

Mullā Ṣadrā's Epistemological Critique of Modern Skepticism: A Reconstruction of the Foundations of Certainty in Knowledge

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Abstract: *This paper deals with the epistemic crisis of certainty in modern epistemology, which is provoked by the empirical scepticism of David Hume. Hume doubted the principles of causality and inductive reasoning so much that knowledge is only conceived as probabilistic and contingent mental representations and lacks a firm ontological basis. This results in strong object-subject and empirical reductionism. This study uses qualitative method based on literature study, by applying critical philosophical approach and conceptual analysis to the main texts of the two thinkers. The main finding is that Mulla Sadra in the context of al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah, reconstructs the basis of certainty of knowledge through the doctrines of aşālat al-wujūd (the superiority of existence), taşkik al-wujūd (the degree of existence), 'ilm ḥudūrī (knowledge of presence), ittihād al-'āqil wa al-ma'qūl (the oneness of the subject and object of knowledge) and al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah (substantial movement). Sadra's epistemology harmonizes reason (burhān), intellectual intuition (kasyf), and revelation (naql), so that knowledge is no longer merely a mental representation, but rather an existential event that unites subject and object at a higher level of existence. This reconstruction has successfully addressed Hume's skepticism and has initiated a fruitful dialogue between Islamic epistemology and contemporary modern epistemology.*

Keywords: *Mullā Ṣadrā, Hume's Skepticism, 'Ilm Ḥudhūrī, Aşālat al-Wujūd, al-Ḥarakah al-Jawhariyyah*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini membahas krisis epistemik terkait kepastian dalam epistemologi modern, yang dipicu oleh skeptisisme empiris David Hume. Hume meragukan prinsip-prinsip kausalitas dan penalaran induktif sedemikian rupa sehingga pengetahuan hanya dipahami sebagai representasi mental yang probabilistik dan kontingen serta tidak memiliki dasar ontologis yang kokoh. Hal ini mengakibatkan reduksionisme objek-subjek*

dan empiris yang kuat. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berdasarkan studi literatur, dengan menerapkan pendekatan filosofis kritis dan analisis konseptual terhadap teks-teks utama kedua pemikir tersebut. Temuan utamanya adalah bahwa Mulla Sadra, dalam konteks *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, merekonstruksi dasar kepastian pengetahuan melalui doktrin-doktrin *aṣālat al-wujūd* (keunggulan keberadaan), *taṣkik al-wujūd* (tingkat keberadaan), *'ilm ḥudūrī* (pengetahuan tentang kehadiran), *ittiḥād al-'āqil wa al-ma'qūl* (kesatuan subjek dan objek pengetahuan) serta *al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah* (gerakan substansial). Epistemologi Sadra menyelaraskan akal (*burhān*), intuisi intelektual (*kasyf*), dan wahyu (*naql*), sehingga pengetahuan tidak lagi sekadar representasi mental, melainkan suatu peristiwa eksistensial yang menyatukan subjek dan objek pada tingkat keberadaan yang lebih tinggi. Rekonstruksi ini telah berhasil mengatasi skeptisisme Hume dan telah memicu dialog yang bermanfaat antara epistemologi Islam dan epistemologi modern kontemporer.

Kata kunci: *Mullā Ṣadrā, Hume's Skeptisisme, 'Ilm Ḥudhūrī, Aṣālat al-Wujūd, al-Ḥarakah al-Jawhariyyah*

Introduction

The rise of modern philosophy from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment has introduced a profound epistemological upheaval in the founding of rationalism and empiricism as the dominant paradigms that judge the validity of knowledge by reason and empirical experience.¹ This change has led to the fragmentation of knowledge, separating the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, knowledge is understood holistically as the integration of revelation, reason, and human experience.² A reconstruction of Islamic epistemology that integrates metaphysics, rationality, and revelation has become urgently necessary to address the crisis of the legitimacy of truth in the contemporary era.³ In epistemological discourse, the concept of *Justified True Belief (JTB)* is still regarded as the classical formulation of knowledge, although its validity continues to be challenged by the rise of modern skepticism.⁴

One of the fundamental issues in modern epistemology is the emergence of skepticism that questions the possibility of humans acquiring true and certain knowledge. This doubt stems from the separation between the subject and the object of knowledge,

¹ Hammis Syafaq et al., "Reconstructing Islamic Epistemology: Bridging Metaphysics, Reason, and Revelation," *Teosofi: Journal of Sufism and Islamic Thought* 14, no. 2 (2024): 244–45, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2024.14.2.240-269>.

² Syafaq et al., "Reconstructing Islamic Epistemology," 24–242; Fristika Maulida Aminatuz Zuhria et al., "The Nature, Sources, and Classification of Knowledge from the Perspectives of Philosophy and Islam," *Al-Iqro': Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2025): 148–50, <https://doi.org/10.54622/aijis.v2i2.498>.

³ Syafaq et al., "Reconstructing Islamic Epistemology," 250–55; Zia Ul Haq, "Modern Western Thought and Islamic Reformism: Intellectual Challenges, Prior Discourse, and Future Prospects," *Religions*, 5–7, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/3/308>.

⁴ Job De Grefte, "Knowledge as Justified True Belief," *Erkenntnis* 88, no. 2 (2023): 531, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-020-00365-7>; Paul Égré et al., "Knowledge, Justification, and Adequate Reasons," arXiv:1412.1862, preprint, arXiv, December 26, 2021, 1, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1412.1862>.

as well as a critique of the principle of causality as the foundation of scientific rationality. David Hume argued that cause-and-effect relationships lack objective rational certainty, rather, they are merely formed from mental habits arising through the repetition of empirical experiences.⁵ This view subsequently reinforced the fundamental crisis of objectivity in modern knowledge. Skepticism further developed in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, who viewed skepticism not merely as an epistemological method, but also as both a virtue and an intellectual weakness, particularly when linked to truth relativism in postmodern discourse.⁶ On the other hand, the separation of revelation from the structure of rational knowledge in the Western empiricist tradition has also weakened the metaphysical dimension in modern epistemology.⁷ Consequently, modern knowledge tends to be understood in reductionist and representational terms—that is, limited to what can be empirically verified and represented through the subject's consciousness.⁸

The problem of epistemological skepticism has not only developed within the tradition of modern Western philosophy but also has a long history in classical Islamic intellectual thought. However, unlike modern skepticism, which tends to lead to relativism and a crisis of the legitimacy of truth, skepticism in the Islamic tradition functions more as a methodological tool for testing the validity of theological and philosophical claims.⁹ This tradition is evident in the epistemological experience of al-Ghazali, who viewed doubt not as an end in itself, but as an intellectual phase leading to a more authentic conviction through the synthesis of reason, intuition, and spiritual experience.¹⁰ In subsequent developments, *the taḥqīq* tradition also exhibited a similar tendency through its emphasis on independent reasoning, empirical observation, and a critical stance toward established scientific authority.¹¹ Thus, scepticism in the Islamic tradition is neither an attempt to deny the possibility of knowledge, nor an epistemological method to reach a more robust and reflective certainty. But within these dynamics, Islamic philosophers from Ibn Sīnā to Mullā Ṣadrā attempted to work out a foundation for

⁵ Mohsen Marvinam, "Denial of Causality by Hume and the Response of Commentators on the Transcendent Wisdom of Mulla Sadra," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 12, no. 1 (2020): 65–67, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.18.2020.182>.

⁶ Lorenzo Serini, "Nietzsche's Conception of Skepticism as Intellectual Virtue and Vice," *European Journal of Philosophy* 33, no. 4 (2025): 1468–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.13068>.

⁷ Ul Haq, "Modern Western Thought and Islamic Reformism: Intellectual Challenges, Prior Discourse, and Future Prospects," 8–10.

⁸ Salis Masruhin et al., "Factors Influencing Islamic Education: Systems of Thinking, Truth, Knowledge, and Values (Morality)," *Journal of Educational Management and Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2021): 12–14, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38035/jmpis.v2i2.679>.

⁹ Syarifuddin Syarifuddin, "Tracing Skepticism in Classical Islam," *Refleksi: Journal of Philosophy and Islamic Thought* 22, no. 1 (2022): 55–57, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ref.v22i1.3235>; Paul L. Hack, **Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion** (Routledge, 2013), 12–15, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315886947>.

¹⁰ Andi Nurbaethy, "Skepticism in Al-Ghazali's Epistemological Framework," *Aqidah-Ta: Journal of Aqidah Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 66–68, <https://doi.org/10.24252/aqidahta.v4i1.5171>.

¹¹ Giancarlo Casale, "Cultures of Taḥqīq between the Mongols, the Mughals, and the Mediterranean," *Journal of Early Modern History* 27, no. 4 (2023): 275–78, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700658-bja10073>.

knowledge which could overcome the problem of radical doubt and at the same time preserve the metaphysical dimension of knowledge.¹²

Mullā Ṣadrā in *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah* offers an alternative paradigm to the modern epistemological crisis through the doctrines of *aṣālat al-wujūd*, *'ilm ḥuḍūrī*, and *ittiḥād al-'aql wa al-ma'qūl*.¹³ Furthermore, the concepts of substantial motion (*al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah*) and gradations of existence (*taškīk al-wujūd*) explain that the human soul undergoes a dynamic ontological development toward intellectual and spiritual perfection.¹⁴ Although studies on Mullā Ṣadrā continue to evolve, most research still focuses on historical, comparative, and descriptive aspects of his metaphysical and epistemological structures. Some studies compare Mullā Ṣadrā's concept of the certainty of knowledge with that of Descartes.¹⁵ Meanwhile, other studies highlight the concept of presential knowledge and intuitive experience in his philosophy.¹⁶ In fact, Mullā Ṣadrā's thought holds great potential as a philosophical critique of modern skepticism, particularly regarding the problems of causality, subject-object dualism, and epistemological relativism. However, efforts to position Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology as a *critical tool* against modern skepticism remain relatively limited. This research gap serves as the primary foundation for this study.

The urgency of this study lies in the effort to position Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology as a framework for onto-epistemological criticism of David Hume's modern skepticism. Unlike previous studies, which generally focus on the historical, descriptive, or comparative aspects of Mullā Ṣadrā's thought, this article examines the constructive relevance of the philosophy of *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah* in addressing fundamental problems in modern epistemology. In this study, the discussion is limited to David Hume's empirical skepticism, particularly regarding the problems of causality and induction,

¹² Seyyed Mohsen Miri, "An Analytical-Critical Approach to the Historical Itinerary of Criticism of Skepticism from Ibn Sina to Mulla Sadra," **Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism** 3, no. 1 (2013): 77–80, <https://doi.org/10.20871/kpjipm.v3i1.41>; Munirah Imran et al., "Ibrahim A.S.: An Analysis of the Concepts of 'Ilm al-Yaqīn, 'Ayn al-Yaqīn, and Haqq al-Yaqīn as a Model for Contemporary Da'wah," *BITARA: International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2025): 45–48, <https://doi.org/http://www.bitarajournal.com>.

¹³ Kerwanto, "The Epistemology of Knowledge from Mullā Ṣadrā's Perspective and Its Relevance to Intuitive Experience," *Jurnal An-Nufus* 4, no. 1 (2022): 45–48, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2019.30.1.3238>; İbrahim Kalın, **Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Sadra on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition** (Oxford University Press, 2010), 112–15, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199735242.001.0001>; Kholid Al Walid, "Mulla Sadra's Realism on the Principle of Ittiḥād al-'Aql Wa al-Ma'qul: A Response to Modern Realism," *Fikrah* 11, no. 2 (2023): 78–82, <https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v11i2.23062>.

¹⁴ Ali Al-Haj Al-Hasan, *Mulla Sadra's Grand Synthesis: A Study of the Foundations, Methodology, and Innovations of Hikmah Muta'aliyah* (Jim-Zam, 2025), 67–72; Miswari Usman, "The Establishment of Mulla Sadra's Philosophy: Main Concepts of Al-Hikmah Al-Muta'aliyah," *At-Taḥkīr* 15, no. 2 (2022): 45–50, <https://doi.org/10.32505/at.v15i2.4701>; Muhammad Faiq and Ibnu Farhan, "Mullā Ṣadrā's Ontology: The Fundamentality of Existence Over Essence," *KACA (Karunia Cahaya Allah): Jurnal Dialogis Ilmu Ushuluddin* 13, no. 2 (2023): 23–26, <https://doi.org/10.36781/kaca.v13i2.476>.

¹⁵ Seyyed Mohammad Dawood Alawi et al., "A Comparative Study of the Quiddity and Method of Attaining Certainty in the Thought of Descartes and Mullā Ṣadrā," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 13, no. 2 (2026): 18–22, <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v13i2.7369>.

¹⁶ "The Epistemology of Science from Mullā Ṣadrā's Perspective and Its Relevance to Intuitive Experience," 50–55.

which form a crucial foundation for the justification of modern knowledge. This article argues that the root of Hume's skepticism lies not merely in his critique of causality and induction, but in the epistemological assumption of representationalism, which separates the subject from the known reality. In contrast, Mullā Ṣadrā offers a foundation for the certainty of knowledge based on *aṣālāt al-wujūd* (the primacy of existence), *taṣkīk al-wujūd* (the gradation of existence), *‘ilm ḥudhūrī* (presential knowledge), *ittiḥād al-‘āqil wa al-ma‘qūl* (the unity of the subject and the object of knowledge). Thus, this study not only compares two distinct traditions of thought but also demonstrates how an existence-based epistemology can serve as a conceptual alternative to address the crisis of certainty in modern philosophy.

Method

This study is a qualitative, literature-based research project with a philosophical-critical approach, which aims to conceptually analyse the relationship between Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology and modern scepticism as represented by the thought of David Hume. Data sources were obtained through a review of primary and secondary literature related to the epistemology of both figures, including their original works as well as relevant contemporary academic studies. This study is based primarily on David Hume's major works, "*A Treatise of Human Nature*" and "*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*," selected for the systematic way in which they handle modern empirical scepticism, particularly with respect to the problems of causality, induction, and justification of knowledge.¹⁷ As for the primary sources of Mulla Sadra, they include *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah fī al-Aṣfār al-‘Aqliyyah al-Arba‘ah* (*al-Aṣfār al-Arba‘ah*) as the main work to be a reference in investigating the concepts of *aṣālāt al-wujūd*, *taṣkīk al-wujūd*, *‘ilm ḥudhūrī*, *ittiḥād al-‘āqil wa al-ma‘qūl*, and *al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah*. These primary sources are supplemented by a variety of secondary literature in the form of books and scholarly articles which treat Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology along with modern scepticism.

Data collection was done by documentation. Then the data was analysed using a descriptive-analytical method to map the epistemological structure of modern scepticism, especially within the framework of Humean empiricism. Moreover, this study takes a deconstructive approach to criticise the epistemological assumptions of this scepticism from the perspective of the philosophy of *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*. Finally, a conceptual synthesis was carried out to reconstruct the paradigm of certainty of knowledge in Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology as an alternative to the problem of modern scepticism.

¹⁷ David Hume et al., *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*, The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume 1–2 (Clarendon Press, 2007); David Hume and Peter J. R. Millican, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford University Press, 2007); Kalin, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy*; Al-Hasan, *The Great Synthesis of Mullā Sadra: A Study of the Foundations, Methodology, and Innovations of Hikmah Muta'aliyah*.

Results and Discussion

Modern Skepticism and the Problem of the Certainty of Knowledge

The modern form of epistemological scepticism was systematised in the thought of David Hume through the radical empiricism he developed in “*A Treatise of Human Nature*” and “*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*”. Hume viewed all human knowledge as deriving from perceptions, which are divided into two forms: *impressions*—direct and vivid sensory experiences—and *ideas*—mental representations of weaker intensity. Based on this view, Hume asserted that every idea must have an empirical basis in the form of a preceding sensory impression. If an idea cannot be traced back to a specific empirical experience, then that idea is considered to lack a valid epistemological foundation. Consequently, various metaphysical concepts such as substance and self-identity are viewed as problematic because they cannot be clearly verified empirically.¹⁸

From a modern epistemological perspective, the implications of Hume’s theory are significant because they relate directly to the fundamental parameters of knowledge, which are classically formulated as “*justified true belief*”. This model assumes that a proposition can be considered as knowledge only if it satisfies three main criteria: truth, belief and rational justification. But Hume’s scepticism questions the possibility of having true certainty of justification for empirical knowledge because, he argues, all ideas are derived only from sensory experience which is transitory and impermanent.¹⁹ His critique is most apparent in his discussion of causality. He says that humans never see necessary cause-and-effect relationships but only see relationships that occur consistently between events, which then form mental habits in humans.²⁰

Hume’s criticisms of the principle of causality then gave rise to the problem of induction, which has become one of the main foundations of modern epistemological scepticism. Scientific understanding is based on the assumption that nature is regular and uniform, but Hume argued that this assumption cannot be rationally proven without circular reasoning.²¹ But Hume’s scepticism did not entail a wholesale denial of the possibility of knowledge. He still admitted the existence of certainty in “relations between ideas,” but knowledge of “things” could only attain a degree of probability, according to empirical experience. These perspectives relate to the growing trend of postmodern

¹⁸ Hume et al., **A Treatise of Human Nature**, 7–8; Hume and Millican, **An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding**, 12–16.

¹⁹ Égré et al., “Knowledge, Justification, and Adequate Reasons,” 1; De Grefte, “Knowledge as Justified True Belief,” 531.

²⁰ Hume and Millican, **An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding**, 26–33; Marvinam, “Hume’s Denial of Causality and the Response of Commentators on Mulla Sadra’s Transcendent Wisdom,” 65–67.

²¹ Tommaso Costa, “From Hume to Jaynes: Induction as the Logic of Plausible Reasoning,” arXiv:2511.02881, preprint, arXiv, November 4, 2025, 2, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2511.02881>; Marvinam, “Hume’s Denial of Causality and the Response of Commentators on the Transcendent Wisdom of Mulla Sadra,” 65.

relativism, which questions more and more the validity of universal truths in human knowledge.²²

The application of philosophical skepticism in the modern tradition is not always consistent in practice. The use of Descartes' method of doubt in the study of pre-Islamic Arabic literature, for example, demonstrates that skepticism is often applied partially and selectively to reinforce specific conclusions, rather than as a method of criticism carried out comprehensively and objectively.²³ This situation reveals that modern skepticism, despite its great theoretical strength, still harbors issues of inconsistency when applied in concrete analysis.

Thus, Hume's epistemological skepticism demonstrates that the crisis of certainty in modern epistemology is rooted in the weakness of the rational justification for causal relationships and inductive reasoning. When empirical experience and rationality can no longer guarantee the inevitability of a connection to reality, representational epistemology—which separates the subject and object of knowledge—begins to lose its philosophical basis of legitimacy.²⁴ In this context, Hume's skepticism became a pivotal point for the emergence of various efforts to reconstruct epistemology, including within the tradition of Islamic philosophy.

Mullā Ṣadrā's Ontological-Epistemological Foundation within the Framework of *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyah*

In the context of post-classical Islamic philosophy, *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyah* does not merely reproduce the intellectual legacy of the past but represents the pinnacle of intellectual development that redefines the relationship between existence and knowledge.²⁵ A crucial issue in examining this framework lies in the extent to which its onto-epistemological foundations are capable of responding to the challenges of modern skepticism, which tends to reduce truth to empirical limits or mere mental correspondence.

Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical system is rooted in the doctrine of *aṣālat al-wujūd* (the primacy of existence), which asserts that existence is the most fundamental reality, whereas essence (*māhiyyah*) is merely a derivative and secondary mental construct.²⁶ In the concept of *aṣālat al-wujūd*, reality is a single, objective existential unity that serves as the primary basis for humans to attain certainty, in contrast to Hume's empirical

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²³ Halya Millati and Khoirul Umami, "Inconsistencies in the Application of Descartes's Method of Philosophical Skepticism in *Fī Shi'r al-Jāhili*," *Mutawatir: Journal of Hadith Exegesis* 11, no. 1 (2021): 56–58, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2021.11.1.127-152>.

²⁴ Kalin, **Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy**, 89–92; "The Epistemology of Knowledge from Mullā Ṣadrā's Perspective and Its Relevance to Intuitive Experience," 42–44.

²⁵ Al-Hasan, *The Great Synthesis of Mulla Sadra: A Study of the Foundations, Methodology, and Innovations of Hikmah Muta'aliyah*, 17.

²⁶ Al-Hasan, *The Great Synthesis of Mulla Sadra: A Study of the Foundations, Methodology, and Innovations of Hikmah Muta'aliyah*, 72.

skepticism, which stops at mental representations.²⁷ This gradational structure allows knowledge to be understood as a process of existential actualization moving toward a higher level of certainty, rather than merely an accumulation of contingent mental representations as assumed in modern empiricist epistemology.

As Ibrahim Kalin points out in his article, the metaphysical foundation of Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology cannot be separated from its epistemology since knowledge is seen as a manifestation or a stage of perfection of existence itself.²⁸ This perspective positions *'ilm ḥuḍūri* (knowledge of presence) as the core of Ṣadrā's epistemology, which is not merely understood as a psychological experience but as a form of existential presence. The subject-object relationship is no longer dualistic, for the subject not only knows reality but is simultaneously present in and united with it without the mediation of conceptual representation.²⁹ In this context, it can be argued that Hume is trapped in skepticism because he limits the entire content of consciousness to impressions and ideas, which technically fall under the category of *'ilm ḥuṣūlī* (representational knowledge). In fact, within Mullā Ṣadrā's framework, true certainty (*yaqīn*) lies in *'ilm ḥuḍūri* (knowledge of presence), where there are no conceptual intermediaries that could lead to errors of correspondence.³⁰

Within the general epistemological framework, knowledge is defined as *Justified True Belief* (JTB), which aims to reduce doubt to certainty (*yaqīn*). However, Mullā Ṣadrā takes this framework to a deeper level through his theory of the unity between the knowing subject and the known object (*ittiḥād al-‘aql wa al-ma’qūl*). In his system, justification is no longer understood as an external, correspondence-based relationship between the mind and reality, but rather as an internal relationship characterized by existential identity.³¹ From these points of view certainty (*yaqīn*) is the highest stage of human knowledge. It is without doubt and has the character of necessity.³² This confirmation takes place when the subject has an existential union with the object through the substantial motion (*al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah*) that brings about the actuality of its intellectual potential.³³ As such, intuition is not regarded as the opposite of reason but a type of reason that has been expressed at its highest level through the purification of the soul and connection with the divine source.³⁴

²⁷ Muhammad Kholid Muslih et al., "The Philosophical Concepts of Mulla Sadra," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2025): 166, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v8i2.1306>.

²⁸ Kalin, **Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy**, 4.

²⁹ "Epistemology of Knowledge from Mullā Ṣadrā's Perspective and Its Relevance to Intuitive Experience," 46.

³⁰ Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence* (State University of New York Press, 1992), 72.

³¹ "The Epistemology of Knowledge from the Perspective of Mullā Ṣadrā and Its Relevance to Intuitive Experience," 52.

³² Al-Hasan, *The Great Synthesis of Mulla Sadra: A Study of the Foundations, Methodology, and Innovations of Hikmah Muta'aliyah*, 157.

³³ Rohmatul Hannani and Achmad Khudori Soleh, "Reason as the Ladder to the Divine: Mulla Sadra's Philosophy of the Soul," 19, no. 1 (2024): 6, <https://doi.org/10.31603/cakrawala.9426>.

³⁴ Hannani and Soleh, **Reason as the Ladder to the Divine: Mulla Sadra's Philosophy of the Soul**, 9.

Skepticism often arises from the mind's limitations in independently proving claims of truth. Mullā Ṣadrā addresses this problem by asserting that true knowledge cannot be reduced to mental representations but is identical to *wujūd* itself. Within these contexts, knowledge is seen as an existential presence, making the issue of correspondence between mind and external reality moot. Skeptical doubts are also diminished because the subject and object are no longer viewed as two separate entities, but rather as parts of the same ontological unity.³⁵ Thus, the parameters of knowledge in *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyah* no longer rely on the accumulation of essential concepts—which are susceptible to doubt—but on the intensification of the subject's own existence. The validity of intuitive experience, often rejected in Western epistemology because it is not considered rationally justifiable, is founded on knowledge of presence (*'ilm ḥuḍhūrī*).³⁶ But for Sadra it is this intuitive experience that has epistemic legitimacy, as it is based directly on existential reality.

Thus, Mullā Ṣadrā's onto-epistemological foundation within the framework of *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyah* offers an alternative paradigm to modern dualistic epistemology. Through the doctrine of the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*), the distinction between representational knowledge (*'ilm ḥuṣūlī*) and knowledge of presence (*'ilm ḥuḍhūrī*), and the theory of the unity between the knower and the known (*ittiḥād al-'āqil wa al-ma'qūl*), Mullā Ṣadrā constructs an epistemology that positions knowledge as an existential event. Within this framework, knowledge is not merely a fragile mental representation, but an ontological participation in reality.³⁷ On this basis, Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology not only presents a philosophical critique of modern skepticism and relativism, but also offers a reconstruction of the foundations of the certainty of knowledge through a synthesis of reason, *kashf*, and revelation that leads to the attainment of *haqq al-yaqīn*.³⁸

The Reconstruction of the Certainty of Knowledge in Mullā Ṣadrā's Epistemology

One of the most serious problems in modern philosophy is the collapse of the foundations of the certainty of knowledge, a trend that has intensified since the 18th century through David Hume's empirical skepticism. The skepticism developed by Hume is not merely methodological doubt, as in the tradition of early modern rationalism, but rather a radical critique of the possibility of humans acquiring certain knowledge about objective reality. Within the framework of his empiricism, knowledge is reduced to a series of impressions and ideas derived from sensory experience, so that the human relationship with the external world no longer possesses a solid foundation of rational

³⁵ "The Epistemology of Knowledge from Mullā Ṣadrā's Perspective and Its Relevance to Intuitive Experience," 48.

³⁶ "The Epistemology of Knowledge from Mullā Ṣadrā's Perspective and Its Relevance to Intuitive Experience," 39.

³⁷ Alawi et al., "A Comparative Study of the Quiddity and Method of Attaining Certainty in the Thought of Descartes and Mulla Sadra," 18–22.

³⁸ Fathul Mufid, "Demystifying the Islamic Thought Reconciliation Model of Mullah Sadra's Transcendent Theosophy," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion (EJPR)* 15, no. 1 (2023): 112–15, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.2023.4115>.

certainty. This leads to the relation between subject and object being problematised, even to ontological disconnection. This is the point at which the modern form of scepticism ceases to be a merely epistemological device and becomes a metaphysical crisis of the nature of reality itself.

The epistemology of Mullā Ṣadrā as articulated in the system of *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah* provides an alternative approach that radically differs from the tradition of modern empiricism. While Hume had thought of knowledge as mental representations of sense experience, Mullā Ṣadrā had thought of knowledge as one of the modes of existence (*nahw al-wujūd*).³⁹ Therefore, knowing is not a cognitive activity that results in conceptual representations of objects, but rather an existential event that involves a change at the level of the knowing subject's existence. This perspective is rooted in the principle of *aṣālat al-wujūd*, which asserts that fundamental reality is not essence (*māhiyyah*), but rather existence (*wujūd*) as an actual and hierarchical ontological structure.⁴⁰ Based on this principle, the certainty of knowledge is no longer determined by the representational correspondence between mental concepts and external objects, but rather by the degree of intensity with which reality is present in the subject's consciousness.⁴¹

One of the most significant contributions of modern skepticism to the problem of the certainty of knowledge is evident in Hume's critique of the principle of causality. Hume argued that cause-and-effect relationships can never be directly apprehended in human empirical experience. What is available to experience is merely the repetition of certain events in sequence, whereas the belief in the existence of a necessary causal relationship is merely the result of a mental habit (*habit of mind*) that is formed through repeated experience.⁴² This view has far-reaching epistemological implications because it reduces the laws of nature to psychological patterns of association that have no objective basis in the structure of reality. Thus, scientific certainty loses its ontological foundation and depends entirely on empirical probability.

Mullā Ṣadrā proposes an ontological reconstruction through the concept of *al-rabt al-wujūdī*, which is rooted in the doctrine of *taskiq al-wujūd*. The cause-and-effect relationship is not understood as an external connection between two independently existing entities, but rather as an existential bond inherent in the very structure of

³⁹ Ibrahim Kalin, "Knowledge as the Unity of the Intellect and the Object of Intellection in Islamic Philosophy: A Historical Survey from Plato to Mulla Sadra," *Transcendent Philosophy: An International Journal for Comparative Philosophy and Mysticism* 1, no. 1 (2000): 73–75, <https://traditionalhikma.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Knowledge-as-the-Unity-of-the-Intellect-and-the-Object-of-Intellection-in-Islamic-Philosophy-A-Historical-Survey-from-Plato-to-Mulla-Sadra-by-Reza-Shah-Kazemi.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Al-Hasan, *The Great Synthesis of Mulla Sadra: A Study of the Foundations, Methodology, and Innovations of Hikmah Muta'aliyah*, 63; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (State University of New York Press, 2006), 77–80.

⁴¹ Jan-Peter Hartung, "Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics – Modulation of Being by Sajjad H. Rizvi," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 3 (2010): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186310000088>.

⁴² Marvinam, "Hume's Denial of Causality and the Response of Commentators on the Transcendent Wisdom of Mulla Sadra," 54.

existence itself.⁴³ The effect (*ma'lūl*) does not possess an independent existence separate from its cause, but is an existential manifestation of the cause at a certain level of reality. The concept of *faqr wujūdī* affirms that the existence of the effect is ontologically entirely dependent on its cause, so that the causal relationship cannot be reduced to a mere empirical association as assumed in modern empiricism.⁴⁴ Thus, the certainty of causality in Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology is not based on the frequency of sensory observation, but rather on the ontological structure of existence, which can be understood through intellectual intuition regarding existential relations.

The foundation for reconstructing the certainty of knowledge in Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemological system reaches its most fundamental form through the concept of *'ilm huduri* or present knowledge. The certainty of knowledge within the Sadrian framework is not merely a passive cognitive activity, but rather a spiritual journey (*asfār*) in which the soul undergoes existential actualization toward a more perfect level of existence.⁴⁵ Knowing does not merely produce a conceptual image of an object but brings reality itself into consciousness. Therefore, Mullā Ṣadrā distinguishes between two forms of knowledge: *'ilm ḥuṣūlī* (representational knowledge) and *'ilm ḥuḍūrī* (knowledge of presence). The distinction between the two is crucial for understanding Sadrian epistemology's critique of modern empirical skepticism.

Table 1. Comparison of *'Ilm Ḥuṣūlī* and *'Ilm Ḥuḍūrī*

Aspect	'Ilm Ḥuṣūlī	'Ilm Ḥuḍūrī
Form of knowledge	Mental representation	Direct presence
Subject-object relationship	Through Conceptual Mediation	Without an intermediary
Foundation of certainty	The Correspondence Between Concept and Reality	Existential Presence
Epistemological Implications	Allows for Skepticism	Serving as the Foundation of Certainty in Knowledge
Relevance to Hume	In line with <i>impressions</i> and <i>ideas</i>	Transcends empirical representationalism

The table shows that Hume's problem of skepticism operates within the realm of representational knowledge (*'ilm ḥuṣūlī*). When knowledge is understood as mental representation, there is always the possibility of doubt regarding the correspondence between ideas and external reality. In this context, the root of Hume's skepticism lies not

⁴³ Selamat Saeful Muslim, "Mulla Sadra's Metaphysics and Its Influence on Indonesian Islamic Thought," *TAJIDID: Journal of Ushuluddin* 27, no. 1 (2020): 1–2, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36667/tajdid.v27i1.313>

⁴⁴ Al-Hasan, *The Great Synthesis of Mulla Sadra: A Study of the Foundations, Methodology, and Innovations of Hikmah Muta'aliyah*, 104.

⁴⁵ Rusmir Šadić, "The Principles of Mullā Ṣadrā's Epistemology," *Filozofska istraživanja* 37, no. 4 (2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.21464/fi37401>.

only in his critique of causality and induction, but also in the representational assumption that mediates the relationship between consciousness and reality.

Human self-awareness is the most fundamental example of this form of knowledge because within it there is no separation between subject, object, and the act of knowing.⁴⁶ Through the concept of *'ilm ḥuḍūrī*, Mullā Ṣadrā places the foundation of the certainty of knowledge at an ontological level that is beyond the reach of representational skepticism. Conceptual knowledge derives its validity precisely because it is rooted in the more fundamental experience of presence.⁴⁷ Without such a foundation, the whole edifice of human knowledge would be in a state of indeterminacy, as in David Hume's empirical skepticism.⁴⁸ Therefore, Sadra's epistemological reconstruction does not only reject modern scepticism by argument, but also proves that scepticism is the result of reducing knowledge to the representational dimension.

In Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology, the reconstruction of the certainty of knowledge is more comprehensively presented in the doctrine of *ittiḥād al-'aql wa al-ma'qūl*. In this doctrine, knowing is understood as an existential change undergone by the human soul. Knowing is no longer conceived as a passive representational activity, but as a process of ontological actualisation that allows the knowing subject to unite with the intellectual form that it knows. This process is intimately connected with the theory of *al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah* which argues that the human soul moves dynamically from potentiality to a higher form of existential actuality.⁴⁹

A consequence of this approach is that the certainty of knowledge cannot be separated from the existential development of the knowing subject. Mullā Ṣadrā maintains that the higher the level of actualisation of the human soul, the higher is its ability for the correct understanding of reality. In the *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyah* system, epistemology is therefore a synthesis of three principles: intellectual intuition, rational proof, and sharia.⁵⁰ The integration of these three dimensions indicates that Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology is directed to the overcoming of the dichotomy between rationalism and empiricism that is typical of the tradition of modern philosophy.

However, the reconstruction of certainty of knowledge in Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemology is not without its challenges when seen in the context of modern epistemology. The experience of presence has been positioned as the basis of certainty, but the question of how the intersubjective verification of that experience can be accomplished without reducing its existential character still remains. Furthermore, the connection between the level of certainty of knowledge and the perfection of the subject in the spiritual realm may lead to the impression that epistemological validity is greatly

⁴⁶ Kalin, **Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy**, 22.

⁴⁷ Walid, "Mulla Sadra's Realism on the Principle of Ittihad al-'Aql Wa al-Ma'qul," 111.

⁴⁸ "The Epistemology of Knowledge from Mullā Ṣadrā's Perspective and Its Relevance to Intuitive Experience," 118.

⁴⁹ Hannani and Soleh, *Reason as the Ladder to the Divine: Mulla Sadra's Philosophy of the Soul*, 93–95.

⁵⁰ Avita Aniqotul 'Athiyyah et al., **Al-Hikmah Al-Muta'aliyah: The Synthesis of Mulla Sadra's Islamic Philosophy and Its Influence on Islamic Epistemology**, 16, no. 1 (2025): 1, <https://doi.org/10.32678/aqlania.v16i1.3>.

dependent on the inner condition of the individual. So there is still a need for a dialogue between Sadra's epistemology and modern epistemology in order to further develop its contributions in contemporary philosophical discourse.

Conclusion

The decline of the confidence underlying knowledge in contemporary epistemology is illustrated by David Hume's skepticism regarding causality and induction. Hume argued that cause-and-effect relationships are insignificant, rather, they are the result of mental habits formed through repeated life experiences. Representational epistemology, which distinguishes between the subject and the object of knowledge, has its limitations. Consequently, this perspective makes certainty in knowing controversial because it relies entirely on probabilistic empirical explanations and cannot provide absolute certainty.

The epistemology of Mullā Ṣadrā in *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah* reconstructs the basis of the certainty of knowledge by employing the principles of *aṣālat al-wujūd*, *ilm hudhūrī* and *ittiḥād al-'aql wa al-ma'qul*. Knowledge, in this sense, is an existential event that joins the subject and the object in the world of being and not as a mental representation. Certainty (*yaqīn*) thus becomes no longer dependent on the correspondence of concepts with the external reality, but on the degree of the existential actualisation of reality in the subject. As such, knowledge has a stronger ontological foundation than modern representational epistemology.

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