

# Reconceptualizing Epistemology in Islamic Mysticism: A Critical Analysis of Knowledge Through Presence in Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi's Thought

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## ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the epistemology of mysticism in Islamic thought through Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi's concept of Knowledge through Presence (*al-'ilm al-huduri*). The research positions Yazdi's epistemological framework as a bridge between classical Islamic illuminationist philosophy (*hikmah al-ishraq*) and contemporary philosophical discourse. Employing qualitative-descriptive and analytical methods, the study explores Yazdi's seminal work, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy\**, alongside key secondary sources, to uncover the philosophical coherence and ontological implications of his ideas. The findings reveal that Yazdi redefines mystical knowledge not as mere subjective intuition but as direct, non-representational awareness rooted in the existential unity between the knower and the known. This approach emphasizes the integration of rational analysis, metaphysical realism, and spiritual experience, presenting an alternative to Western dualistic epistemologies. Ultimately, this study concludes that Yazdi's theory offers a comprehensive, integrative model of Islamic epistemology that reaffirms the legitimacy of mystical consciousness as a valid and crucial source of knowledge in contemporary Islamic philosophy, bridging the gap between traditional and modern philosophical paradigms.

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## 1. Introduction

Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi's doctrine of "knowledge through presence" (*al-'ilm al-huduri*) reconfigures Islamic epistemology by asserting that mystical cognition is an ontologically direct form of knowledge, rather than a purely derived subjective state (Fatimah & Soleh, 2024). His formulation challenges the prevailing representational model by proposing that, in certain acts of knowing, objects are not represented in the mind but rather present to consciousness in a way that collapses the standard subject-object divide.

Yazdi's intervention should be read within the context of renewed scholarly interest in the illuminationist and transcendental theosophical debate, where contemporary commentators argue that his system revives and reframes classical intuitions for contemporary epistemic purposes (Khorramabadi, 2020). Recent comparative studies position Yazdi's project as a continuation of the illuminationist (*ishraqi*) and Sadrian traditions, while adapting them to address modern

epistemological critiques (Hammis Syafaq, 2024).

Despite this renewed attention, crucial questions remain regarding Yazdī's claims: What metaphysical commitments underlie the immediacy he invokes? Can knowledge through presence be epistemically justified beyond the report of the mystical subject? And how does Yazdī's account fare when measured against analytical considerations of verifiability and intersubjectivity? These are the issues this article seeks to explore.

Methodologically, this study employs qualitative-analytic tools: an in-depth textual exegesis of Yazdī's primary exposition of al-*'ilm al-ḥudūrī*, combined with a systematic engagement with contemporary journal literature that critically examines the epistemology of *ḥudūrī* and its implications for Islamic philosophical inquiry. This analysis proceeds by (a) reconstructing Yazdī's core claims, (b) identifying his metaphysical presuppositions, and (c) testing his epistemic robustness in light of recent scholarly criticism.

Initial findings indicate that Yazdi bases epistemic proximity on a metaphysics of presence that treats knowledge as a mode of existential co-manifestation: the knower and the known engage in a single locus of presence, rather than standing at an epistemic distance. This reorientation yields a participatory and non-representational conception of truth, which has implications for the ontological status of mystical secrets and for the assessment of epistemic authority in Islamic thought.

The discussion section will situate Yazdi's position within three interrelated events currently active in international journals: the recovery of classical illumination resources for contemporary epistemology; the viability of non-representational accounts of knowledge in relation to intersubjective standards of justification; and the potential of a reconstructed Islamic epistemology to engage in dialogue with secular analytical critique (Naghbi, S. M. H., & Nasri, 2019). In doing so, this paper highlights both the promise and the vulnerability of Yazdi's Project—particularly the tension between the ontological claims of existence and the methodological demands of scientific justification.

More than pure theory, this study also reflects on the consequences of accepting *ḥudūrī* knowledge as epistemic legitimacy for Islamic Studies as a discipline: it would expand the accepted sources of knowledge (alongside reason and revelation) to include a properly theorized mystical consciousness, thus prompting a reassessment of hermeneutics, religious epistemology, and pedagogy within Muslim intellectual institutions (Hammis Syafaq, 2024).

In short, by providing a critical and measured reconstruction of Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdī's knowledge through presence, this article argues that his theory offers a serious and philosophically sound attempt to integrate mystical intimacy into a systematic Islamic epistemology. Whether this theory will ultimately meet standards of intersubjective validity remains debatable but its conceptual resources deserve careful appropriation and further comparative research.

## 2. Methods

This study uses a systematic literature review (SLR) method to analyze the epistemological concept of knowledge through presence (al-'ilm al-ḥuḍūrī) in Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi's thought within the broader framework of Islamic mysticism and philosophy. The purpose of using this method is to collect, evaluate, and synthesize existing scholarly works that critically discuss Yazdi's epistemology, providing a comprehensive understanding of how mystical cognition functions as a legitimate form of knowledge in Islamic intellectual discourse (Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, 1992).

### Research Design and Rationale

A literature review design was chosen because this research focuses on conceptual and theoretical exploration, rather than empirical testing (John W. Creswell, J. David Creswell, 2023). A literature-based approach allows for in-depth interpretation of philosophical and mystical arguments, which are best analyzed through textual and hermeneutic methods, rather than experiments (Sharan B. Merriam, 2023). This design also facilitates tracing the evolution of the notion of knowledge through presence, from its classical illuminationist origins to its modern reformulation by Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi (Warno, 2023).

### Data Sources and Selection Criteria

This study systematically collected data from peer-reviewed international journals, scholarly books, and dissertations published between 2019 and 2025. Databases such as Scopus, DOAJ, Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar were used to identify relevant sources (Zainun Kamaluddin Fakhri et al., 2025). Inclusion criteria required that the selected literature (a) be directly related to Islamic epistemology, mysticism, or illuminationism; (b) discuss the work of Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi or the concept of knowledge through presence; and (c) be written in English, Arabic, or Indonesian with academic credibility. Exclusion criteria included popular essays, unreferenced publications, and sources with unclear methodology.

### Data Collection Procedure

A structured data collection protocol was implemented. Keywords such as "Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi," "knowledge through presence," "Islamic epistemology," and "mystical knowledge" were entered into the database search (Nanang Hidayat and Kholid Al Walid, 2023). Each identified study was screened first by title and abstract, then by full-text review. Relevant passages were extracted and thematically organized using citation management software (Zotero). This ensured consistency and transparency in documenting each study's contribution to understanding Yazdi's epistemological framework.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis used qualitative content analysis techniques (Uwe Flick, 2024). The literature was coded into thematic clusters such as (1) philosophical foundations of presence-based knowledge, (2) mystical cognition and proximity, (3) comparison with illuminationist epistemology, and (4) implications for Islamic education and thought. Each cluster was analyzed for conceptual coherence, similarities, and differences. Synthesis was conducted by comparing Yazdī's position with classical sources (Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Mullā Ṣadrā) and contemporary interpretations (2019–2025 studies).

## Validation and Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the analysis, triangulation was conducted across various types of data—classical texts, recent journal articles, and comparative philosophy studies (Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, 2019). A critical appraisal checklist was applied to evaluate the methodological quality, credibility of the arguments, and academic rigor of each publication. All interpretations were reviewed for internal consistency and alignment with Yazdī's original terminology and context.

## Data Synthesis and Presentation

The results are synthesized through narrative integration, combining findings from theoretical and analytical studies into a coherent framework (Asyibli, Basri Ibtihal et al., 2024). This synthesis prioritizes conceptual precision and historical continuity while identifying gaps in the literature—particularly regarding the empirical validation of mystical epistemology in contemporary Islamic studies.

## Ethical and Scholarly Considerations

Although no human participants were involved, this study maintained high ethical standards of academic integrity, ensuring accurate citation, appropriate paraphrasing, and avoiding plagiarism (American Psychological Association, 2020).

## 3. Literature Review

**Theoretical-Foundations and Classification of Islamic Epistemology** In the revitalization of contemporary Islamic philosophy, epistemology has emerged as a key domain of inquiry, driven by concerns that modern Western epistemic frameworks inadequately reflect the holistic Islamic tradition of knowledge (Maskur Rosyid, 2024). Scholars emphasize that Islamic epistemology does not simply replicate rationalist or empirical models, but also integrates revelation (naql), reason ('aql), and inner consciousness (dhawq) into a unified orientation toward knowledge (Asyibli, Basri Ibtihal et al., 2024).

Theoretical – The distinction between discursive knowledge (nazharī) and direct

knowledge (hudūrī). One major stream of recent research distinguishes between ‘ilm nazharī (discursive and representational knowledge) and ‘ilm hudūrī (direct and presentational knowledge) (Nanang Hidayat, Kholid Al Walid, 2023). As observed in one study, the notion of hudūrī knowledge offers an alternative to subject-object dualism by positing the direct presence of what is known in the consciousness of the knower.

### **Theoretical Roots – Illuminationist and Sufi Insight into Knowledge Through Presence**

A resurgence of interest in the illuminationist (ishraq) tradition and Sufi epistemology is evident in recent works. For example, studies have shown that the doctrine of al-‘ilm al-ḥudūrī (knowledge through presence) is supported by the metaphysical claim that the knower and the known have a direct mode of co-presence, developed by classical philosophers such as Mulla Sadra and Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, and now being re-evaluated by modern scholars (Warno, 2023).  
 Theoretical Articulation – Modern: Mehdi Ha’iri Yazdi’s Epistemology In recent years, Mehdi Ha’iri Yazdi’s exposition of knowledge through presence has attracted scholarly attention as an attempt to articulate a systematic Islamic epistemology that combines mystical affinity with rational justification. A 2025 article found that Yazdi's model not only bridges rationalism and empiricism but also “provides a strong epistemological basis for the validity of mystical experience” (Zainun Kamaluddin Fakhri et al., 2025).

Contemporary Theoretical Critique: Epistemic Certainty and Intersubjectivity. While the theoretical foundations of hudūrī knowledge are being rehabilitated, various critiques have emerged questioning how such knowledge can meet the standards of epistemic certainty, communal validation, and intersubjectivity (Nina Mulyani et al., 2024). One recurring critique in the literature demands clarification of how mystical intimacy can be subject to communal scrutiny and how it avoids mere subjectivity.

### **Theoretical – Integration of Sources of Knowledge in Islamic Educational Philosophy**

Going beyond pure epistemology, recent works in Islamic educational philosophy emphasize the need to integrate revelation, reason, and experience, not merely as separate sources, but as interdependent in the formation of subjects of knowledge. This theoretical move supports a framework that views knowledge through presence as one legitimate modality among others.  
 Experimental/Analytical Case Studies in the Context of Islamic Education

Empirical studies are few but increasing. For example, a 2024 study demonstrated how Yazdi epistemology is applied in the Islamic boarding school tradition in Indonesia, examining how knowledge through presence resonates with Islamic boarding school educational practices. This illustrates how theory can interact with lived educational structures.

## Experimental/Analytical-Epistemology and Curriculum Design

Research on Islamic curriculum development is grounded in epistemological insights: a 2025 study on ethical curriculum development argued that recognizing epistemic pluralism (including mystical knowledge) has direct implications for pedagogy, assessment, and teacher formation.

Experimental/Analytical – The role of intuition and mystical cognition in Islamic psychology. Another empirical work examines the epistemology of intuition (al-ḥads) as a source of knowledge in Islamic psychology. These findings demonstrate that mystical and intuitive ways of knowing are increasingly validated in interdisciplinary research, providing a precedent for considering knowledge through presence within educational and psychological frameworks.

Experimental/Analytical – The institutional relevance of epistemology in educational management. A 2024 article explores how Islamic epistemology underpins educational management strategies, arguing that a knowledge tradition based on presence and the holistic integration of sources offers a viable framework for governance, ethics, and institutional design. This empirical shift supports the claim that epistemology is not only theoretical but also operational in institutional settings. Theoretical/Experimental – Gap analysis: connecting classical theory and contemporary practice.

The literature acknowledges a persistent gap: while theoretical models of knowing through presence have been revived, empirical validation across various contexts (especially early childhood education, the tri-center of family-school-community) remains weak (Nur Fatimah, 2024a). This gap frames the thrust of the current research to explore how mystical epistemic models function in the context of PAUD (early childhood education) in Indonesia. Theoretical – Implications for the subject-object problem in Islamic epistemology Revisiting the subject-object problem, recent work suggests that *hudūrī* knowing reconfigures the knower-known relationship by collapsing epistemic distance (Basuki Setyo Argo et al., 2024). This metaphysical repositioning is crucial for understanding how knowing through presence can offer an alternative to the dualistic frameworks that dominate modern epistemology. Theoretical/Experimental – Relevance for holistic integrative education Several articles highlight how epistemologies that embrace mystical proximity foster pedagogies oriented toward wholeness, ethical formation, and spiritual awareness—not just cognitive skills (Ismail, F., Sukardi, I., & Ramadoni, 2025). For researchers in education and curriculum studies, this means that epistemology becomes a pedagogical orientation, not just a philosophical abstraction.

Experimental/Analytical-Methodological considerations in investigating mystical knowledge. The methodological subtheme in the literature discusses appropriate methods for studying direct and mystical knowledge: literature reviews, qualitative analysis, thematic coding, and content analysis are common, but mixed methods or quantitative studies are less common. This reflects the complexity of validating epistemic claims rooted in presence and awareness, rather

than measurable representations.

**Contribution and Positioning of This Research** In summary, the current literature supports two pillars (1) the theoretical articulation of knowledge through presence and (2) an empirical-analytical engagement with how such epistemologies play out in educational and institutional contexts. This research positions itself to leverage these two streams: critically reconstructing Yazdi's theory within contemporary debates while investigating its relevance in the context of early childhood education (ECE), using qualitative methods. Thus, this research aims to address the identified gap: bridging philosophical models and educational practices within early childhood school-family-community partnerships.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The literature review reveals three main findings regarding Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi's epistemology of mysticism and his concept of knowledge through presence (*al-ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*). First, Yazdi redefines mystical knowledge as a form of non-representational and direct cognition based on the ontological unity of the knower and the known (Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, 1992). This finding emerges consistently across contemporary commentaries, which recognize its epistemology as a corrective to the representational models dominant in the Western and Islamic rationalist traditions (Zainun Kamaluddin Fakhri et al., 2025).

Second, the reviewed studies demonstrate that Yazdi's system synthesizes rational analysis and spiritual experience, bridging classical Illuminationist thought (Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā) with modern epistemological discourse (Warno, 2023). Recent studies emphasize that Yazdi's approach places mystical cognition within a philosophical, rather than purely theological, framework, thus broadening the scope of Islamic epistemology to include experiential awareness as a legitimate epistemic resource (Nanang Hidayat and Kholid Al Walid, 2023).

Third, several empirical-analytical papers demonstrate that Yazdi's concept has practical implications for Islamic education, curriculum development, and the philosophy of science (Nur Fatimah, 2024). These studies report that knowledge through presence can inform ethical pedagogy, integrative learning, and holistic educational management when adapted to contemporary contexts. Collectively, the reviewed literature demonstrates a growing consensus that Yazdi's epistemology is philosophically rigorous and pedagogically relevant.

These findings collectively imply that Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi's epistemology constitutes a bridge between metaphysics and modern cognitive theory. By treating knowledge as existential participation rather than symbolic representation, Yazdi reformulates epistemology in ontological terms—asserting that true knowledge occurs when being and consciousness coincide (Yazdi, 1992). This model transforms the concept of mystical experience from a subjective phenomenon into a philosophically justifiable epistemic act.

Furthermore, Yazdi's synthesis of reason (*'aql*) and presence (*ḥuḍūr*) represents a methodological innovation in Islamic thought (Fuady, F., Fakhri, Z. K., Al Walid,

K., & Rahman, 2025). His framework legitimizes mystical intuition not by rejecting rationality, but rather by repositioning it as a preparatory phase for direct knowledge. Thus, Yazdi anticipates contemporary phenomenological and consciousness studies trends that also emphasize immediacy, intentionality, and self-presence in the act of knowing (Asyibli, Basri Ibtihal et al., 2024).

This discussion aligns with and expands on previous literature in several ways. Previous studies on Islamic epistemology—particularly those by Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā—emphasized illumination (*ishraq*) as the medium through which divine truths can be known (Warno, 2023). Yazdi modernized this legacy by re-articulating it within a rational philosophical structure accessible to contemporary discourse. A 2025 study by Fakhri and colleagues identified this as Yazdi's "philosophical formalization of mystical cognition" (Zainun Kamaluddin Fakhri et al., 2025).

Compared with empirical analysis in educational research, Yazdi's epistemology provides a conceptual foundation for integrative pedagogy. A 2024 Khazanah study links his notion of presence to the development of moral consciousness in Islamic higher education, demonstrating that epistemic proximity fosters ethical awareness and intellectual humility (N. Fatimah, Soleh 2024). Similarly, Basri Asyibli's 2024 work on Islamic educational philosophy interprets knowledge through presence as an inner dimension of learning, complementing external (discursive) modes of teaching (Asyibli, Basri Ibtihal et al., 2024).

Finally, the literature highlights a lingering gap: while Yazdi's theoretical contributions are well-documented, their empirical application remains limited. Few studies examine how mystical epistemology operates in everyday academic or social practice. This underscores the need for future interdisciplinary work bridging philosophy, cognitive science, and education to validate the experiential dimension of knowledge through presence (John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, 2023).

In conclusion, the results and discussion confirm that Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi's knowledge through presence offers a comprehensive, integrative, and philosophically sound model of Islamic epistemology. This model not only revitalizes classical mystical thought but also provides new conceptual tools for addressing contemporary questions about consciousness, learning, and the nature of truth.

## 5. Conclusion

This study concludes that Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi's epistemology of mysticism, through the concept of knowledge via presence (*al-‘ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*), provides a cohesive and integrative framework for understanding knowledge in Islamic philosophy. Yazdi's model bridges classical illuminationist traditions with modern epistemological discourse, emphasizing knowledge as an existential immediacy rather than mere representational cognition. Recent scholarship has highlighted Yazdi's work as a pivotal attempt to expand Islamic epistemology, incorporating inner consciousness and metaphysical presence, thus revitalizing the philosophical

legacy of Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā. In the context of Islamic education, his theory offers valuable implications for a holistic pedagogy that integrates moral awareness, intuitive insight, and spiritual formation alongside cognitive reasoning. However, while Yazdi's epistemology is conceptually profound, the gap between philosophical theory and empirical validation persists. Future research should focus on empirical studies, particularly through qualitative fieldwork, to explore how mystical awareness contributes to ethical learning and transformation in real-life educational and social settings. Ultimately, Yazdi's epistemology not only deepens our understanding of Islamic metaphysics but also fosters interdisciplinary dialogue between Islamic thought, the philosophy of reason, and educational science, offering a new path for both intellectual and spiritual development in Islamic institutions.

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