     Intisharat-i Bunyad-i Farhang-i Islami, 1976), 482.

55. Zamakhshari, *Tafsīr*, 3: 259.

56. Gold and silver or gold and copper are two examples of this genus. In each, the former term excels over the latter noun. On the other hand, in English literature Blake's "The Tyger" and "The Lamb" (1789-94) represent a metaphorical binary in which neither is under- nor overestimated.

57. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 62, emphasis added.

58. Mish, *Merriam-Webster's*, 230, 1021.

59. Shakir, *The Qur'an*, 2:86, emphasis added.

60. Makarim, *The Holy Qur'an*, 2:86, emphasis added.

61. Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 67-68.

62. Another example can be what Derrida discovered in Hegel's "*aufhebung*" ("to conserve" and "to suppress"). Jacques Derrida, *Ear of Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken, 1982), 130; Jacques Derrida, *Points ...: Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 101. In the context, one in which Hegel explained this idea as synthesis, the first meaning, to preserve, could be preserved, as two things are kept into one; on the other side, the second import, to suppress, is unsatisfying, since if one nullifies the other, there still remains one, and this will not be what is called "synthesis."

63. A. Musavi (Sayyid Radi), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, trans. A. Feid al-Islam Isfahani (Tehran: Feiz al-Islam, 1986), 284, sermon 96.

64. 'Abdullah Javadi Amuli, "*Mahdavīat* and Divine Justice," *Intiẓār* 13 (fall 2004): 41-54. The meaning of time is not complete unless one notices past, present, and future at the same time. Trinity is among other examples, although inacceptable in the Islamic tradition (Q. 4:171, 5:73). My point here is about different relations between/among signs in different texts and cultures. As Christians believe that the three persons in the Trinity are the same, they should be regarded as being in a relation instead of as being two by two or separately in western or Christian literature. In literary texts, it is sometimes necessary to criticize the text in regard to three characters. For example, in a psychoanalytical approach to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601), we should see Hamlet, Claudius, and Gertrude in a triangle. J. Lacan, J. Miller, and J. Hulbert, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet," *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977): 11-52.

65. Muhammad Gunabadi, *Tafsīr-i Bayān-u al-Saʿādah fī Maqāmāt-i al-ʿIbādah*, trans. Rida Khani and Hishmatullah Riyadi (Tehran: Payam-i Nur University Press, 1994), 12:194.