

The Notion of the Soul in al-Kindi: Building the Epistemological Foundation of Early Islamic Psychology

Jarman Arroisi¹, Nur Hadi Ihsan² and M. Najib Abdussalam³

^{1,2,3}Darussalam University, Gontor, Ponorogo, Indonesia

jarman@unida.gontor.ac.id^{1*}, nurhadiihsan@unida.gontor.ac.id²,
mnajib@gontor.ac.id³

Abstract: *The discourse surrounding the nature of the soul, a central theme in the field of psychology, has endured through centuries of scholarly inquiry. Within the rich tapestry of Islamic intellectual heritage, the systematic examination of this topic found its early champion in al-Kindi, a prominent Muslim philosopher. His contributions, as explored in this article, have left an indelible mark on the Islamic and Western traditions of soul study. Employing a library research methodology, this work draws from an array of data sources, including books, articles, pamphlets, and various other printed and non-printed materials. A documentary approach is employed to methodically gather data from these diverse sources, which is subsequently subjected to descriptive analytical scrutiny. This examination yields several key findings. Al-Kindi's exploration of the soul is wide-ranging, encompassing its definition, its intricate relationship with the human body, its state when separated from the corporeal vessel, and its manifold powers. Of particular significance is the unique role played by the rational faculty, a power intrinsic to humanity that facilitates the generation of knowledge. Furthermore, al-Kindi's classification of knowledge is both notable and comprehensive, contributing significantly to the development of the nascent field of Islamic psychology. In summation, al-Kindi's profound insights have laid a robust foundation for the epistemological framework of early Islamic psychology, shaping its trajectory in enduring ways.*

Keywords: Al-Kindi; Epistemological foundation; Islamic Psychology; Metaphysical perspective; Soul concept.

A. Introduction

The discourse on the soul, or “*nafs*,” stands at the heart of psychological inquiries, representing a topic that has persevered through centuries. Even before the inception of Islam, this subject garnered contemplation from Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, whose intellectual legacy served as a foundation for subsequent philosophical thought. With the advent of Islam, Muslim scholars embarked on a journey to study and adapt the works of these Greek philosophers through the lens of Islamic perspective and worldview. This endeavor

unearthed the undeniable importance of discussions regarding the soul, particularly the contributions of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, which formed an intrinsic part of ancient dialogues.

Remarkably, early Muslim scholars played a pivotal role in establishing the bedrock of psychological studies, despite often being overlooked by modern psychologists. Western psychologists commonly initiate their explorations with the foundational ideas of Greek thinkers, notably Plato and Aristotle, subsequently traversing through the realm of psychological ideas in medieval and early modern Europe. Regrettably, the substantial influence of Muslim scholars, whose works were translated into Latin and left an indelible mark on European thinkers during the Middle Ages and the early modern European Renaissance, remains underemphasized.¹

Prominent early Muslim thinkers, including al-Kindi, al-Razi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Miskawaih among the philosophers, as well as al-Sarraj al-Tusi, al-Hakim al-Tirmidzi, al-Muhasibi, al-Qusyairi, and al-Ghazali among the Sufis, engaged in extensive and comprehensive explorations of the concept of the soul in their respective writings. However, it is irrefutable that al-Kindi stands as the trailblazer of the study of the soul from an Islamic perspective and worldview. The scholarly legacy and intellectual heritage of Islam unequivocally designate al-Kindi as the earliest Muslim scholar to delve into the intricacies of the soul or “*nafs*.”

Al-Kindi’s profound insights into the soul, or “*nafs*,” can be gleaned from several of his works, including “*Fi al-Qaul fi al-Nafs*” (Opinions on the Soul), “*Kalam fi al-Nafs*” (Discourse on the Soul), “*Mahiyah an-Naum wa al-Ru’ya*” (The Nature of Sleep and Dreams), “*Fi al’Aql*” (On Reason), and “*al-Hilah li Daf’i al-Ahzan*” (Stratagems for Dispelling Grief). The first four of these treatises were collated into a compendium titled “*Rasail al-Kindi al-Falsafiyah*,” edited by Dr. Muhammad Abduh Hadi Abu Raidah. Furthermore, “*Fi al’Aql*” and “*al-Hilah li Daf’i al-Ahzan*” found their place in the book “*Rasa’il Falsafiyah li al-Kindi wa al-Farabi wa Ibn Bajjah wa Ibn ‘Arabi*,” edited by Dr. Muhammad Abdurrahman Badawi.²

Numerous researchers and scholars have undertaken comprehensive examinations of al-Kindi’s philosophical concepts. Their inquiries encompass a spectrum of approaches, from investigations into the historical and

¹ Muhammad Utsman Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al’Ulama’ Al-Muslimin* (Beirut: Dar al-Syuruq, 1993), p. 7.

² Najati, Muhammad Utsman Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al’Ulama’ Al-Muslimin*, p. 24

overarching facets of Islamic philosophy, which often include comparisons with other Muslim philosophers,³ to detailed explorations of al-Kindi's unique philosophical contributions.⁴ In the former category of studies, the breadth and diversity of philosophers and philosophical themes discussed often lead to more generalized discussions of each thinker's ideas within various philosophical contexts. Conversely, within the latter category, where the focus narrows to the singular figure of al-Kindi, the range of philosophical issues addressed remains extensive and varied. Consequently, these studies do not delve deeply into specific topics, such as the examination of the soul, which is the central theme of this paper.

This recurrent pattern is also observable in contemporary research and scholarly publications, particularly in academic journals. While some researchers have published comprehensive studies on the concept of the soul in Islamic philosophy, these works often draw from the perspectives of multiple Muslim philosophers, rather than centering solely on al-Kindi's contributions.⁵ Conversely, there exist scholarly works dedicated to dissecting al-Kindi's philosophical ideas, but these examinations often encompass a broader array of philosophical topics, extending beyond the boundaries of

³ M. M Sharif, *History of Muslim Philosophy* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassaowitz, 1963); Majid Fakhry, *Tarikh Al-Falasafah Al-Islamiyah* (New York: al-Dar al-Muttahidah Li al-Anasyr, 1974); Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Liadain Sherrard with the assistance of Philip Sherrard (New York: Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications for The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1962); T. J De Boer, *History of Philosophy in Islam*, ed. Edward R. Jones (T.k: Global Grey ebooks, 2018); Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, n.d.).

⁴ Ahmad Fuad Al-Ahwani, *Al-Kindi: Failasuf Al-'Arab* (Kairo: Mu'assasah al-Mashriyah al-'Ammah li al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Tiba'ah wa al-Nasyr, n.d.); Kamil Muhammad Muhammad Uwaidlah, *Al-Kindi Min Falasifah Al-Masyriq Wa Al-Islam Fi Al-'Ushur Al-Wustha* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1993); 'Abd Rahman Marhaban, *Al-Kindi: Falsafatuhu Muntakhaba* (Beirut: Mansyurat Uwaidat, 1985).

⁵ Mubassyrak Bakry, "Konsep Al-Nafs Dalam Filsafat Islam," *Jurnal AlAsas* 5, no. 2 (2020): 29-43; Muh. Aidil Sudarmono, "Pemikiran Islam Tentang Nafs," *Tajdid: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman Dan Kemanusiaan* 1, no. 1 (2017): 149-65; Andi Muhammad Ikbal dan Muhammad Huzain Salam, "Al-Nafs Dalam Filsafat Islam: Kajian Kritis Terhadap Pemikiran Tentang Jiwa," *Dirasat Islamiah: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman* 1, no. 1 (2020); Afrizal M, "Pemikiran Para Filosof Muslim Tentang Jiwa," *An-Nida': Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 39, no. 1 (2014); Amirudin, "Entitas Jiwa Dalam Kajian Psikologi Islam," *Masile: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Keislaman* 1, no. 1 (2021); St. Rahmatiah, "Pemikiran Tentang Jiwa (Al-Nafs) Dalam Filsafat Islam," *Sulesana* 11, no. 2 (2017); Rudi Ahmad Suryadi, "Pendidikan Islam: Telaah Konseptual Mengenai Jiwa Manusia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam-Ta'lim* 14, no. 1 (2016).

the soul.⁶ Consequently, it is evident that there is a pressing need for research that exclusively delves into al-Kindi's conception of the soul, shedding light on how his ideas laid the earliest foundations for the development of Islamic psychological epistemology.

This study endeavors to scrutinize al-Kindi's perspectives on the soul, addressing various facets of this profound exploration. The analysis commences with a comprehensive examination of the soul's definition, followed by an exploration of its intricate relationship with the human body, an assessment of its condition when separated from the corporeal vessel, and a meticulous examination of its faculties. Furthermore, this investigation will culminate in an in-depth analysis of reason as a pivotal constituent of the soul. Ultimately, this paper seeks to illuminate how al-Kindi's conceptualization of the soul constitutes a pioneering and substantive contribution to the establishment of the epistemological underpinnings of Islamic psychology.

B. Methods

This article constitutes a qualitative library research, drawing from a diverse range of primary and secondary sources. Primary data sources encompass the original works of al-Kindi that directly address the subject of the soul, including "*Fi al-Qaul fi al-Nafs*" (Opinions on the Soul), "*Kalam al-Kindi fi al-Nafs*" (Al-Kindi's Discourse on the Soul), and "*Fi Hudud al-Asy'ya' wa Rusumiha*" (The Definitions of All Things). Secondary data sources, on the other hand, encompass information derived from various other literary works that contribute to the description and analysis of the subjects explored in this research. Both primary and secondary data are gathered through documentary techniques.

The data collected is subsequently analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach. This methodology involves the selection and organization of data from their respective sources, followed by their description in alignment with the original intent of the data sources. Subsequently, the data is interpreted within the framework of relevant

⁶ Havis dan Hoirul Amri Aravik, "Menguak Hal-Hal Penting Dalam Pemikiran Filsafat Al-Kindi," *SALAM; Jurnal Sosial & Budaya Syar'i* 6, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/DOI:10.15408/sjsbs.v6i2.11228>; Reni Marlina, "Filsafat Dan Agama (Ketuhanan, Al-Nafs, Dan Alam) Dalam Perspektif Al-Kindi," *Tekno Aulama, Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan Islam*, n.d., <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.53888/teknoulama.v1i1.321>; Kamaluddin, "Al-Kindi: Filsafat Agama Dan An-Nafs," *Aqlania: Jurnal Filsafat Dan Teologi Islam* 12, no. 1 (2021).

scholarly discourse and subjected to comparative analysis, aiming to connect, link, compare, identify commonalities, and discern differences in relation to the perspectives of other scholars and thinkers. The culmination of this research is a conclusion that provides answers to the questions posed within this study.

C. Results and Discussions

Intellectual Biography of al-Kindi

Yusuf Ya'qub bin Ishaq al-Kindi, known as al-Kindi, hailed from the Kindah tribe in Yemen. He was born in Kufah, Iraq, in 801 CE (185 AH) and passed away in 873 CE (260 AH) at the age of 72. His lineage can be traced back through a distinguished ancestry, with his forebears having ruled the Kindah tribe. Notably, his father, Ishaq bin Shabah, held the position of governor in Kufah during the reigns of al-Mahdi and al-Rashid, two Abbasid caliphs. Al-Kindi's lifetime coincided with the rule of six Abbasid caliphs, from al-Rashid (786-809 CE) to al-Mutawakkil (847-861 CE). His upbringing within an esteemed family provided a conducive environment for his intellectual development.⁷

Al-Kindi's intellectual legacy is underscored by his remarkable productivity as a writer. His extensive body of work encompasses approximately 270 identified treatises, classified into 17 distinct categories. These encompass diverse fields such as philosophy, logic, arithmetic, dialectics, meteorology, astronomy, geometry, spherical and globular concepts, astrology, medicine, psychology, politics, music, quantity, divination, and studies in metals and chemistry.⁸ This comprehensive range of topics within his writings underscores the breadth and depth of his intellectual endeavors, marking him as an encyclopedic thinker. Notably, the influence of al-Kindi's work extended beyond his time, with some of his writings being translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona (1114-1187 CE), an Italian scholar. These translations had a profound impact on medieval European thought, as reflected in the recognition of al-Kindi as one of the 12 great thinkers of the world in the European context, as noted by the Italian mathematician Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576 CE).⁹

⁷ Uwaidlah, *Al-Kindi Min Falasifah Al-Masyriq Wa Al-Islam Fi Al-Ushur Al-Wustha*, p. 5-6.

⁸ George N Atiyeh, *Al-Kindi Tokoh Filosof Muslim*, ed. Kasidjo Djojosewarno (Bandung: Pustaka, 1983), 140-87.

⁹ Atiyeh, George N Atiyeh, *Al-Kindi Tokoh Filosof Muslim*, p. 10.

Al-Kindi's intellectual pursuits encompassed an impressive range of subjects, reflecting his insatiable curiosity and scholarly prowess. His works in philosophy delved into topics such as metaphysics, ethics, and the nature of knowledge, contributing significantly to the development of Islamic philosophical thought. Al-Kindi's writings on logic laid the groundwork for subsequent developments in this field and were instrumental in introducing Aristotelian logic to the Islamic world. His engagement with mathematics extended to arithmetic, where he made advancements in number theory, including prime numbers, and introduced the Indian numeral system to the Islamic tradition. Additionally, al-Kindi's contributions to medicine, psychology, and music further exemplify his multifaceted expertise and the depth of his intellectual contributions.

Furthermore, the impact of al-Kindi's works extended far beyond his era, influencing not only medieval Europe but also future generations of scholars. His commitment to preserving and translating ancient Greek texts into Arabic played a pivotal role in the transmission of classical knowledge to the Islamic world. This endeavor, along with his own original contributions, facilitated the flourishing of the Islamic Golden Age and the subsequent European Renaissance. Al-Kindi's enduring legacy as an intellectual luminary continues to inspire contemporary scholars and stands as a testament to the transformative power of dedicated scholarship and interdisciplinary exploration.

The Concept of the Soul in al-Kindi's View

Al-Kindi's definition of the soul is profoundly intricate and thought-provoking. He portrays the soul as:

تمامية جرم طبيعي ذي آلة قابل للحياة أو استكمال أول لجسم ذي حياة بالقوة.¹⁰

“the perfection of a natural body,” signifying that it represents the zenith of a physical entity that is innately imbued with life.”

This life, as al-Kindi elucidates, is not mere existence; it is a state of vitality that endows the body with the potential for sustained life through an inherent power. The term “perfection” in al-Kindi's definition carries profound significance. It denotes a state where a genus (referred to as *al-Jins*)

¹⁰ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, ed. Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Abu Raidah (Kairo: Dar al-Fikr al'Arabi, 1950), p. 165.

attains completeness and evolves into a distinct species. It is the transformative phase where a natural body (*jism thabi'i*) achieves the zenith of its existence, ultimately becoming a human being. This definition underscores the dynamic relationship between the soul and the physical body it inhabits. Furthermore, the phrase “natural body” delineates a body that is inherently constituted by the laws of nature and not one artificially fabricated. Al-Kindi’s formulation intricately interweaves the physical and metaphysical realms, blurring the boundaries between them. It is in this interconnectedness that he positions the soul, viewing it as the essential bridge between the material and the spiritual.¹¹

Additionally, the concepts of “possessing life” and “having life with power” elucidate that the soul, within the human essence, harbors a readiness for existence and the capacity to receive the vitalizing force of the soul. This duality in the definition emphasizes the soul’s role as both the source of life and the recipient of the divine, vitalizing energy. It encompasses the soul’s dual nature, embodying an intricate interplay between inherent potential and divine infusion. Essentially, both of the above definitions are equivalent as they draw from Aristotle. This definition can also be found in the explanations of the soul by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd.¹²

In addition to Aristotle’s definition, al-Kindi also presents an alternative conception of the soul, seemingly influenced by Plato and Plotinus. Here, he defines the soul as:

النفس بسيطة ذات شرف وكمال عظيمة الشأن جوهرها من جوهر الباري عز وجل
كقياس ضياء الشمس من الشمس.¹³

“The soul is a simple element of great honor and perfection, exalted in status, and its essence derives from the essence of the Creator, just as the brightness of the sun comes from the sun itself.”

In essence, the definitions offered by al-Kindi, although drawing heavily from Aristotelian philosophy, manifest a profound contemplation of the soul’s nature. They mirror the intricate tapestry of thought that permeates the intellectual legacy of the Islamic world. Furthermore, al-Kindi’s alternative conception of the soul, which bears traces of Platonic and

¹¹ Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al-Ulama’ Al-Muslimin*, p. 25.

¹² Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al-Ulama’ Al-Muslimin*, p. 25.

¹³ Al-Kindi, *Rasa’il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 273.

Plotinian influence, paints the soul as a sublime, elemental entity—endowed with honor and perfection. He elevates its status, attributing its essence to the Creator, much like the radiance of the sun emanating from the sun itself.

In this alternate view, al-Kindi distinguishes the soul as the rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*). He expounds that its essence is divine and lordly, a celestial substance descended from the luminous essence of the Creator.¹⁴ This portrayal emphasizes the soul's simplicity and immortality, standing in stark contrast to the ephemeral nature of the material world. Its descent from the realm of intellect to the world of the senses is accompanied by the retention of memories from past lives, imbuing it with a unique character. This soul, marked by its divinely bestowed attributes, finds no solace in the transient earthly existence, perpetually grappling with diverse needs and desires, which are met with a multitude of obstacles, ultimately giving rise to multifaceted forms of suffering.¹⁵ Al-Kindi's contemplation of the soul traverses realms of philosophical depth and metaphysical intricacy. His profound elucidations continue to serve as a source of intellectual enrichment and contemplation, transcending the boundaries of time and culture.

The Relationship Between the Soul and the Body

In examining the relationship between the soul and the body, al-Kindi's perspective underscores the soul's possession of qualities such as perfection, honor, and elevated status, setting it apart from the physical body. In al-Kindi's words:

أن هذه النفس منفردة عن هذا الجسم مباينة له وأن جوهرها جوهر إلهي روحاني بما يرى من شرف طباعها ومضادتها لما يعرض للبدن من الشهوات والغضب.¹⁶

“This soul is distinct from this body, differing from it because its essence is divine and spiritual, as evident in its noble attributes and its resistance to the bodily desires and anger.”

According to al-Kindi, the soul is separate from the body due to its divine and spiritual essence, characterized by its noble attributes and its capacity to withstand bodily desires and anger. Furthermore, al-Kindi postulates that since the soul originates from the Divine light, when it

¹⁴ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 273.

¹⁵ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 274.

¹⁶ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 273.

detaches from the body, it attains omniscience encompassing the entirety of the universe, leaving nothing concealed from its perception. He elaborates:

وإذا تجردت وفارقت هذا البدن وصارت في عالم العقل فوق الفلك صارت في نور الباري
ورأت الباري عز وجل ... فانكشف لها علم كل شيء وصارت الأشياء كلها بارزة لها
كمثل هي بارزة للباري عز وجل.¹⁷

“And when it divests itself and departs from this body, ascending to the realm of intellect above the galaxies, it resides in the light of the Almighty and perceives the Almighty, the Mighty and the Majestic... thus, knowledge of everything becomes unveiled to it, and all things become manifest to it, just as they are manifest to the Almighty, the Mighty and the Majestic.”

While acknowledging the soul’s connection to the body in the confines of this earthly realm, al-Kindi maintains that without the light of the sun, this world would be plunged into complete darkness, a condition that significantly influences the soul’s existence.¹⁸

It’s important to note that al-Kindi’s viewpoint on this matter diverges from that of Ibn Sina. According to Ibn Sina, the relationship between the soul and the body isn’t one of separation between two distinct substances, but rather an interdependent connection where each relies on the other. This interdependence forms an integral aspect of the human condition. In this perspective, the soul cannot exist independently of the body, and likewise, the body cannot function without the presence of the soul.¹⁹

Al-Kindi’s Theory of the Immortality of the Soul

Al-Kindi posits that the soul remains eternal after death, transitioning to the realm of truth where the Creator resides, an everlasting abode. In this realm, it is profoundly close to the Creator, endowing it with the knowledge of all things, both the manifest and the hidden, the known and the unknown.²⁰ Al-Kindi’s stance on this matter is rooted in a Quranic verse: *“Indeed, you were in heedlessness of this. We have removed from you your cover, so your sight, this Day, is sharp.”* (Q. Qaf: 22).²¹

¹⁷ Al-Kindi, *Rasa’il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 275-76.

¹⁸ Al-Kindi, *Rasa’il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 274.

¹⁹ Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna’s Psychology* (London: Oxford University, 1952), p. 3-4.

²⁰ Al-Kindi, *Rasa’il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 275-76.

²¹ Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al’Ulama’ Al-Muslimin*, p. 26.

In this regard, al-Kindi's ideas bear resemblance to Plato's notion that the soul endures beyond death, for its essence is akin to the essence of the Creator, as it is created from His substance. Al-Kindi articulates:

فإن النفس على رأي أفلاطون وجلة الفلاسفة باقية بعد الموت جوهرها كجوهر
الباري.²²

“So, according to Plato and the majority of philosophers, the soul endures after death; its essence is like that of the Creator.”

Furthermore, al-Kindi underscores that life within the body during one's worldly existence is but a fleeting moment, akin to a person crossing a road. Beyond this, the soul will transfer to the true realm, where it will abide eternally. Al-Kindi asserts that this perspective aligns with the consensus among philosophers, who collectively affirm the enduring nature of the soul beyond mortal existence.²³

The Faculties of the Soul in al-Kindi's Perspective

In al-Kindi's exploration of the faculties inherent to the soul, he masterfully amalgamates the philosophical viewpoints of two prominent Greek thinkers, Aristotle and Plato, to the extent that their distinctions become almost indistinguishable. According to Plato, the soul undergoes a tripartite division, comprising the appetitive faculty (القوة الشهوانية), the emotive faculty (القوة الغضبية), and the rational faculty (القوة العاقلة). According to Plato's doctrine, these aspects of the soul maintain their existence even beyond the dissolution of the corporeal vessel.²⁴ In stark contrast, Aristotle delineates a categorization of the soul into three discrete forms: the vegetative soul (النفس النباتية), overseeing processes of nourishment, growth, and reproduction; the animal soul (النفس الحيوانية), responsible for sensations, imagination, and movement, while retaining the functions of the vegetative soul; and finally, the rational soul (النفس العاقلة), an exclusive attribute of human beings.²⁵

²² Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 275.

²³ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 280.

²⁴ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 274.

²⁵ Ibnu Sina, *Ahwal Al-Nafs*, ed. . Ahmad Fuad Al-Ahwani (Kairo: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyah, 1952), p. 40-62.

Aristotle's perspective posits that these souls closely mirror the form of the body and cease to exist once the physical body perishes.²⁶

Al-Kindi indeed references Plato's tripartite division of the soul frequently.²⁷ Nevertheless, on certain occasions, he subtly synthesizes Plato's ideas with those of Aristotle. In this context, al-Kindi affirms:

إن للنفس قوتين متباعدتين هما الحسية والعقلية. وإن لها قوى أخرى متوسطة بين الحس والعقل هما المصورة والغاذية والنامية والغضبية والشهوانية.²⁸

"The soul, indeed, possesses two distinct faculties, those of the sensory and the rational. Moreover, it houses intermediary faculties, situated between the sensory and the rational, which are commonly denoted as imaginative, nutritive, emotional, appetitive, and growing faculties."

These faculties encompass:

- a. The Sensory Faculty. This faculty enables the apprehension of sensory and external forms associated with the essence of the soul, primarily facilitated through the five senses.
- b. The Intermediary Faculties. This category encompasses several distinct faculties:
 - 1) The Imaginative Faculty: This faculty comprehends sensory forms in terms of their material aspects and can conjure them even when external sensory objects are absent. It is capable of constructing sensory forms, whether in a state of wakefulness or during the dream state, generating visions such as human figures adorned with horns or feathers, or animals that possess the ability to communicate.
 - 2) The Retentive Faculty: Responsible for the memorization of sensory forms, this faculty subsequently transfers them to the imaginative or visionary faculties.
 - 3) The Emotional Faculty: This faculty impels individuals towards victory when confronting distressing stimuli and serves as a guardian of the soul.
 - 4) The Appetitive Faculty: Compelling individuals to seek that which they desire, this faculty is the driving force behind the pursuit of one's desires.

²⁶ Al-Ahwani, *Al-Kindi: Failasuf Al'Arab*, 75-96.

²⁷ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, 273-74.

²⁸ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 294-95.

- 5) The Nutritive Faculty: This faculty is closely associated with the acquisition of nourishment and its subsequent processing within the body.
- 6) The Growing or Germinative Faculty: This faculty pertains to the processes of growth and reproduction.²⁹

Al-Kindi's perspective identifies the brain as the central locus for all these faculties, diverging from Aristotle's view, which designates the heart as the hub of sensory faculties.³⁰ It is conceivable that al-Kindi drew influence from post-Aristotelian medical authors, particularly the works of Galen.³¹

- c. The Rational Faculty: This capacity pertains to the understanding of matters of reason. A more comprehensive examination of this faculty will be undertaken when exploring al-Kindi's theory of reason.

The taxonomy of the soul's faculties as articulated by al-Kindi exhibits resonances with the subsequent categorizations advanced by later Muslim philosophers, including al-Farabi, Ibn Miskawaih, and Ibn Sina. For instance, Ibn Miskawaih's classification aligns closely with al-Kindi's division, partitioning the soul's faculties into the appetitive, emotional, and rational domains. With regard to the appetitive faculty, Ibn Miskawaih introduces additional terminology, such as "*al-nafs al-syahwatiyyah*" and "*al-nafs al-bahimiyyah*" (the animalistic soul). Furthermore, in the context of emotional faculties, Ibn Miskawaih introduces the term "*al-nafs al-sabu'iyyah*" (the vicious soul).³²

Al-Farabi³³ and Ibnu Sina,³⁴ while fundamentally concurring with al-Kindi's tripartite division of the soul into vegetative, animal, and rational

²⁹ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 295, 299, 300.

³⁰ Muhammad Ali Abu Rayyan, *Tarikh Al-Fikr Al-Falsafi Fi Al-Islam* (Iskandaria: Dar al-Jami'at al-Mishriyyah, 1984), p. 239.

³¹ Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah 'inda Al'Ulama' Al-Muslimin*, p. 28.

³² Ibnu Miskawaih, *Tahdhib Al-Akhlaq* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1985), p. 13-14.

³³ Al-Farabi, *Ara' Ahl Al-Madinah Al-Fadlilah*, ed. Al-Bir Nasri Nadir, 3rd ed. (Beirut, 1973), 49-52; Al Farabi, *Fusus Al-Hikam*, ed. Muhammad Hasan Al Yasin (Baghdad: Mathba'ah al-Ma'arif, 1967), p. 75-78.

³⁴ Sina, *Ahwal Al-Nafs*, 50-58; Ibnu Sina, *Al-Najat* (Kairo: Matba'ah al-Sa'adah, 1331), p. 258-67.

faculties, expand upon this categorization with greater detail and elaboration.³⁵

Al-Kindi's Notions on Reason

The concept of reason, also known as the rational faculty, encompasses the soul's capacity to apprehend non-material forms, specifically universal concepts such as species and genera. Al-Kindi delves deeply into the intricate nature of reason and the stages involved in the process of rational comprehension in his renowned work "*Fi al-Aql*." This treatise serves as a concise compilation of the philosophical ideas put forth by prominent figures including Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, and Alexander of Aphrodisias.³⁶

Al-Kindi's perspective on reason diverges from Aristotle's established framework. While Aristotle classifies reason into three distinct categories, Al-Kindi introduces a novel paradigm consisting of four types of reason. Notably, he introduces the concept of the "external reason" or "active reason," a novel notion not present in Aristotle's philosophical discourse. This fourth facet of reason is a unique addition attributed to Al-Kindi's philosophical innovation. Despite the brevity of Al-Kindi's work, "*Fi al-Aql*," its significance within the landscape of Islamic philosophy is monumental. It holds a prominent position among subsequent Islamic philosophers, including luminaries such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd. Furthermore, Al-Kindi's work significantly impacted the extensive debates surrounding the essence of reason among medieval Christian philosophers.³⁷

Al-Kindi discerns four distinctive forms of reason, each representing pivotal stages in the process of comprehending all that is rational. These stages are as follows:³⁸

- a. The Ever-Active Reason: This core facet serves as the "*illah*" of all reason and encompasses all objects of thought, referred to as "*ma'qulat*." Scholars and experts have proposed diverse definitions for this aspect. Some contend that it is distinct from the soul and equate it with the divine, such as Allah or the First Intellect for created beings. Conversely, others assert that reason resides within the soul and is, in fact, an intrinsic part of it, denoted as "*al-kulliyat*" within the soul. The transformation of potential reason into active reason occurs when

³⁵ Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah 'inda Al-Ulama' Al-Muslimin*, 64-76; Syah Reza, "Konsep Nafs Menurut Ibnu Sina," *Jurnal KALIMAH* 12, no. 2 (2014): 263-79.

³⁶ Reza, "Konsep Nafs Menurut Ibnu Sina," p. 27.

³⁷ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 351-52.

³⁸ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 314-47.

dealing with abstract and purely rational matters. In essence, it is the “*kulliyat*” itself, not an external reason, that instigates this change. Al-Kindi articulates in his work “*Al-Falsafah al-Ula*”:

“The transformation of the soul from potentiality to actuality, in the sense of its ‘kulliyat,’ is facilitated by the ‘kulliyat’ itself. When the ‘kulliyat’ unites with the soul, it leads to the soul’s transformation into a rational entity or an entity encompassing the ‘kulliyat’ of everything. Subsequently, as all rational matters reside within the soul, there is a transition from potentiality to actuality. This is what al-Kindi terms the acquired reason or the active reason that propels the soul from potentiality to actuality.”³⁹

- b. Potential Reason: This component signifies the inherent readiness within humans to grasp rational concepts.
- c. Internal Transformation of Reason: As the soul comprehends all rational and abstract concepts, it becomes fused with them. This fusion leads to the unification of all rational and abstract matters. Consequently, potential reason evolves into active reason. Once a profound understanding of rational matters is achieved, the soul gains the ability to summon them at will, akin to a writer who can write at any given moment. Therefore, this reason is also referred to as proprietary reason and acquired reason, indicating that it initially does not belong to the soul but gradually becomes an integral part of it.
- d. External Reason: When reason genuinely comprehends rational concepts or transforms them into alternative forms, it is categorized as external reason. This delineates the externalization of the understanding of reason from one perspective and its externalization to others from a different angle. Hence, it becomes apparent that, according to Al-Kindi’s perspective, reason represents a latent potential within the soul that transitions into actuality under the influence of rational concepts. Alexander characterizes this as Active Reason, signifying reason’s capability to transform a faculty into an action. This viewpoint is shared by Al-Farabi and other prominent philosophers. However, Plato’s perspective deviates somewhat, as he posits that the process of recollection serves as the pathway to comprehend rational concepts.

Hence, it becomes evident that Al-Kindi argues that something rational is that which brings the potential reason out of its original condition, the potential reason, into its current state, the active reason. Furthermore, when

³⁹ Al-Kindi, *Rasa’il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 155.

this active reason is utilized, it is referred to as external reason. While active reason resides within the soul, it is considered as *qunyah* or *malakah* (inherent capacity) or reason termed “*fi’il mustafad*” (acquired action).⁴⁰

Al-Kindi’s Theory of Knowledge

Al-Kindi’s intricate theory of knowledge classifies it into two fundamental categories: sensory knowledge and rational knowledge. Sensory knowledge pertains to the comprehension of the external, manifest forms of all entities, a cognitive capacity shared by both animals and humans. In contrast, rational knowledge possesses the remarkable ability to penetrate the very essence of all things, a unique attribute bestowed upon humanity.⁴¹

Al-Kindi’s categorization of knowledge finds consonance with Aristotle’s classifications, a framework subsequently adopted by eminent Muslim philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Miskawaih, and Ibn Sina. Nonetheless, a pivotal disparity arises between Aristotle’s viewpoint and that of these Muslim philosophers. For Aristotle, sensory perception serves as the cornerstone of knowledge and rational thinking; he posits that knowledge and cogitation hinge upon sensory perception. In contrast, commencing with Al-Kindi, Muslim philosophers propose that sensory perception serves as an initial and preparatory phase for the soul to attain genuine rational knowledge, which transcends the confines of sensory perception. This profound knowledge is acquired through channels that surpass human intellect, encompassing divine inspiration and emanation from the Active Intellect, an intellect disengaged from and beyond the realm of material existence.⁴²

Al-Kindi emphatically contends that human preoccupation with worldly desires, emotions, and the pursuit of material pleasures constitutes a formidable obstacle impeding the soul’s quest for authentic knowledge. According to Al-Kindi, the acquisition of genuine knowledge necessitates the emancipation from worldly desires and pleasures. In this context, Al-Kindi articulates: “*Its essence is like the essence of the Creator in terms of power. We know the differences in all things, just as the Creator knows them, or slightly below that level, for it originates from the Creator’s light.*”⁴³

However, Al-Kindi underscores that relinquishing worldly desires and pleasures alone is insufficient for the attainment of genuine knowledge. He

⁴⁰ Abu Rayyan, *Tarikh Al-Fikr Al-Falsafi Fi Al-Islam*, p. 240.

⁴¹ Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al’Ulama’ Al-Muslimin*, p. 29–30.

⁴² Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al’Ulama’ Al-Muslimin*, p. 171.

⁴³ Al-Kindi, *Rasa’il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 275.

posits that individuals must combine this renunciation with introspection and contemplation of the essence of all things. This union fortifies and purifies the soul, enabling it to perceive the essence of all things comprehensively, akin to how one discerns the reflections of sensory objects in a pristine mirror. Al-Kindi references Pythagoras to elucidate this concept:

“Indeed, when the soul, united with the body, forsakes desires, becomes free from impurities, frequently contemplates and investigates the essence of all things, it becomes very pure, and the image of the Creator’s light merges with it. The Creator’s light influences and perfects it because of the clarity it obtains from purity. At that moment, the images and knowledge of all things become manifest, just as the images of various sensory objects are seen in a clear mirror...”⁴⁴

Al-Kindi further posits that the purification of the soul from impurities culminates in a state of clarity and virtue, endowing individuals with the profound ability to fathom hidden mysteries.⁴⁵ Thus, according to Al-Kindi, the apprehension of the essence of all things does not hinge on sensory perception but rather can be attained through emanation from Allah. This path to knowledge entails the purification of the soul from materialistic and worldly impurities, coupled with the diligent analysis and scrutiny of the essence of all things, rendering the soul receptive to the emanation of knowledge from the Creator. This discussion accentuates the resonance of Al-Kindi’s ideas with the later concept of “kashf” championed by Sufis.⁴⁶

Building the Epistemological Foundation of Islamic Psychology: Insights from Al-Kindi

Within the Islamic paradigm, epistemology finds its anchor in the overarching Islamic worldview, with God and revelation occupying paramount and non-negotiable positions at its core. Consequently, the fundamental approach to shaping various branches of Islamic scholarship, including Islamic psychology, involves infusing them with a bedrock of Islamic epistemology. Establishing a science rooted in this Islamic worldview is of the essence, and it’s crucial to recognize how such an undertaking aligns with the Islamic perspective. Approaches that confine knowledge exclusively to empirical and rational dimensions find themselves at odds with the Islamic view, which, ontologically, acknowledges the coexistence of two realms: the realm of *al-syahadah* (the physical) and *al-ghaib* (the metaphysical). This

⁴⁴ Al-Kindi, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al’Ulama’ Al-Muslimin*, p. 276.

⁴⁵ Al-Kindi, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al’Ulama’ Al-Muslimin*, p. 287.

⁴⁶ Najati, *Al-Dirasat Al-Nafsaniyah ‘inda Al’Ulama’ Al-Muslimin*, p. 30-31.

method of engaging with knowledge has been an enduring trait of Islamic scholarship, championed by noble Muslim scholars and thinkers. Al-Kindi emerges as a prominent exemplar in this tradition.

As previously delineated, Al-Kindi introduces a pivotal distinction between the corporeal and the incorporeal, venturing beyond Aristotle's perspective, which posits the soul as the ultimate perfection of the body. Al-Kindi, in contrast, bestows upon the soul a status of sublimity, nobility, and grandeur, grounded in its divine origin and luminosity.⁴⁷ This perspective shares roots with the philosophical heritage of the Greeks, particularly Plato, yet it finds resonance in Al-Kindi's thought due to its harmony with the Islamic worldview rooted in divine revelation. Al-Kindi's Islamic outlook emphasizes that, owing to its grandeur, the human soul, upon parting from the decaying body, does not face annihilation. Al-Kindi's assertion posits the human soul's endurance and return to its original, eternal realm.

Given the soul's role as the embodiment of perfection and substance, it is the soul that facilitates the functioning of the body with its multifarious faculties, spanning from vegetative and animalistic powers to the pivotal realm of rationality.⁴⁸ The diverse faculties attributed to the soul, including those of desire, emotion, and reason, all spring from the soul itself. It is in the realm of reason and the rational soul that humanity's superiority over other creations of God becomes evident. Through these endowments, encompassing the soul and its associated faculties, humans possess the unique capacity to grasp abstract, rational forms emancipated from the confines of the material realm.

A fundamental disparity in the perception of the foundational tenets of knowledge surfaces between Greek philosophy, notably Aristotle, and Islamic philosophy, particularly in terms of establishing the epistemological foundation. Aristotle contended that sensory perception serves as the bedrock of knowledge and thought, without which knowledge and thought would be non-existent. This framework sharply contrasts with the perspective of Muslim philosophers, who assert that sensory perception merely marks the initial and preparatory phase, setting the stage for the soul to attain authentic, rational knowledge transcending the domain of sensory perception. According to the viewpoint of Muslim philosophers, knowledge is attainable not solely through sensory avenues but also through channels that transcend the human intellect. These channels encompass divine inspiration and emanation from the Active Intellect, an intellect detached from and

⁴⁷ Al-Kindi, *Rasa'il Al-Kindi Al-Falsafiyah*, p. 273.

⁴⁸ Al-Kindi, 274; Al-Ahwani, *Al-Kindi: Failasuf Al'Arab*, p. 75-96.

independent of material existence.⁴⁹ It is within this framework that Muslim philosophers lay the foundational groundwork for the sanctity of revelation as a fount of transcendent knowledge.

D. Conclusions

This investigation unveils al-Kindi's predilection for a Platonic interpretation of the soul over Aristotle's. This preference can be ascribed to the congruity between Platonism and Islamic tenets, which postulate that the human soul emanates as a divine breath, exhorting individuals to temper their desires and appetites in the pursuit of happiness in both the temporal and the eternal realms. Additionally, al-Kindi's intellectual stance bears the imprint of Plotinus' doctrines, where the soul is perceived as originating from the first intellect, itself an emanation of the One, akin to the way light radiates from the sun. Consequently, al-Kindi amalgamates Plato's and Plotinus' tenets to elucidate the intricate notion of the soul.

In the endeavor to articulate the concept of the soul or "nafs" drawing from the riches of the Greek tradition, al-Kindi demonstrates his restraint from wholesale adoption. Hence, it becomes evident that across various discourses, his conceptions and ideas may align with particular philosophers while diverging from them on other fronts. Al-Kindi's contention that the soul represents the consummate embodiment of the self, surpassing the corporeal vessel, as a sublime essence emanating from the divine radiance, imperishable in contrast to the perishable body, underscores the harmonious rapport with the Islamic worldview. It is within the context of this overarching framework that the entire spectrum of Islamic disciplines takes form, encompassing the realm of psychology, which probes the depths of the soul. In this context, al-Kindi provides an illustrative example of how the multifaceted concept of the soul is expounded upon through the prism of the Islamic perspective, rooted in the bedrock of divine revelation.

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⁴⁹ Al-Ahwani, *Al-Kindi: Failasuf Al'Arab*, p.171.

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