

Philosophical Thinking of Al-Kindi

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Abstract

This article comprehensively examines the philosophical thought of Al-Kindi, the first Muslim philosopher to seek to integrate Greek philosophy with Islamic teachings. The study highlights three main aspects of Al-Kindi's philosophy: (1) Talfiq, the effort to harmonize religion and philosophy by affirming that both share the same ultimate goal of seeking truth; (2) metaphysics, which holds that God is the First Cause (al-'illah al-ūlā), the absolute Being, and the Creator of the universe from nothing (creatio ex nihilo); and (3) the concept of the soul (al-nafs), which emphasizes that the soul is spiritual, eternal, and originates from God, attaining perfection when it is liberated from the body. The Methodology used is library research with the technique of content analysis. Through his works spanning various disciplines, Al-Kindi laid the foundations for the development of a rational and religious Islamic philosophy. His perspective asserts philosophy is not a threat to religion. However, rather than being a tool for strengthening and deepening our comprehension of divine truths. His intellectual legacy became a foundation for subsequent developments in Islamic philosophical thought, including those of Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd.

Keywords: Al-Kindi; Islamic philosophy; talfiq; metaphysics; soul; integration of Religion and philosophy.

Abstrak

Artikel ini secara komprehensif mengkaji pemikiran filosofis Al-Kindi, filsuf Muslim pertama yang berupaya mengintegrasikan filsafat Yunani dengan ajaran Islam. Studi ini menyoroti tiga aspek utama filsafat Al-Kindi: (1) Talfiq, upaya untuk menyelaraskan agama dan filsafat dengan menegaskan bahwa keduanya memiliki tujuan akhir yang sama yaitu mencari kebenaran; (2) metafisika, yang menyatakan bahwa Tuhan adalah Penyebab Pertama (al-'illah al-ūlā), Wujud Mutlak, dan Pencipta alam semesta dari ketiadaan (creatio ex nihilo); dan (3) konsep jiwa (al-nafs), yang menekankan bahwa jiwa bersifat spiritual, abadi, dan berasal dari Tuhan, mencapai kesempurnaan ketika terbebas dari tubuh. Metodologi yang digunakan adalah riset pustaka dengan teknik analisis isi. Melalui karya-karyanya yang mencakup berbagai disiplin ilmu, Al-Kindi meletakkan dasar bagi pengembangan filsafat Islam yang rasional dan religius. Perspektifnya menegaskan bahwa filsafat bukanlah ancaman bagi agama. Namun, alih-alih menjadi alat untuk memperkuat dan memperdalam pemahaman kita tentang kebenaran ilahi, warisan intelektualnya justru menjadi landasan bagi perkembangan selanjutnya dalam pemikiran filosofis Islam, termasuk karya Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, dan Ibn Rushd.

Kata Kunci: Al-Kindi; filsafat Islam; talfiq; metafisika; jiwa; integrasi Agama dan filsafat.

INTRODUCTION

Islam has been governed at various times throughout its history, from the Classical Period to the Modern Period. Each period exhibits its own distinctive characteristics of development. However, Islam reached its peak of civilization during the Classical Period, particularly under the Abbasid Dynasty during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (Khasanah et al., 2020).

The achievements during this period were influenced by various internal and external factors. The strong motivation of the Muslim community was an important internal factor contributing to Islam's progress and prosperity under the Abbasid Dynasty (Madani, 2015). Muslims worked hard to understand religious scriptures and engaged in intellectual inquiry in search of the truth (Umar & Santalia, 2022).

This golden age was marked by the emergence of Muslim philosophical thought addressing issues such as humanity, the soul, metaphysics, and other related fields. One of the most prominent and influential philosophers of this era was Al-Kindi. Al-Kindi is recognized as the first philosopher in the Islamic world and one of its most influential figures (Wahda, 2019). He is commonly acknowledged as "the Father of Arab Philosophy" (Dewi et al., 2025). Al-Kindi not only established the foundations of Islamic philosophy, but he also fostered the spread of Greek philosophy throughout the Islamic world. He was instrumental in disseminating and synthesising Greek thought within an Islamic framework, while also emphasising the value of reason in understanding God and the created universe. Al-Kindi's enormous contribution to the integration of Greek philosophy and Islamic thought had an impact on Europe throughout the Renaissance, preventing the dichotomisation of knowledge (Daula, 2013).

Within the framework of metaphysics, Al-Kindi viewed God as the First Cause (*al-ʿillah al-ūlā*), who is not caused by anything else and thus serves as the ontological foundation of all existence (Kamaluddin, 2021). Al-Kindi's ideas had a considerable

impact on subsequent developments in Islamic intellectual history, as evidenced by his extensive body of work, which covered a wide range of scientific and philosophical topics.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method employed in this study is library research, using content analysis as the analytical technique. This approach involves examining and analysing classical texts that discuss the philosophical thought of Al-Kindi.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Biography of Al-Kindi

Al-Kindi's full name is Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq ibn al-Shabbah ibn 'Imran ibn Muhammad ibn al-Ash'ath ibn Qays al-Kindi. The appellation *al-Kindi* is derived from Kindah, a branch of Banu Kahlan that settled in Yemen (Aravik & Amri, 2019).

Al-Kindi was born in Kufah in 185 AH (801 CE), during the Abbasid Dynasty, under the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809 CE). His great-grandfather, al-Ash'ath ibn Qays, was a distinguished nobleman and a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who died as a martyr alongside Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas in the battles between the Muslims and the Persians in Iraq. Al-Kindi's father, Ishaq ibn al-Shabbah al-Kindi, served as the governor of Kufah during the Abbasid period, under the caliphates of al-Mahdi (775–785 CE) and Harun al-Rashid (786–809 CE). His father passed away when Al-Kindi was still a child; nevertheless, he was able to pursue his education adequately (Sirajuddin Zar, 2004). This privileged position granted Al-Kindi access to advanced education and to the intellectually rich academic environment of the Abbasid court.

Al-Kindi received his early education in Kufah before relocating to Baghdad, which was the intellectual centre of the Islamic world. He demonstrated a strong commitment to the study of multiple disciplines. This intellectual emphasis enabled him to explore an extensive number of topics, including philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, music, logic, physics, and chemistry, as well as to translate Greek works into Arabic. His knowledge in philosophy and science made him the first Arab to be recognised among the world's leading philosophers.

Al-Kindi is notable in the history of Islamic philosophy for being the first scholar to systematically introduce and develop Greek philosophy in the Islamic world. Known as *Faylasūf al-‘Arab* (the Philosopher of the Arabs), he played a key role in integrating Greek intellectual legacy into an Islamic framework in the ninth century CE. During the Abbasid Dynasty's age of tremendous intellectual growth, Al-Kindi stood out not just as a translator, but also as an original thinker who sought to reconcile philosophical logic with Islamic revelation. His multidisciplinary approach enabled his work to encompass metaphysics, logic, ethics, psychology, cosmology, music, and medicine.

Al-Kindi owned a private library known as *Al-Kindiyyah*. This library housed a diverse range of collections from numerous fields of study. In addition to *Al-Kindiyyah*, he also established *Bayt al-Ḥikmah*, which served as a centre for academic conferences and the advancement of knowledge, encompassing religious studies and philosophy (Rifa et al., 2020). *Bayt al-Ḥikmah* also served as a major centre for translation activities (Rinjani et al., 2023). This clearly demonstrates Al-Kindi's significant contribution to the development of knowledge in the Islamic world.

During the reign of al-Mutawakkil of the Abbasid Dynasty, the *Ash‘arite* school (*Mazhab al-Asy‘ariyah*) was designated as the official doctrine of the state.

This situation was exploited by anti-philosophical groups. Influenced by the instigation of Muhammad and Ahmad, the sons of Ibn Shakir, some argued that those who studied philosophy showed a lack of reverence for religion. As a result, al-Mutawakkil ordered that Al-Kindi be flogged and that his library, *al-Kindiyyah*, be confiscated. However, the library was eventually returned to its owner (Hasyimsah, 2002). The actual date of Al-Kindi's death remains unknown. According to L. Massignon, quoted by Hasyimsah, Al-Kindi died around 246 AH (860 CE). C. Nallino guesses the date at around 260 AH (873 CE), while T. J. de Boer predics 257 AH (870 CE). Meanwhile, Musthafa 'Abd al-Raziq proposes the year 252 AH (866 CE), and Yaqut al-Hamawi reports that Al-Kindi passed away after reaching the age of eighty or somewhat older.

2. The Works of Al-Kindi

Al-Kindi was a highly productive philosopher and actively engaged in the translation of Greek works, while also revising and correcting the writings of others. He received recognition from the Caliph *al-Ma'mūn*, who awarded gold equal in weight to the books translated to anyone capable of rendering works into Arabic. This practice reflects the strong spirit of scholarly activity at the time, as well as the high level of motivation fostered by the rewards granted by the Caliph. Al-Kindi's works are estimated to number no fewer than 270 titles across various fields of philosophy, among which are the following:

- a. *Al-Kindī ilā al-Mu'tasim bi-llāh fī al-Falsafah al-Ūlā* (First Philosophy);
- b. *Al-Falsafah al-Dākhilah wa al-Masā'il al-Manṭiqiyyah wa al-Mu'tasimah wa mā fawqa al-Ṭabī'iyyāt* (Introduced Philosophy, logical problems and difficulties, and metaphysics);
- c. *Fī annahu lā tunālu al-falsafah illā bi-'ilm al-riyāḍiyyāt* (The view that philosophy cannot be attained except through the mathematical sciences);

- d. *Fī qaṣd Aristṭāṭālīs fī al-Maḳūlāt* (Aristotle's intention in the Categories);
- e. *Fī māhiyyat al-‘ilm wa aqsāmih* (the nature of knowledge and its classifications);
- f. *Fī ḥudūd al-ashyā' wa rusūmihā* (A treatise on the definitions of things and their descriptions);
- g. *Fī annahā jawāhir lā ajsām* (A treatise on substances that are not bodies);
- h. *Fī 'ibārah al-jawāmi' al-fikriyyah* (Expressions concerning comprehensive ideas);
- i. *Al-ḥikmiyyah fī asrār al-rūḥāniyyah* (A philosophical treatise on spiritual mysteries);
- j. *Fī al-ibānah 'an al-‘ilal al-fā'ilah al-qarībah li al-kawn wa al-fasād* (A treatise explaining the proximate active causes of generation and corruption) (Hasyimsyah, 2002).

3. Al-Kindi's Philosophical Thought

a. *Talfiq*

Al-Kindi attempted to harmonize religion and philosophy through a process known as *talfiq*. He defines philosophy as the knowledge of truth (Mooduto & Santalia, 2025). According to Al-Kindi, philosophy and religion have a fundamental goal: both aim to explain and achieve what is true and good. The Qur'an conveys truths that are not contradicted by philosophy. Instead, it contains numerous directives and exhortations that encourage individuals to engage in study and thinking in the research of truth. In addition to relying on revelation, religion also utilizes reason and philosophy in the pursuit of truth. Al-Kindi maintained that the First Truth, *al-Ḥaqq al-Awwal*, is God. Philosophy seeks to investigate God, while religion provides its foundation. Al-Kindi further asserted that philosophy is the noblest and most

exalted of human arts (Rifa et al., 2020). He contended that the highest form of philosophy is the philosophy of God (Hasyimsyah, 2002), which holds the supreme position among all branches of philosophy (Habibah, 2020). God is thus regarded as the ultimate goal and the Absolute Truth. Therefore, according to Al-Kindi, those who reject philosophy are, in effect, rejecting truth itself and are consequently considered unbelievers, as they have distanced themselves from the truth despite perceiving themselves as righteous.

Philosophical knowledge includes theology, divine unity, and virtue, as well as other sciences that teach how to achieve what is useful while avoiding what is detrimental. Philosophy serves as a significant tool for advancing religion by presenting rational reasons (Marlena, 2021). Likewise, religion or revelation directs humans towards realities that cannot be fully realised through reason alone.

On this basis, Al-Kindi maintained that human beings ought to be grateful to earlier thinkers who laid the foundations of philosophical reasoning in the search for truth. He presented this view as an argument against groups that denied philosophy and as an effort to legitimise philosophy within Islam. Al-Kindi rejected the assumption that philosophy is opposed to religion, emphasising that truth ultimately originates from God, whether through revelation or reason. As he asserted, “we should not be ashamed to accept the truth from wherever it comes” (Sirajuddin Zar, 2010). This perspective paved the way for the acceptance of Greek philosophy within Islam (Nasr, 2006). Al-Kindi’s initial step in this endeavour was the translation of Greek philosophical works (Peter Adamson, 2007).

As the first philosopher who revealed that religion and philosophy are harmonious, both pursue the essence of truth. The reasons demonstrating the harmony between religion and philosophy are as follows:

- 1) Religious knowledge constitutes a part of philosophy;
- 2) The revelation bestowed upon the Prophet corresponds with philosophical truth; and
- 3) The pursuit of knowledge through logical reasoning is commanded by religion (Habibah, 2020).

Therefore, according to Al-Kindi, truth must be accepted wholeheartedly without questioning its source. He then proceeded to address the central issue of philosophy itself, arguing that the objective of philosophy is in harmony with the teachings brought by the Messenger. Consequently, even if a truth originates from Greek sources, it must be studied and actively sought. Al-Kindi's view is consistent with the commands of God in the Qur'an, which urge human beings to reflect upon God's creation and natural phenomena by employing reason in the search for ultimate truth. Among the relevant Qur'anic verses are the following:

- 1) **Qur'an 59:2 (al-Nashr)**
"...So, take heed, O people of insight."
- 2) **Qur'an 7:185 (al-A'raf)**
"Do they not contemplate the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that God has created...?"
- 3) **Qur'an 88:17–20 (al-Ghāsyiyah)**
"Do they not observe the camel—how it was created? And the sky—how it was raised? And the mountains—how they were set firm? And the earth—how it was spread out?"
- 4) **Qur'an 2:164 (al-Baqarah)**

- 5) “Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, the alternation of night and day, the ships that sail upon the sea carrying what benefits humankind, the water that God sends down from the sky by which He revives the earth after its death and disperses upon it every kind of creature, the directing of the winds, and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth—surely there are signs of God’s Oneness and greatness for people who reflect.”

b. Metaphysics

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that examines the most fundamental nature of reality. For Al-Kindi, metaphysics is identical to *falsafah al-ula* (first philosophy), namely the discipline that investigates universal principles which constitute the foundation of all existence. He inherited the Aristotelian tradition, which defines metaphysics as "the science of being insofar as it is being," but he made substantial changes to align with Islamic doctrines. Al-Kindi emphasises that the core of metaphysics is **Tauhid** (Allah's oneness). According to Al-Kindi, God is a perfect being, not preceded by any other existence; His existence has no end, whereas His existence causes all other existents. God is absolutely One, indivisible, and no other essence resembles Him in any respect (Hasymisyah, 2002). Thus, first philosophy is not merely an abstract theory of being, but also a means of affirming the majesty of the Creator. This constitutes the principal distinction between Al-Kindi’s metaphysics and Greek metaphysics, which tends to be religiously neutral.

In Al-Kindi’s philosophy, God does not possess form in the sense of *aniah* or *mahiah*. He does not have *aniah* because God does not belong to the category of beings that exist within the natural world; rather, *Allah* is the Creator of the universe. God is also not composed of matter and form, nor

does He have an essence in the sense of *mahiah*, since He does not belong to any genus or species (Hasyimsayh, 2002).

God is One, unique, and incomparable. God is *al-Ḥaqq al-Awwal* and *al-Ḥaqq al-Wāḥid*. For Al-Kindi, *Allah* is the Creator of the universe. The universe, according to Al-Kindi, is not eternal in the past but has a beginning. This view reflects the strong influence of *ʿIlm al-Kalām* during his time. In demonstrating the existence of God, Al-Kindi proposes empirical arguments, namely:

1. The argument from the origination of the universe;
2. The argument from diversity and unity;
3. The argument from the governance of nature.

Al-Kindi's cosmological view holds that God created the universe from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). *Allah* not only brings the universe into existence but also governs and regulates it, transforming some of its parts into others. Furthermore, Al-Kindi's belief in creation *ex nihilo* aligns with the theological concepts of the Mu'tazilah movement. This viewpoint defends Islamic belief against criticisms given by materialists and agnostics. Al-Kindi's views on bodily resurrection reinforce this interpretation, the possibility of miracles, the validity of prophetic revelation, and the emergence and destruction of the world by God (Hasyimsyah, 2002). These positions strengthen Al-Kindi's argument for God as the Creator of the universe and the First Being, upon whose existence all other beings depend.

c. The Soul

The soul (*nafs*) etymologically derives from the Arabic *nafsun* (singular), with the plural forms *anfus* or *nufūs*, meaning spirit, life force of the body, blood, intention, person, and will. In English, the term *Phyco* refers

to the soul or the mental dimension (Rifa et al., 2020). Within philosophical inquiry, the discussion of the soul occupies a central position, as the soul constitutes an essential element—indeed, the very essence—of the human being, while the human being itself is a primary object of philosophical investigation.

The soul or spirit is not composite, yet it holds profound meaning and plays a vital role in human existence. God created the soul's substance, which is divine and spiritual in nature. The soul is distinct from the body. While the potential of sensual desire may push humans to participate in inappropriate activities, the soul functions to regulate and control such urges. According to Al-Kindi, as cited by Madani, the soul is eternal and does not perish with the destruction of the body (Madani, 2015). This indicates that the substance of the soul derives from God.

Philosophers employ the term soul (*al-nafs*), while in the Qur'an the corresponding term is *al-rūḥ*. When rendered into Indonesian, this term appears in the forms desire, breath, and spirit. The Qur'an and Hadith do not provide a definitive and explicit exposition of the nature of the spirit and the soul. According to the Qur'an, humans will not be able to understand the true essence of the spirit since it is Allah's domain. This condition prompted Muslim thinkers to base their study of the soul on Greek philosophy and then integrate it with Islamic teachings (Sirajuddin Zar, 2000).

Al-Kindi's conception of the soul is closely connected to the ideas of Greek philosophers, particularly Aristotle. The soul is not composite, yet it is of great significance, perfect, and noble (Aravik & Amri, 2019). The substance of the spirit derives from the substance of God. The relationship between the spirit and God is analogous to the relationship between light and

the sun. The soul is spiritual and divine, whereas the body (*jism*) is associated with passions and anger.

According to Al-Kindi, He believes that while the soul stays within the body, it does not feel absolute contentment or pure pleasure. Only once the spirit has separated from the body can it experience genuine delight and perfect knowledge. After leaving the body, the soul enters the intellectual world (al-*‘ālam al-ḥaqq*, al-*‘ālam al-‘aql*), where it can experience God's presence and see Him. This realm constitutes the true and eternal happiness that can be experienced by a purified soul (Aravik & Amri, 2019). This view illustrates that the soul or spirit originates from God, the Purest; consequently, God may draw near to a purified soul. Therefore, human beings must continually purify themselves and cleanse their hearts as a means of drawing closer to God.

An impure soul, after parting from the body (*jism*), does not immediately reach the everlasting realm; instead, it wanders for a length of time to purify itself. Initially, the soul resides on the Moon, then moves to Mercury, and finally ascends to higher celestial spheres, enduring progressive phases of purification. Only after the soul becomes completely pure and cleansed can it enter the realm of truth or the eternal realm (Aravik & Amri, 2019).

According to Al-Kindi, as cited by Harun Nasution, the soul possesses three faculties. First, the appetitive faculty; second, the irascible faculty; and third, the thinking faculty (cognitive faculty). The faculty of thought is identified as the intellect (*‘aql*). According to Al-Kindi, humans' appetitive faculty is similar to that of pigs, their irascible faculty to that of dogs, and their thinking capacity to that of angels (Nasution, 1973). This argument on the faculties inherent in humans suggests that the appetitive and

irascible faculties are shared by animals; however, the faculty of thought is similar to that of angels. Therefore, in order to respond wisely to existing phenomena, human beings should prioritize the thinking faculty over appetitive desires and anger, since the thinking faculty is angelic in nature and spiritual, enabling more prudent and judicious reasoning.

If human life is oriented solely towards eating and drinking or worldly pleasures, the potential for thought is hampered (Putri, 2023). As a result, the soul's ability to develop its thinking faculty is intimately tied to the state of a clean and cleansed soul, which allows it to accurately distinguish between good and evil.

CONCLUSION

Al-Kindi was the first philosopher to harmonize philosophy and religion. He paved the way for subsequent philosophers—such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd—in the further development of philosophy. Philosophy is the science of wisdom. According to Al-Kindi, philosophy is closely connected to religion and functions to strengthen it. Therefore, philosophy and religion cannot be in conflict, since both aim to seek the essence of truth.

Al-Kindi lived during the Abbasid Caliphate, considered Islam's golden age. This historical setting had a considerable impact on the development of Al-Kindi's philosophy, especially given the vigorous translation movement of Greek philosophical writings during that period. Al-Kindi made a substantial contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the Islamic world, as evidenced by the large number of works he produced across various fields of learning.

He laid the foundations for a more systematic and rational development of Islamic philosophy and opened space for the integration of foreign sciences into Islamic

civilization. Through his critical yet religious approach, Al-Kindi demonstrated that philosophy can serve to strengthen religion rather than undermine it.

Thus, Al-Kindi's thought constitutes not only an important part of Islamic intellectual history but also a foundation for the subsequent tradition of Islamic philosophy developed by significant figures such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd. His legacy demonstrates that Islam possesses a strong rational tradition in understanding existence, knowledge, and divinity.

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