

## FROM REPRESENTATION TO PRESENCE: *'ILM* *ḤUDŪRĪ* AND SUHRAWARDĪ'S CRITIQUE OF PERIPATETIC EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the shift from representational to presential knowledge in Islamic epistemology by examining Suhrawardī's concept of 'ilm ḥudūrī (knowledge through presence). Drawing on his critique of the Peripatetic tradition in Hikmat al-Isbrāq, this article aims to examine two things: Suhrawardī's study of the epistemological foundations of representative knowledge in the Peripatetic tradition, as well as its weaknesses in achieving the essence of the truth of knowledge. Using a qualitative, literature-based, and analytical approach, this study argues that Suhrawardī challenged the Peripatetic model—especially that developed by Avicenna—because it reduced knowledge to mental representations formed by definitions and logical reasoning. In his view, such knowledge is indirect because it relies on abstractions that cannot fully capture reality. Sensory perception is also limited, as it cannot grasp intangible or universal truths. In response, Suhrawardī developed 'ilm ḥudūrī as a direct, non-discursive form of knowledge based on immediate presence. Knowledge here is not constructed through concepts or inference, but is revealed through insight (isbrāq), where the soul directly encounters reality. This shift from representation to presence reshapes how knowledge relates to existence and self-awareness. Ultimately, 'ilm ḥudūrī lies at the heart of Suhrawardī's philosophy of illumination, offering a critique of Peripatetic epistemology and a more integrated vision of knowledge, existence, and spiritual insight. Suhrawardī's formulation of 'ilm ḥudūrī as an alternative to conceptual-representational knowledge ('ilm ḥuṣūlī).*

**Keywords:** *Hikmat al-Isbrāq, 'Ilm Ḥudūrī, Illuminationist Philosophy, Peripatetic Epistemology, Suhrawardī.*

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini mengeksplorasi pergeseran dari cara mengetahui representasional ke presential dalam epistemologi Islam dengan meneliti konsep 'ilm ḥudūrī (pengetahuan melalui kehadiran) menurut Suhrawardī. Dengan mengacu pada kritiknya terhadap tradisi Peripatetik dalam *Hikmat al-Isbrāq*, artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui dua hal, yakni: kajian Suhrawardī

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terhadap dasar-dasar epistemologis pengetahuan representatif dalam tradisi Peripatetik, serta kelemahan-kelemahannya dalam mencapai hakikat kebenaran pengetahuan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, berbasis pustaka, dan analitis, studi ini berpendapat bahwa Suhrawardī menantang model Peripatetik—terutama yang dikembangkan oleh Avicenna—karena mereduksi pengetahuan menjadi representasi mental yang dibentuk oleh definisi dan penalaran logis. Menurut pandangannya, pengetahuan tersebut bersifat tidak langsung karena bergantung pada abstraksi yang tidak dapat sepenuhnya menangkap realitas. Persepsi indrawi pun terbatas karena tidak dapat memahami kebenaran yang tidak berwujud atau universal. Sebagai tanggapan, Suhrawardī mengembangkan *‘ilm ḥudūrī* sebagai bentuk pengetahuan langsung dan non-diskursif yang berlandaskan pada kehadiran langsung. Pengetahuan di sini tidak dibangun melalui konsep atau inferensi, tetapi diungkapkan melalui pencerahan (*ishrāq*), di mana jiwa secara langsung bertemu dengan realitas. Pergeseran dari representasi ke kehadiran ini membentuk kembali bagaimana pengetahuan berhubungan dengan keberadaan dan kesadaran diri. Pada akhirnya, *‘ilm ḥudūrī* berada di jantung filsafat iluminasi Suhrawardī, menawarkan kritik terhadap epistemologi Peripatetik dan visi yang lebih terintegrasi tentang pengetahuan, eksistensi, dan wawasan spiritual. Rumusan *‘ilm ḥudūrī* yang diusulkan Suhrawardī menjadi alternatif bagi pengetahuan representatif-konseptual (*‘ilm ḥuṣūlī*).

**Kata-kata Kunci:** *Epistemologi Peripatetik, Filsafat Iluminasi, Hikmat al-Ishrāq, ‘Ilm Ḥudūrī, Suhrawardī.*

## Introduction

In Islamic epistemology, knowledge can be attained via various forms, which include rational thinking, sensory perception, and intuitive experience. The forms represent the different ways of attaining and validating truth in the Islamic tradition of knowledge (Syarip et al. 2026, 8–13). However, in his attempt to offer a historically based classification of Islamic reason, Moḥammed ‘Abed al-Jābirī distinguishes between three epistemological forms, namely *burhānī* (reasoning based on demonstration), *bayānī* (reasoning based on script/text), and *‘irfānī* (gnostic-mystical intuition) (Jabiri 2003, 7).

Among classical Islamic philosophers, the concept of *‘irfānī* involves a variety of knowledge that does not involve discourses but is rather non-discursive. Examples of such a type of knowledge in Islamic epistemology include *al-‘ilm al-ladunnī* (divinely bestowed knowledge), *al-‘ilm al-tanassukī* (transcendent knowledge), *al-‘ilm al-ilāhī* (divine or theological knowledge) (Afandi 2015, 45–58) and *‘ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence) (Yazdī 1992, 5–26, 43–92). Unlike *burhānī* and *bayānī*, which rely on discursive reasoning, textual interpretation, and formal methods of verification, *‘irfānī* epistemology is grounded in inner illumination and immediate experiential awareness.

The process of acquiring knowledge through illumination necessitates the purification of the soul via *mujābahadah* (spiritual struggle) and *mukāshafah* (inner unveiling) (Jannah et al. 2024, 167–76). This process forms the foundation of *‘ilm ḥudūrī*, or knowledge by presence, which asserts that true knowledge is attained not through discursive reasoning but through direct apprehension and unmediated awareness. Suhrawardī explains that those closer to the source of divine light are capable of perceiving deeper realities, while those distant from it remain veiled in

ignorance. At the highest level, proximity to Allah—the ultimate source of light—results in absolute and certain knowledge (Asyari 2018, 1–11).

Islamic philosophy is traditionally categorized into several schools of thought, including Peripateticism (*mashā'ī*) and Illuminationism (*ishrāqīyyah*). The Peripatetic school, represented by philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, prioritizes rational argumentation and syllogistic logic as the primary pathways to knowledge. In contrast, Suhrawardī's Illuminationism school integrates rational inquiry with spiritual purification (*riyāḍah nafsāniyyah*), enabling the soul to perceive reality through inner vision and direct witnessing. For Suhrawardī, spiritual discipline supersedes pure rationalism; true knowledge arises not from conceptual abstraction but from divine illumination (Ihsan et al. 2022, 84–108).

Mullā Ṣadrā, a later philosopher of the *ḥikmat al-muta'ālīyyah* (Transcendent Philosophy) tradition, further refined Islamic epistemology by distinguishing between *'ilm ḥuṣūlī* (acquired knowledge) and *'ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence). He asserted that *ḥudūrī* knowledge is superior and more fundamental, constituting an immediate, inner awareness bestowed upon the human soul by divine grace. In contrast, *ḥuṣūlī* knowledge is secondary, derived from external representations and discursive forms (Walid 2020, 163–76).

In his analysis of *'ilm ḥudūrī*, Maḥdī Ḥā'irī Yazdī links the concept to mystical awareness and ontological unity. He argues that human consciousness transcends the binary of subject and object, entering a state of self-disclosure, which is in essence self-knowledge (Fatimah and Soleh 2024, 219–42). This mystical experience ultimately leads to unitive consciousness in which the knower becomes fully absorbed in divine reality. One of the major challenges for philosophers dealing with this mystical epistemology is addressing the paradox of individual consciousness merging with the Absolute (Yazdī 1992, 43–92; Abdullah 2013, 15–24).

The article attempts to analyze the epistemology of *'ilm ḥudūrī* presented by the Iranian mystic Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī and reassesses the former's criticism of the hegemonic Aristotelian approach from the perspective of Islamic epistemology (Mursalina et al. 2025, 21–31; Saidurrahman 2016, 99–120). While Suhrawardī has been very critical of the epistemological approach espoused by the latter school, focusing on the use of definitions and sensory experience to gain knowledge, this research goes further than this and aims at exploring the epistemological consequences of this approach developed by the Iranian philosopher. In particular, it analyzes the concept of *'ilm ḥudūrī* not only as the means of criticizing representative knowledge but also as an epistemological theory that provides direct access to reality through divine presence and illumination (Yazdī 1992, 24; Hejazi 2010).

In contemporary discussions of Islamic epistemology, increasing attention is being paid to the multidimensionality of knowledge in Islamic thought, particularly the balance between rational inquiry and experiential spiritual understanding (Harahap et al. 2025, 217–35). One prominent concept in this discourse is *'ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence), a form of immediate, intuitive knowledge that

contrasts with discursive or acquired knowledge (*‘ilm ḥusūlī*). Rooted in both classical Sufi philosophy and Islamic Illuminations thought (*ḥikmah ishrāqīyyah*), *‘ilm ḥudūrī* provides an epistemological model that privileges the unity of the knower and the known through direct presence, bypassing the mediation of conceptual representation (Nasr 2006, 55–58).

The present article contextualizes the idea of *‘ilm ḥudūrī*, as introduced by Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī, in the current discussions regarding the shortcomings of positivism and reductionism in knowledge. The article does not approach Suhrawardī’s criticism of the Peripatetic philosophy simply as part of past academic disputes. Instead, the article emphasizes how this philosophical critique can be reconsidered within the framework of contemporary Islamic thought on epistemology. The idea of *‘ilm ḥudūrī* provides a possible response to modern epistemological paradigms that privilege the objectification of knowledge, empiricism, and partial ways of knowing (Fuady et al. 2025, 1–25).

Recent scholarship has similarly argued that contemporary Islamic epistemology requires a re-engagement with non-representational modes of knowing to overcome the limitations of modern epistemic reductionism and scientism (Wijaya 2026, 29–39; Nair 2023, 1–29). Likewise, Ahmed maintains that Islamic intellectual traditions preserve a richer conception of knowledge in which cognition is inseparable from ethical self-transformation and metaphysical realization. From this perspective, knowledge is not merely the representation of external objects but an existential encounter with reality itself, thereby challenging the secular assumptions that dominate modern theories of knowledge (Ahmed 2022, 135–54). These contemporary discussions provide an important framework for reassessing Suhrawardī’s theory of *‘ilm ḥudūrī* as an alternative epistemological paradigm that transcends the limitations of representational knowledge and re-establishes the intimate relationship between knowing, being, and spiritual presence.

The relevance of this approach to modern epistemology has been further emphasized through recent research on metaphysical and spiritual aspects of knowledge. For example, Lieke Wijnia advocates for recovering spirituality as a core aspect of knowledge in response to the fragmentation of meaning associated with modern education (Wijnia 2022, 37–57). Similarly, recent works on Islamic epistemology by Aswin Nasution (2023, 386–96) and Hammis Syafaq et al. (2023, 240–69) underscore the centrality of intuitive cognition and spiritual unveiling (*kashf*) as legitimate pathways to truth in Islam, especially within the paradigms of prophetic knowledge and ethical formation (Abbasi et al. 2024, 859–70; Griffel 2024, 139–52).

Within this context, *‘ilm ḥudūrī* stands as an alternative to the hegemony of empiricist frameworks. This underscores the interdependence of epistemology, ontology, and spirituality in Islamic thought, suggesting that knowledge cannot be divorced from existence. As highlighted by Abdullah, the Sufi tradition of *ma‘rifah*—knowledge through inner witnessing—provides an experiential foundation for an integrated model of knowing that harmonizes intellect (*‘aql*)

and heart (*qalb*) (Abdullah 2013, 15–24). In fact, *'ilm ḥudūrī* may be considered one of the clearest manifestations of what contemporary Muslim philosophers such as Kholid al Walid identify as Islam's unique epistemological ethos—where knowledge is not merely informational but also transformational (Walid 2020, 163–76; Warno 2023, 333–52).

Recent philosophical discussions further reinforce this perspective by emphasizing the ontological foundations of knowledge in Islamic intellectual traditions. Rizvi contends that post-Avicennian philosophical traditions increasingly shifted attention from representational theories of cognition toward forms of immediate awareness and presence, thereby laying the foundations for later developments in Illuminations and Transcendent Philosophy (Rizvi 2020, 219–49; Üçer 2020, 23–68). These studies suggest that Suhrawardī's theory of *'ilm ḥudūrī* should be understood not only as an epistemological alternative but also as a comprehensive ontological framework.

This study aims to examine the concept of *'ilm ḥudūrī* within Islamic epistemology by exploring its philosophical underpinnings, theological implications, and contemporary relevance. Drawing from classical thinkers like Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā and engaging with contemporary Islamic scholars, this study argues that *'ilm ḥudūrī* represents an ontologically rooted epistemology that is vital for reinvigorating an Islamic worldview responsive to modern crises of meaning. This article contributes to the broader efforts in Islamic intellectual traditions to recover integrative and spiritually grounded forms of knowledge that transcend dualism and epistemological reductionism.

Recent developments in Islamic epistemology have increasingly focused on the concept of *'ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence), especially as articulated within Suhrawardī's Illuminations philosophy (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*). Habib emphasizes that in Suhrawardī's epistemology, *'ilm ḥudūrī* serves as the foundation for an existential mode of knowing in thought with the mystical dimensions of Sufism, indicating that *ḥudūrī* knowledge is both mystical and rational (Assya'bani and Falach 2022, 53–64).

In a related analysis, Walid et al. draw connections between philosophical and Sufi epistemologies, especially in articulating *'ilm al-ḥudūrī* as a shared feature in both Suhrawardī's and Mullā Ṣadrā's frameworks. They argue that this form of knowledge transcends representational and symbolic reasoning, advancing toward a direct spiritual encounter with metaphysical reality (Walid et al. 2023, 111–22). This perspective affirms that authentic knowledge in Islamic philosophy emerges from immediate awareness within spiritual consciousness, thus rejecting the epistemological dualism of subject and object.

Moreover, the broader literature has addressed the significance of Illumination (*ishrāq*) as an essential paradigm in Islamic epistemology. Nasr argues that Suhrawardī's epistemology is central to the resacralization of knowledge, one that reconciles rational inquiry with spiritual intuition within a cosmic metaphysical order (Nasr 1989, 12). Abbasi et al. contribute a historical analysis, asserting that Suhrawardī's critique of the Peripatetic tradition stems from its overreliance on

abstract reasoning devoid of intuitive presence. He argues that *ḥudūrī* offers a corrective epistemology rooted in metaphysical immediacy (Abbasi et al. 2024, 859–70).

Nasution et al. underscore the relevance of *‘ilm ḥudūrī* as a form of metaphysical epistemology that bridges the divide between spiritual and empirical knowledge systems in contemporary Islamic thought (Nasution et al. 2023, 386–96). Some Scholars also explore how Suhrawardī’s model inspires an inclusive Sufi epistemology that harmonizes reason and intuition, emphasizing that authentic cognition requires both intellectual reflection and spiritual receptivity (Nizhnikov 2015, 171–78; Haryanto 2023, 53–58; Ahmad and Khan 2024, 109–42).

Furthermore, scholars such as Putra et al., Refinal et al., and Kamali explicitly refer to *‘ilm ḥudūrī* as a distinctive Islamic epistemological ethos—transformative, spiritually anchored, and grounded in the higher objectives (*maqāṣid*) of the divine law. Rather than being merely descriptive, this form of knowledge enacts moral and existential transformation (Putra et al. 2025, 2393–401; Refinal et al. 2024, 95–110; Kamali 2017, 295–321). Lastly, Abbasi et al. offer a comparative analysis of Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā, concluding that both thinkers view *ḥudūrī* knowledge as a metaphysical illumination sourced from divine light, in contrast to Avicenna’s logical-structural epistemology (Abbasi et al. 2024, 859–70).

Despite the burgeoning literature on *‘ilm ḥudūrī* in Islamic epistemology, there are still some crucial gaps in analysis. To begin with, previous research tends to highlight the experiential and mystical elements of knowledge by presence, especially concerning the Sufi notion of spirituality and intuitive understanding (Yazdī 1992, 43–92) at the expense of its philosophical role as a method of acquiring knowledge systematically in Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī’s Illuminations epistemology. As such, *‘ilm ḥudūrī* is regarded not as an epistemological approach but as an experience for gaining spiritual enlightenment.

Second, several comparative studies on Peripatetic and Illuminations epistemology have looked into the contrast between discursive and intuitive approaches to knowledge in Islamic philosophy, including Avicenna and Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (Nasution et al. 2023, 386–96). Nonetheless, most of these studies do not explore Suhrawardī’s critique of definition, logical thinking, and sense perception comprehensively as an epistemological system, thus limiting themselves to merely analyzing the conceptual opposition between two philosophical schools. Hence, insufficient consideration has been paid to the process whereby Suhrawardī advances from criticizing representational epistemology to establishing *‘ilm ḥudūrī* as an alternative philosophical methodology.

Third, new research has attempted to demonstrate the pertinence of the concept of *‘ilm ḥudūrī* within the context of contemporary problems caused by positivism and epistemological reductionism. For example, Lieke Wijnia, through her analysis of how metaphysical and spiritual elements could be regained in modern education systems (Wijnia 2022, 37–57), calls for the re-integration of spiritual epistemology. Moreover, Aswin Nasution (Nasution et al. 2023, 386–96) and Hammis Syafaq et al. (2023, 240–69) consider intuitive cognition, prophetic

knowledge, and spiritual unveiling as viable epistemic modes in today's Islamic world. Nevertheless, none of these studies have attempted to draw a systematic link between the classical Illuminations philosophy of knowledge by presence and modern epistemological problems, such as fragmented conception of knowledge, disappearance of metaphysical groundings, and degradation of ethical significance in modern science.

This article seeks to fill this gap by providing a systematic and comprehensive account of the epistemology of Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī and the importance of *'ilm ḥudūrī* as one of its concepts. While prior studies analyze either the mystical dimension of knowledge by presence or the Suhrawardīan criticism of Peripatetic philosophy, my study explores his critique of definition, logic, and sensory knowledge in a systematic and unified manner.

Finally, this research adds to the literature on the topic of Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī by conducting a reconstruction of the epistemological project of the philosopher in question and focusing especially on the relation of his critique of the methods of Peripatetic philosophy and his conception of *'ilm ḥudūrī* as an alternative way of knowing. By approaching Suhrawardī's critiques of definition, logic and sensory perception not as separate ideas, but as a connected set of beliefs forming a single epistemological framework, this paper will help to understand the philosophical structure of the theory of knowledge developed by Suhrawardī and the way it differed from the traditional epistemology based on representational concepts.

The novelty of this research is not only in the reconstruction of the criticisms that Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī formulated against Peripatetic epistemology, but also in the reevaluation of the idea of *'ilm ḥudūrī* as a united epistemological and ontological framework. It will be claimed that Suhrawardī's critique of definition, logic, and sensory perception should not be regarded as separate ideas, but as a basis of a more profound philosophical project implying a radical reconceptualization of knowledge as presence rather than representation. The paper will focus on the idea of *'ilm ḥudūrī* being not only an alternative epistemological approach, but an ontological concept of knowledge grounded in the notion of presence.

Furthermore, this study offers a contextualized and contemporary reading of Suhrawardī's thought, demonstrating the continued relevance of illuminative epistemology in addressing modern intellectual challenges, including scientific reductionism, epistemic fragmentation, and the broader crisis of meaning in contemporary knowledge systems. Unlike many previous studies that primarily affirm the value of *'ilm ḥudūrī*, this research also provides a critical evaluation of its limitations, particularly in relation to issues of subjectivity, epistemic verification, and its applicability within modern scientific frameworks (Kuntarto et al. 2025, 155–66).

In terms of its contribution, this article advances the field of Islamic philosophy and epistemology by offering a more nuanced and systematic understanding of Suhrawardī's intellectual project, especially by clarifying the conceptual transition from Peripatetic rationalism to illuminative knowledge by presence. It also

contributes to broader epistemological debates by positioning *'ilm ḥudūrī* as a form of non-representational and presential knowledge, thereby expanding its relevance beyond Islamic philosophy to engage with global philosophical discourses.

Moreover, by engaging with contemporary epistemological concerns, this study opens new avenues for interdisciplinary dialogue between Islamic philosophy, philosophy of knowledge, and the sociology of knowledge, particularly within the frameworks of post-positivist and post-secular thought. Finally, the study contributes to ongoing intellectual efforts to reintegrate ethical, spiritual, and metaphysical dimensions into modern knowledge systems, proposing *'ilm ḥudūrī* as a framework for a more holistic, integrative, and transformative understanding of knowledge (Demirkuş 2026, 154–68).

The research focuses on the importance of the theory of *'ilm ḥudūrī*, also known as knowledge by presence, which has been formulated by Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī – one of the greatest thinkers in the history of Islamic philosophy. While many attempts have already been made to summarize Suhrawardī's epistemological critique of Peripatetic epistemology, the article seeks to demonstrate the nature of an alternative epistemological approach based on rejecting definition, representational reason, and sensory experience. First, Suhrawardī asserts that concepts and discursive thinking cannot apprehend the essence of reality, especially its metaphysical aspects such as existence, self-knowledge, and the existence of immaterial things.

On this basis, the current research will prove that, contrary to popular opinion, the doctrine of *'ilm ḥudūrī* can hardly be considered a mere negation of Peripatetic rationalism. Instead, it is a fully developed theory of knowledge, wherein the process of cognition takes place thanks to ontologically immediate connections between a person and things, ideas, and other realities he or she is supposed to know. As opposed to the traditional representational approach to cognition, in which understanding of reality comes about due to mediations, the epistemological system based on the theory of *'ilm ḥudūrī* sees knowledge as a process of participating in being.

To investigate these themes, this study adopts a qualitative library research methodology, drawing on both philosophical analysis and linguistic-textual interpretation (Eklund 2023, 91–113; Broughton 2021, 4097–126; Hetherington 2003, 119–45; Norton 1977). A philosophical approach is employed to engage deeply with the metaphysical and conceptual foundations of Suhrawardī's epistemology, especially his departure from representational knowledge and his embrace of ontological immediacy through divine presence. Meanwhile, the linguistic dimension analyzes key terminologies, semantic structures, and epistemic expressions within classical Islamic philosophical texts, particularly those found in Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-Isbrāq*. By integrating these two methodological lenses—philosophical and linguistic—this study aims to clarify the epistemological transition from conceptual mediation to unmediated presence, thereby highlighting the centrality of illumination and spiritual experience in acquiring true knowledge.

## A Brief Biography of Suhrawardī

Abū al-Futūḥ Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn Ḥabash ibn Amīrak al-Suhrawardī al-Kurdī, widely known as Suhrawardī, was born in 549 AH / 1154 CE in the village of Suhraward, located in the Jibāl region of northwestern Iran. He was revered by various titles, including *shaykh al-ishrāq* (master of Illumination), *al-ḥakīm* (the sage), *al-shahīd* (the martyr), and more notably *al-maqtūl* (the Executed), a title derived from the circumstances surrounding his death. According to Ziai, Suhrawardī was executed by hanging under the order of al-Malik al-Zāhir, son of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (Saladin), after being accused of heresy (Ziai 1990, 22; Aminrazavi 2014, 1–25). He died on July 29, 1191 CE / 578 AH, at the age of 36 according to the solar calendar (Shamsiyyah), or 38 according to the lunar calendar (*Qamarīyyah*) (Corbin 1993, 206).

Suhrawardī's execution serves as a poignant reminder of the risks faced by revolutionary thinkers throughout history. His fate echoes that of Socrates, who was condemned to death by hemlock, and Aristotle, who chose exile over persecution. Far from extinguishing their ideas, such tragedies often immortalized their legacies. Suhrawardī's critique of the Peripatetic tradition made a seminal contribution to Islamic epistemology. He is widely regarded as one of the most original thinkers in post-Avicennian Islamic philosophy because he attempted to reconstruct epistemology upon the foundations of illumination, intuition, and direct presence rather than upon purely representational knowledge (Niksirat 2017, 686–95; Kaukua 2020, 40–66; Hedayatafza and Bostani 2021, 169–94). He rejected the foundational premises of Peripatetic epistemology, specifically the theories of knowledge that relied heavily on definitions, formal logic, and sensory perception (Suhrawardī et al. 1999, 5–31; Ma'lūf 1997, 764). According to Suhrawardī, this framework was incapable of leading to authentic understanding or accessing metaphysical truths (Aminrazavi 2014, 92–120).

This section outlines Suhrawardī's critique of the inherent limitations of Peripatetic epistemology, particularly those concerning definition, logical formalism, and empirical sensory data. In response to these limitations, Suhrawardī proposed an alternative epistemological model: *'ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence). This model asserts that genuine knowledge arises not from conceptual mediation but from immediate experiential perception (*shuhūdī*), realized through divine illumination (*ishrāq ḥudūrī*), whereby the purified soul becomes a receptacle for metaphysical light (Suhrawardī 2006, 39–60; Suhrawardī 1998, 28–58; Corbin 1993, 210). Suhrawardī systematically established *'ilm ḥudūrī* as a foundational alternative to the representational and rationalist methodologies of the peripatetic school. His philosophical framework not only exposed the limitations of Aristotelian logic but also inaugurated an epistemology rooted in existential presence and inner illumination (Suhrawardī 1998, 5–31; Abbasi et al. 2024, 859–870; Assya'bani and Falach 2022, 53–64).

## The Limitations of Peripatetic Definition

One of the foundational theories of knowledge acquisition in classical philosophy is through definition. In both philosophical and logical traditions, definitions are commonly referred to as *ta'rif*, meaning to make known or simply definition (Sakilah et al. 2025, 362–71; Ziai 1990, 77). Within this framework, Socrates is renowned for his dialogical method, in which he pursued the essence of concepts through relentless questioning to reach a clear and fundamental understanding of the subject. Aristotle expanded and refined this approach, positioning definitions as gateways to scientific knowledge. For Aristotle, true scientific understanding arises through grasping precise definitions, as they provide universal and essential explanations of phenomena that can be systematically categorized and analyzed.

A central tenet of the Peripatetic model is the acquisition of knowledge through formal definitions (*ta'rif*), a concept dating back to the Socratic and Aristotelian traditions. Socrates employed a dialogical method to attain essential understanding through rigorous questioning, whereas Aristotle refined this into a structured system of logic in which scientific knowledge is grounded in precise definitions that capture the *essentia* or *mābiyyah* of a subject (Afandi 2015, 15–26). In the classical Islamic philosophical tradition, particularly in Ibn Sīnā's works, knowledge was believed to be attained by identifying an object's genus and differentia, providing a universal framework for categorizing reality (Boer 1967; Nasr 2006, 107–19; Corbin 1993, 167–75). This model became the cornerstone of Peripatetic logic, sustaining centuries of intellectual inquiry in the Islamic world (Warno 2023, 333–52) and providing the dominant framework of rationalist epistemology that later became the primary target of Suhrawardī's Illuminations critique (Hedayatafza and Bostani 2021, 169–94).

However, Suhrawardī identified several critical flaws in this approach. First, reliance on rigid logical structures presupposes that all essences are knowable and expressible in universal terms. This assumption breaks down when applied to abstract or spiritual reality. Concepts such as soul (*nafs*) or love (*mahabbah*) resist neat categorization and defy encapsulation within binary logical constructs (Suhrawardī et al. 1999, 58–76). Second, the Peripatetic framework imposes an artificial fixity on concepts that are often dynamic and fluid in real life. While genus and differentia may suit scientific taxonomy, they fail to reflect the evolving and multilayered nature of social, cultural, and metaphysical phenomena (Bickenbach and Davies 1996). Third, this model invites reductivism. For example, defining humans simply as rational animals satisfies logical formalism but fails to capture the complexity of human experience—its emotional, spiritual, and existential dimensions (Gasset 1957, 16–17). Thus, logic, despite its clarity, falls short of addressing the depth of human reality.

Suhrawardī's critique was rooted in his contention that the Peripatetic method, dominated by Aristotelian syllogism, marginalizes profound dimensions of reality that transcend empirical and rational analysis. He argued that truth—especially metaphysical and divine truths—cannot be confined to conceptual frameworks

derived from sensory or logical operations (Suhrawardī 1999, 66–77). Instead, he advanced a vision of epistemology in which knowledge is *present* in the soul and is accessible through spiritual purification and direct illumination (Abbasi et al. 2024; Ihsan et al. 2024, 383–406). This critique of Illuminations does not reject reason outright but challenges the supremacy of logical deduction as the sole or the highest form of knowing (Assya'bani and Falach 2022, 53–64). For Suhrawardī, true knowledge emerges not from abstraction but from an ontological encounter—an experiential unveiling made possible through divine proximity and the soul's inner receptivity (Aminrazavi 2014, 96–102).

### Suhrawardī's Critique of the Peripatetic Concept of Definition

The Peripatetic school asserts that valid definitions should articulate the essential characteristics of an object, which assumes that one possesses prior knowledge of these attributes. Suhrawardī challenges this notion, highlighting the paradox that if knowledge is contingent upon prior definitions, then the acquisition of genuinely new knowledge becomes impossible. For example, referring to a horse as an animal that neighs provides no information to someone who has never encountered a horse (Iqbal 2016, 25).

Suhrawardī contends that definitions that simply substitute one term for another are devoid of significance, such as defining father as one who has children or human as a rational animal (Suhrawardī 1994, 18). This form of reductionism, which prioritizes the empirical over the metaphysical, overlooks the spiritual aspects of humanity and, according to him, irrationally defines X in terms of Y when Y is inherently included in X.

Integrating Platonic intuition with Aristotelian reasoning, Suhrawardī challenges the Peripatetic definition theory in *Ḥikmat al-Isbrāq* (Aminrazavi 2014, 93), dismissing the rigid distinction between genus (*jins*) and differentia (*faṣl*), which he perceives as a unified conceptual entity. Although he acknowledges the practicality of definitions, he deems them insufficient for achieving genuine knowledge. Rather, he promotes an epistemology based on immediate experience, persistently critiquing Peripatetic approaches and, in *Ḥikmat al-Isbrāq*, elaborating on both the shortcomings of definitions and the prerequisites for their legitimacy (*fī al-ta'rif wa sharā'iṭihī*) (Suhrawardī 1994, 18).

### Knowledge Beyond Definition: Suhrawardī's Alternative Approach

Suhrawardī asserts that genuine knowledge arises from a direct experiential understanding of an entity's essence, whereas definitions based on abstract concepts are fundamentally limited and fail to encapsulate the entirety of reality. (Ziai 1990,66). He points out two primary obstacles to knowledge derived from definitions: the limitations imposed by human subjectivity and the intrinsic complexity of objects, whose characteristics frequently resist abstraction.

In the second section of *al-Talwihāt*, he contends that valid definitions ought to encompass essential attributes, secondary features, and existential context (Aminrazavi 2014, 94). However, even with these elements, they remain

inadequate, as they cannot capture the complete nature of an object. Moreover, certain realities—such as colors, sounds, or spiritual truths—lack a definable genus or differentia, rendering them impervious to classificatory reasoning. For example, black represents a simple, indivisible reality (*shay' wāḥid wa basīṭ*) that cannot be effectively communicated to someone who has never experienced it (Suhrawardī 1994, 73).

Suhrawardī posits that authentic knowledge emerges from an illumination-based connection (*idāfa ishraqiyya*) between the knower and the known. Through direct witnessing (*mushāhadah*), the need for definitions dissipates, as mental and sensory forms are required to be in harmony (*ṣūratuhu fī al-'aql ka-ṣūratibi fī al-ḥiss*) (Suhrawardī 1994, 73–74). Knowledge is derived not from logical reasoning but from immediate experience, producing insights that transcend inference—black, for instance, is genuinely understood only through direct observation.

### Definition and the Concept of Light in Suhrawardī's Philosophy

Suhrawardī asserts that light, which is central to his Illuminations metaphysics, cannot be defined because nothing is clearer than light itself (Suhrawardī 1372, 106). The *nūr al-anwār* represents the ultimate reality, self-sufficient and self-revealing rendering conceptual definitions insufficient (Suhrawardī 2006, 39–60).

Genuine understanding of light, and consequently metaphysical truth, is attained solely through direct illumination (*ishraq*) and presence (*ḥudūr*), rather than through logical reasoning. His critique of Peripatetic epistemology dismisses representational knowledge in favor of an epistemic immediacy that is rooted in light, intuition, and direct experience (Abbasi et al. 2024, 859–70).

### The Weakness of Logic

Logic, regarded as the second fundamental pillar of classical epistemology after definition, functions as a formal instrument for validating concepts, structuring arguments, and ensuring consistency in reasoning. The method of syllogism proposed by Aristotle gained prominence in philosophical investigations and had a great impact on subsequent intellectual movements, such as the Islamic Peripatetic school of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā (Afandi 2015, 15–26; Hassan 2001, 41). Thus, valid knowledge is reached via correct definitions and logical demonstrations. Consequently, the importance of logic cannot be understated in the search for certainty.

Although Suhrawardī was well-versed in this approach, he severely criticized it. He does not reject logic but emphasizes that the scope of methodology is too narrow, and the metaphysical aspects are exaggerated. According to Suhrawardī, syllogistic reasoning proves useful for organizing thoughts and clarifying them. However, it fails to uncover the true reality of being. Logical investigation is stuck in the conceptual world and can never get to the essence of immaterial truths. *Al-Talwīḥāt* reveals Suhrawardī's attitude toward the Peripatetic method when he says, "I am not an adherent of the Peripatetic doctrine, but my intention is to rectify the doctrine and highlight the core principles of Aristotle" (Walbridge

2016, 255–77).

### Suhrawardī's Critique of Aristotelian and Peripatetic Logic

In scrutinizing the role of logic, as depicted in such works as *al-Talwīḥāt*, *al-Mashārī' wa al-Mutārahāt*, and *Ḥikmat al-Isbrāq*, one must note that Suhrawardī does not disregard the validity of Peripatetic logic but challenges the claim that Aristotle's system exhausts philosophical epistemology (Ziai 1990, 42; Rahman and Seck 2025, 227–270). While he had received a full-fledged education in Peripatetic logic, he questioned its claims regarding the sufficiency of logical operations for metaphysical speculation. One of his important ideas in this context is the division of epistemology into *taṣawwur* (conception) and *taṣdīq* (assent or dissent), in which *taṣawwur* implies the process of forming ideas, and *taṣdīq* means affirmation or negation of the propositions concerning these ideas. These notions show both Suhrawardī's adherence to the Avicennian conception of logic and his readiness for criticism of the very notion of logic.

Furthermore, Suhrawardī divides the forms of knowledge into two kinds, namely *fīṭrī* (innate) knowledge, which implies knowledge not requiring any experience, and *ghayr fīṭrī* (acquired) knowledge

Moreover, Suhrawardī distinguishes between the discursive mode of cognition named *fīkr* and another mode of cognition called *amr ākbar*. In the treatise *Ḥikmat al-Isbrāq*, he states that rational cognition is not the only way to achieve truth; rather, it can be done through illuminative insight and experiential presence (Habib 2018, 226–27).

### The Subordinate Role of Logic in Illuminationist Epistemology

In refutation of the claim that logic alone is what represents the ultimate means toward true knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ṣaḥīḥ*), Suhrawardī insists that it is inadequate without the spiritual receptivity to the soul's illuminative vision. He recognizes the usefulness of logic in providing clarity of thought by organizing the discussion, ensuring consistency, and clarifying concepts. Nevertheless, in his view, logic's function stops there since it cannot establish certainties in matters of higher reality. Indeed, according to Suhrawardī, for someone to attain authentic knowledge, one must first purify the soul in preparation for illumination. The latter will reveal the former (Wahyudi and Yunus 2024, 75–84).

Unlike the Peripatetics who favor conceptual and demonstrative aspects in their conception of epistemology, Suhrawardī opts for intuition and inspiration as epistemological approaches. These two forms of knowledge have priority status in epistemology, as opposed to the inferior logical reasoning (Ziai 1990, 44). The place occupied by logic in Suhrawardīan epistemology is secondary. It can work well with the physical sciences since they are concerned with abstract relations. The problem with logic is that it cannot provide access to immaterial entities such as the soul and metaphysical truths.

## Suhrawardī's Logical Framework Compared to Ibn Sīnā's

Suhrawardī's approach departs from Avicennian logic in key respects: Primacy of Intuition: Knowledge through presence (*'ilm ḥudūrī*) takes precedence over propositional knowledge. Logic is subordinate to spiritual receptivity and inner illumination (Warno 2023, 333–52). Critique of Formal Structures: The rigidity of Peripatetic logic renders it incapable of accommodating the limitations of human cognition and the fluidity of spiritual realities (Ziai 1990, 45).

In *Ḥikmat al-Isbrāq*, Suhrawardī presents only essential logical rules—covering propositions, analogical reasoning, and fallacies (*al-mughbālaṭāt*) framing them within his illuminative philosophy and critically contrasting them with Peripatetic logic (Suhrawardī 1372, 14, 26–44).

### Opposition to Excessive Reliance on Formal Logic

First of all, it is worth emphasizing Suhrawardī's skepticism towards overreliance on logical reasoning, which could be regarded as an independent means of attaining truth. The author proves how the power of reasoning may mislead if it does not relate to the sphere of intuitive knowledge, inner experiences, and spiritual practice. Logic, as a powerful tool of systematization, argumentation, and avoiding inconsistency, undoubtedly plays a positive role; however, as the philosopher explains, this kind of cognition always presupposes dealing exclusively with mental constructs and abstractions. As a result, logic can address only conceptual images instead of being able to reach reality per se (Nesher 2021, 153–79).

In other words, certainty in knowledge is impossible through logical demonstration of syllogisms, especially when it comes to metaphysical issues, spirituality of man, and immaterial objects. According to Suhrawardī, metaphysical intuition of being requires a more profound mode of cognition, which could be called *'ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence). It implies immediate contact with truth without mediation. For instance, self-consciousness gives a person certainty in his or her existence but not through any logical operation or proof. The described epistemological model criticizes rationalist theories of Aristotle and Avicenna to some extent.

### The Weaknesses of Sense Perception

In *Ḥikmat al-Isbrāq*, Suhrawardī critiques the Peripatetic theory of sensory perception, highlighting its epistemological limitations. He contends that human perception is inherently flawed due to its reliance on the senses, which are variable and subjective among individuals (Laini and Soleh 2024, 1–24) examining details from the source of thought, methods to verification and implications of Suhrawardī's Isyrāqi philosophy. In explaining, the author uses qualitative research, which is presented descriptively-analytically with an epistemological-philosophical perspective Nicholas Rescher. As a result, this research shows three things: First, Isyrāqi philosophy comes from the extraction of five major schools; pre-Islamic philosophy (Greece. For instance, one individual may perceive a phenomenon while

another may not, thus exposing the fragmented nature of sensory information. By employing the analogy of blind men who touch different parts of an elephant, he demonstrates how each person develops a partial and divergent understanding, all the while believing their own observation to be correct. As a result, sensory knowledge is exclusive, individualized, and confined to superficial aspects of reality. It is contingent, non-transferable, and lacks the intersubjective reliability necessary for universal epistemic validity. More critically, Suhrawardī asserts that sense perception is incapable of grasping universals or immaterial truths, confining it to the most superficial layers of existence (Aminrazavi 2014, 98).

Given that the senses are incapable of completely comprehending physical entities, they are even less equipped to perceive metaphysical truths. Disavowing the Peripatetic dependence on sensory perception, Suhrawardī introduces *'ilm ḥudūrī*—knowledge by presence—rooted in illumination and direct awareness, surpassing the confines of empirical observation and logical reasoning.

### **Knowledge by Presence (*'Ilm Ḥudūrī*)**

The notion of presential knowledge also bears significant similarities to the concepts of *'ilm al-ladunnī* and divine inspiration discussed within broader Islamic intellectual traditions. While *'ilm ḥudūrī* emphasizes immediate ontological presence, *'ilm al-ladunnī* refers to knowledge bestowed directly by God without ordinary epistemic mediation (Nawawi et al. 2019, 219–38; Wekke et al. 2018, 521–44; Rohman 2024, 59–71). Both concepts highlight the limitations of purely discursive reasoning and affirm the possibility of transcendent sources of knowledge.

Suhrawardī's epistemology marks a profound departure from the Peripatetic tradition by privileging intuitive insights over discursive reasoning. He critiques the limitations of logical definitions in capturing the essence of being, arguing that such conceptual tools are inherently abstract and external, and thus incapable of grasping the immediacy of authentic knowledge. For Suhrawardī, genuine cognition does not arise from abstract representations or syllogistic inference but from *'ilm ḥudūrī*—knowledge by presence (Hussain and Karimi 2024, 55–68).

In this alternate epistemological system, knowledge is neither mediated by conceptual representations, mental images, nor even language-based descriptions of the real, but is an immediacy of awareness rather than an interpretation or representation of reality. For Suhrawardī, this is a non-discursive kind of knowing where the relation between the subject and object in knowledge has ceased to be one of distinction because the knower comes to encounter reality via ontological presence wherein knowledge becomes participation in reality as it is in its essential nature. This approach thus contradicts the traditional epistemic system in that cognition is taken to operate in terms of abstract representations of reality as opposed to reality itself.

Via *'ilm ḥudūrī*, Suhrawardī suggests that there are certain forms of awareness which are essentially self-evident in themselves and do not require either reasoning or any empirical observation of what is known. Two of the best examples in this

regard are self-awareness and pain. A person does not come to know pain by forming an abstraction of what it is, nor is he made aware of his existence via logical reasoning. On the contrary, the knowledge of pain and self-awareness is self-present to the subject. As such, a person knows realities by their presence within consciousness rather than by way of intellectual representations.

Suhrawardī's model redirects the epistemological quest from analytical abstraction to illuminative apprehension, where the light of consciousness unveils truth in its self-revelation. This approach not only redefines the nature of knowledge but also integrates ontology and epistemology, proposing that true knowledge occurs through ontological intimacy rather than through representational logic. To know in this framework is to be present with the thing known in its mode of being (Kaukua, 2015, 309–24).

At the heart of Suhrawardī's philosophy lies the metaphysical and epistemological centrality of *nūr* (light). In this schema, light is the most self-evident and foundational reality—immaterial, non-composite, and hierarchically emanating from *nūr al-anwār* (the Light of Lights), which represents the Divine source. All beings are gradations of light, and the human soul, which is luminous in nature, can ascend toward higher realities through spiritual purification and illumination (Wahyudi and Yunus 2024, 75–84). Within this ontological hierarchy, knowledge is achieved when the soul engages with an object in a manner that bypasses sensory mediation and rational abstraction. This form of knowledge—*'ilm ḥudūrī*—is both non-representational and non-discursive, characterized by a direct awareness of reality in its essence.

Suhrawardī's critique of the Peripatetic framework challenges the traditional notion that knowledge consists primarily of conceptual universals derived from empirical particulars. He contends that true knowledge is not the product of conceptual accuracy alone but an existential condition in which the knower participates in the being of the known. In this light-based epistemology, knowledge is no longer confined to mental constructs but is realized through spiritual proximity and presence.

Furthermore, *'ilm ḥudūrī* offers access to metaphysical, spiritual, and divine truths that transcend the capacities of empirical observation and formal logic to comprehend. Realizing these elevated forms of knowledge necessitates both intellectual effort and ethical and spiritual refinement. Suhrawardī insists that the path to truth requires the purification of the soul, as only a refined and illuminated consciousness can receive the light of the truth. Thus, knowledge becomes both an ontological and moral achievement, uniting epistemic insight with an inner transformation (Wahyudi and Yunus 2024, 75–84).

In this context, *'ilm ḥudūrī* is attained through *dhawq* (tasting) or presential awareness, in which the object of knowledge is immediately present to the knower without any external mediation. Suhrawardī applies this framework to self-knowledge, asserting that the soul knows itself not through discursive processes but because it is present to itself—light recognizing itself. This foundational insight serves as the cornerstone of his Illuminations metaphysics, where all authentic

knowledge originates in degrees of luminous presence, ultimately culminating in the *nūr al-anwār*, the source of pure existence and of ultimate knowledge (Suhrawardī 2006, 39–51; Wahyudi and Yunus 2024, 75–84; Suhrawardī 1998, 34–57).

Suhrawardī also considers prophetic knowledge and mystical unveiling to be manifestations of *'ilm ḥudūrī*. Through spiritual discipline and divine illumination, the purified soul becomes capable of directly engaging with metaphysical realities, circumventing rationalist abstractions (Nasr 2006, 1–12 and 223–58). According to Ziai (1990), the attainment of illuminative knowledge (*'ilm ishbrāqī*) involves three distinct stages:

- a. Reception phase: Divine light (*nūr al-anwār*) illuminates the consciousness of the seeker, unfolding the gradations of light (*al-anwār al-sāniḥāt*) through which genuine knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-ḥaqīqīyyah*) is unveiled (Suhrawardī 2006, 39–51; Ziai 1990, 35).
- b. Preparatory phase: The seeker undergoes purification, typically through seclusion (*khalwa*) and ascetic discipline for 40 days, often accompanied by dietary restrictions, such as abstaining from meat.
- c. Integration phase: The seeker synthesizes illuminative experience into a coherent philosophical discourse, thereby contributing to the body of Illuminationist philosophy (Suhrawardī 1372, 257–258; Suhrawardī et al. 1999, 31–73).

In Suhrawardī's epistemological framework, *'ilm ḥudūrī* is inseparable from the soul's ontological condition. The more purified and luminous the soul becomes, the greater its capacity to attain unmediated and truthful knowledge. This ascent toward the *Light of Lights* constitutes both an epistemic journey and spiritual elevation. Suhrawardī's vision of knowledge, therefore, transcends intellectual cognition, positioning it as a mystical and metaphysical engagement with reality.

### **The Role of the Soul in 'Ilm Ḥudūrī**

In Suhrawardī's philosophy of illumination, *'ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence) is intricately linked to the ontological and spiritual condition of the soul. This form of knowledge transcends mere epistemology; it is fundamentally existential, rooted in the luminous nature of the soul and its ability for self-awareness and spiritual insight (Aminrazavi 2014, 32–34). In contrast to representational knowledge, which relies on abstract ideas, *'ilm ḥudūrī* emerges from the soul's direct and unmediated engagement with existence, where the soul functions as both the knower and the locus of knowledge.

Suhrawardī characterizes the soul as a being of light (*nūr*), inherently luminous and capable of perceiving other forms of light. The extent of illumination present within the soul influences the profundity and clarity of its knowledge. A soul that is purified and spiritually elevated attains direct access to higher metaphysical realities, whereas a soul tethered to material concerns remains constrained. The pinnacle of *'ilm ḥudūrī* is the soul's immediate self-awareness—acknowledging its

own existence without reliance on inference or conceptual frameworks (Suhrawardī 2006, 39-51).

In Suhrawardī's discourse with Aristotle, he inquires about the soul's connection to the Active Intellect (*'aql fa'āl*). Aristotle responds, "As long as you remain in this world, you will remain confined—true liberation comes only after death." This echoes Suhrawardī's conviction that genuine unity with divine intellect is achieved solely when the soul surpasses its corporeal limitations (Assya'bani and Falach 2022, 58–64).

Suhrawardī outlines two principal pathways through which the soul can attain liberation and ascend toward true knowledge:

- a. Socratic Inquiry and Ethical Discipline: In the tradition of Socrates, this approach integrates moral cleansing, reflective inquiry (*nazar*), and virtuous deeds (*'amal*), rendering ethical enhancement crucial for attaining clear understanding.
- b. Direct Illumination: This mystical journey transcends rational reasoning, directing attention inward to embrace divine illumination and attain knowledge that surpasses verbal expression (Aminrazavi 2014, 78–91; Suhrawardī 2006, 39–51).

In both pathways, *'ilm ḥudūrī* necessitates a state of spiritual preparedness. A cleansed and open soul harmonizes with the reality it aspires to attain, and as it becomes increasingly luminous, it approaches the *nūr al-anwār* (Light of Lights) more closely. Consequently, knowledge transforms into an ethical-spiritual endeavor that is inextricably linked to the moral condition of the knower (Suhrawardī 1998, 28–58).

According to the Illuminations perspective, the soul is characterized as an active and radiant principle that comprehends through its existence rather than through abstraction. It serves as both a mirror and a source of light, reflecting and engaging with truth. Through the concept of *'ilm ḥudūrī*, Suhrawardī articulates knowledge as fundamentally grounded in ontology, capable of spiritual transformation, and essential for the soul's elevation towards the divine (Aminrazavi 2014, 78–91; Suhrawardī 2006, 39–51).

### The Mechanism of Divine Illumination

The process of illumination described by Suhrawardī may also be compared with classical Islamic theories of revelation and divine inspiration. In both Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī, revelation is understood as a mode of higher cognition in which divine realities become directly accessible to human consciousness (Erdoğan and Eryücel 2024, 1383–1400). Although Suhrawardī develops a distinct Illuminations framework, his conception of *'ilm ḥudūrī* shares a similar emphasis on immediacy, spiritual preparedness, and divine disclosure.

In Suhrawardī's Illuminations philosophy, knowledge is understood as an ontological revelation through divine light, which is disclosed rather than deduced. The cleansed and receptive soul is illuminated by superior realities. In

contrast to Aristotle's substance-oriented framework, Suhrawardī proposes a metaphysics centered on light, wherein all entities differ in brightness according to their proximity to the *nūr al-anwār* (Light of Lights) (Suhrawardī 2006, 39–51; Suhrawardī et al. 1999, 66–67; Walbridge 2000, 143–86).

Suhrawardī posits that all entities partake in either light (*nūr*) or darkness (*ẓulumāt*) based on their ontological status. Proximity to the *nūr al-anwār* (Light of Lights) enhances one's connection to divine reality. In the context of *'ilm ḥudūrī*, knowledge is attained when a lesser light, such as the human soul, is illuminated by a superior light. His hierarchical framework positions the *nūr al-anwār* at the apex, succeeded by pure lights (immaterial intellects/angels), then soul lights (human/animal souls) that are partially tethered to matter, and ultimately matter itself, completely devoid of light and dependent on higher lights for its form and understanding.

In Suhrawardī's hierarchical framework, every level is illuminated by the one that precedes it, creating a continuum of effusion (*fayḍ*). The human soul has the potential to elevate itself by absorbing light from the *anwār qudsiyyah* or, on rare occasions, the *nūr al-anwār*, a transformative journey that brings it nearer to its metaphysical origin.

The mechanism of this divine illumination, as described by Suhrawardī, unfolds through a descending chain of lights:

- a. Knowledge originates from *'aql al-a'lā* (the Supreme Intellect).
- b. It is transmitted to the *'aql fa'āl* (Active Intellect), also referred to as the *rūḥ al-quds* (Holy Spirit).
- c. *Rūḥ al-quds* functions as an intermediary, mediating between the divine and the human intellect.
- d. This knowledge is then radiated (*isbrāq*) from the *nūr al-anwār*, ensuring its purity and certitude (Suhrawardī 1982, 35–37; Suhrawardī et al. 1999, 58–76).

In Suhrawardī's framework, *'ilm ḥudūrī* examines the constraints of Peripatetic philosophy. Although empirical observation and logical reasoning possess merit, they produce only fragmented, mediated understanding. In contrast, *'ilm ḥudūrī* represents a superior form of cognition that is non-discursive and grounded in ontological presence and spiritual intuition (*dhāwq*).

By focusing epistemology on divine illumination, Suhrawardī redefines knowledge as a transformation of existence rather than mere accumulation of facts. Genuine knowledge is attained through alignment with divine light, thereby rendering epistemology an ethical and spiritual journey of purification, enlightenment, and elevation.

## Philosophical Implications

### 1. Rethinking the Limits of Conceptual Analysis in Metaphysical Inquiry

One of the most important intellectual ramifications of the philosophy of

Suhrawardī, therefore, is his critique of the longstanding view according to which metaphysical realities are to be known solely through conceptual reflection. The epistemological paradigm of Peripatetics, specifically of the Aristotelian and Avicennian traditions, is based on the notion of knowledge as a process of abstraction and classification of concepts acquired through sensory perception. Many contemporary approaches to epistemology follow a similar model, emphasizing analytical thinking, empirical justification, and accurate representation of objects as necessary features of knowledge.

Suhrawardī challenges this model by claiming that some aspects of reality do not lend themselves to conceptualization. Metaphysical realities, such as those associated with existence, self-awareness, and immateriality, in particular, require a different type of knowledge, which is direct and non-representational. It is what Suhrawardī calls *‘ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence). According to this paradigm, knowing does not mean representing reality; instead, the latter must be directly present to a knower without mediation. Consequently, Suhrawardī argues, the process of cognition should not only reproduce reality but be a part of the latter as well.

The relevance of this theory in today’s world is due to the current criticism of the epistemology of representation, positivism, and over-reliance on rational abstraction within knowledge systems in today’s world. Through the critique of the limitations of conceptual mediation, Suhrawardī prefigures some of the issues raised against the fragmentation of knowledge, the separation of the subject and the object, and the limitation of truth to formalism and verification in future studies. The epistemology proposed by Suhrawardī thus has implications for modern discussions about knowledge as having elements beyond logical formalism, especially the meaning of things, consciousness, and existential understanding (Walbridge 2000, 3–13, 19-38).

The uniqueness of Suhrawardī’s contribution can be said to lie in his attempt to redefine metaphysical knowledge in terms of its transformational nature rather than as a result of its refinement through conceptual mediation.

## **2. The Emphasis on Presence, Intuition, and Light Leads to a Mystical Epistemology, Merging Philosophy with Inner Vision and Spiritual Experience**

The result of the epistemological investigations of Suhrawardī leads to the mystical dimension of knowledge which transcends the boundaries of rational epistemology. The mystic philosopher does not negate the use of logic and rationality; on the contrary, he asserts that the use of reason and syllogism cannot lead man to absolute truth. Intellectual knowledge or rational proof may provide conceptual certainty, but it always functions in representational terms where knowledge of reality is mediated by means of representation, definition and conceptualization.

According to Suhrawardī, absolute knowledge involves a direct apprehension of reality by *mushāhadah* (inner witnessing) and *dhawq* (experiential tasting),

in which the truth is directly revealed to the soul. Knowledge of reality occurs in knowledge of the presence of the knower in *'ilm ḥudūrī*. Here there is no production of knowledge, but rather an immediate intuition of knowledge by way of consciousness illuminated by higher lights. This kind of knowledge presupposes the existence of certain conditions on the part of the knower.

As a result of the above-mentioned epistemological investigation, Suhrawardī combines philosophy and spirituality into one path of wisdom which involves the transformation of ontological dimensions of reality of human beings. The process of reaching metaphysical knowledge entails the ontological transformation of the subject of cognition.

### 3. His Epistemological Stance Aligns More Closely with Neoplatonism and Sufi Metaphysics Than with Aristotelianism

It should be noted that, like the Neoplatonists, specifically Plotinus, Suhrawardī presents the hierarchy of reality based on degrees of light and immateriality (Yazdī 1992, 24–25). Thus, in his epistemology, the process of gaining knowledge is ontological since the human soul needs to ascend from the world of multiplicity to the levels of more refined illuminations until achieving the ultimate source of being.

This idea corresponds to the Plotinian notion of a soul's ascent to the One through contemplation and spiritual purification. However, in Suhrawardīan epistemology, another Neoplatonist theme can be identified since it emphasizes the significance of such mystical concepts as *kashf*, *ḥudūr*, and *ma'rifah* as the experience of receiving direct intuition of truth. Thus, according to Suhrawardī, the acquisition of metaphysical knowledge presupposes ontological closeness to God acquired during the practice of spiritual purification.

Such features of Suhrawardīan epistemology are consonant with the notions of emanationist metaphysics and the practice of Sufism itself (Aminrazavi 2014, 5–7; Abbasi et al. 2024, 859–70). In turn, Suhrawardīan epistemology differs from the Peripatetic one due to the predominance of ontological, spiritual, and intuitive aspects in its structure.

## Conclusion

Suhrawardī, expressing discontent with the Peripatetic approach to understanding metaphysical truths, introduced *'ilm ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence) as a direct, ontologically based alternative. This perspective transitions from conceptual analysis to spiritual presence, perceiving the soul as both the knower and the origin of illumination.

From the perspective of the author, *'ilm ḥudūrī* is profoundly mystical and frequently neglected in scientific discussions. The fundamental idea—that only a cleansed soul is capable of receiving divine illumination—encounters obstacles posed by human prejudices and diversions, thereby raising doubts about its practicality. This emphasis on self-purification renders knowledge an ethical-spiritual endeavor, rather than solely an intellectual one.

Whereas empirical and discursive knowledge is verified externally through observation, definition, or propositions, the veracity of *‘ilm ḥudūrī* does not depend on such processes of verification. Yet, that does not make it more subjective knowledge, epistemically invalid knowledge. As expounded upon by Maḥdī Ḥā’irī Yazdī in *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence*, what validates *‘ilm ḥudūrī* is the ontological nature of knowledge, wherein the existence of the known and the knowing subject is immediately manifest to each other without the need for representation. Here, the duality between the subject and object is neither obliterated nor negated; instead, it is reinterpreted through the medium of direct existential cognition, wherein the object is grasped directly in terms of its existential presence.

Through this approach, Suhrawardī’s epistemology presents a distinctive theory of certainty which is not based on the objectivization of knowledge through sense perception but rather through ontology. Here, epistemology goes beyond the correspondence theory of knowledge and extends into the realm of metaphysics, wherein knowledge becomes more than just a matter of intellectual comprehension; it becomes a matter of existential participation within a greater reality.

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