

Abu Yusuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq Al-Kindī: The Philosophy of the Soul and Its Significance to Mental Health, Cognition, and Wellbeing

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ABSTRACT

Long before the emergence of modern psychology, Abu Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī has already developed a comprehensive philosophical account of the human soul that continues to offer valuable insights into mental health, cognition, and well-being. As the earliest philosopher of the Islamic tradition, al-Kindī reinterpreted Greek metaphysics and psychology through an Islamic monotheistic framework, laying intellectual foundations that shaped later falsafa and informed early conceptions of the self. This study revisits al-Kindī’s thought to examine its relevance for contemporary psychological discourse. Employing a conceptual, interpretive, and historical-philosophical methodology, the analysis draws on close readings of al-Kindī’s primary texts and a thematic synthesis of major secondary scholarship. A comparative analytical lens is used to explore al-Kindī’s ideas on the soul, cognition, emotion, and ethical self-cultivation and selected themes in modern psychology, without imposing contemporary models onto classical sources. The study highlights al-Kindī’s distinctive account of the soul as an immaterial, rational, and immortal substance whose perfection requires intellectual discipline, ethical refinement, and the governance of bodily faculties. His writings provide early formulations of concepts related to cognitive appraisal, emotional regulation, habituation, psychosomatic interaction, and the integration of spiritual and psychological well-being. The paper also examines al-Kindī theories of sleep and dreams, vision, and the imaginative faculty, as well as his influence on later thinkers such as al-Balkhī. By synthesizing these insights, the study demonstrates how al-Kindī’s philosophical psychology contributes to contemporary efforts to articulate an Islamically grounded, holistic framework for understanding human nature, mental health, and psychotherapy.

Keywords: *Al-Kindī, Abu Yusuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq, Early Muslim Scholars, Islamic Psychology, Muslim Philosophers, Soul*

INTRODUCTION

An Islamic approach to modern psychology needs to return to the Qur’an and Sunnah as primary sources of guidance while also drawing on the rich intellectual legacy of early Muslim scholars and philosophers whose works explored existence, ethics, and the human self. Their contributions continue to offer a reservoir of insights that can be adapted to the challenges of modern contexts (Adamson, 2016; Iqbal, 1930; Nasr, 2006).

The understanding of human nature and the soul predates modern psychology by centuries and can be traced back to Greek thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle (Kenny, 2007). In the Islamic tradition, however, this philosophical heritage was not merely preserved but critically developed by Muslim philosophers, including al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and notably al-

Kindī. Revisiting al-Kindī's works are important because he represents the earliest systematic effort within Islam to integrate reason, metaphysics, and an ethical understanding of the soul which are the areas that closely intersect with contemporary psychological concerns such as mental health, cognition, emotion regulation, moral development, and well-being. His writings offer conceptual tools for rethinking the human person in ways that are holistic, spiritually attuned, and methodologically rigorous, thereby addressing ongoing debates about the religious and philosophical foundations of modern psychology. These perspectives can enrich current psychological frameworks by providing alternative models of the self that align with Islamic worldview commitments (Goodman, 1992; Rassool & Luqman, 2023).

This paper aims to revisit the work of al-Kindī and evaluate the relevance of his thought to contemporary psychology. The contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how al-Kindī's insights, such as on the soul, cognition, mental distress, ethical self-cultivation, and therapeutic reasoning, can inform ongoing efforts to formulate an Islamically grounded psychology and offer conceptual resources for religiously responsive mental health practice. By doing so, the paper seeks to bridge the gap between classical Islamic philosophy and modern psychological discourse. The essay is structured to first elaborate on the background and biography of al-Kindī, then discuss his notable works and intellectual contributions, explore his conception of the soul, and finally examine the significance of his philosophical insights for modern psychology and its evolving paradigms.

METHOD

This study employs a conceptual, interpretive, and historical-philosophical methodology (Bevir, 1999; Gadamer, 2004) rather than an empirical or data-driven approach. The analysis is based on a close textual reading of al-Kindī's primary writings alongside a thematic synthesis of major secondary literature on his philosophy, psychology, and intellectual legacy.

The study further adopts a comparative analytical lens (McGrath, 2011), placing al-Kindī's discussions of the soul, mental health, cognition, emotion, and well-being in dialogue with selected themes in contemporary psychology. This comparative component does not aim to impose modern frameworks on classical texts; rather, it highlights conceptual resonances and potential contributions that al-Kindī's thought can offer to ongoing efforts in developing Islamically grounded and culturally responsive psychological models. According to Libbrecht (2009), this approach is appropriate for a historical-philosophical inquiry whose primary aim is to reinterpret classical Islamic thought for contemporary theoretical and practical development, identify its relevance to present psychological debates, and articulate its potential contributions to the foundations of modern psychological frameworks.

BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHY

Abu Yusuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, known in Latin as Alkindus, is widely celebrated as the first major philosopher of the Arab Islamic world and is often hailed as "the Philosopher of the Arabs" (Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Najati, 2002; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Born into the aristocratic Kindah tribe, descendants of ancient South Arabian nobility, al-Kindī benefited from a distinguished lineage that afforded him both status and early access to learning (Adamson, 2007). His father, Ishāq ibn al-Ṣabbāh, served as governor of Kufa under the Abbasid Caliphs al-Mahdi and ar-Rashid, providing young al-Kindī with an environment

conducive to scholarly pursuits (Adamson, 2007; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Though exact details vary, historians generally agree that he was born in Kufa, Iraq, around 801 CE (185 AH), although Basra is sometimes mentioned as an alternative (Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Najati, 2002).

Al-Kindī began his education in Kufa or Basra, where he memorised the Qur'an and studied Arabic grammar, literature, arithmetic, and Islamic jurisprudence (Puspita, 2023). His intellectual curiosity soon led him to Baghdad, then the vibrant heart of the Abbasid Caliphate and home to the famed *Bayt al-Ḥikma*, or House of Wisdom (Adamson, 2007; Gutas, 1998). There, al-Kindī immersed himself in the rational sciences and philosophy, thriving amid the Graeco-Arabic translation movement that was flourishing under Caliphs al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'taṣim (Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Although he likely did not know Greek himself, he actively supported the translation of key Greek works into Arabic, patronising translators such as Eustathius and 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Ḥimsī and even editing texts like Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and parts of Plotinus's *Enneads*, which were known in the Arabic tradition as the *Theology of Aristotle* (Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Zhuldyz et al., 2023).

Al-Kindī's prominence as a court scholar reached its pinnacle under al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-842 CE) and continued under al-Wāthiq (r. 842–847 CE), both of whom were strong patrons of rationalist scholarship (Adamson, 2007; Lindberg, 1976). He even served as tutor to al-Mu'taṣim's son and dedicated some of his most significant philosophical treatises, such as *On First Philosophy (Risāla fī al-Falsafa al-Ūlā)*, to members of the Abbasid court (Adamson, 2007). Through this privileged position, al-Kindī contributed profoundly to shaping the philosophical vocabulary and conceptual framework that would allow Greek thought to flourish in Arabic (Staley, 1989). He is rightly credited as the first systematic reinterpreter of Aristotle in the Islamic world, laying the groundwork for the *falsafa* tradition (Adamson & Pormann, 2015).

Despite his deep engagement with Greek philosophy, al-Kindī remained rooted in Islamic thought, striving to reconcile reason with faith (Adamson, 2007; Druart, 1993). His exposure to Mu'tazilite ideas further shaped this synthesis (Ivry, 1974; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). While he shared their emphasis on reason and some theological positions, he maintained intellectual independence and was critical of aspects of their atomistic physics and theological polemics (Ivry, 1976). His relationship with the Mu'tazila likely contributed to his later persecution when the Abbasid policy shifted toward Sunni theology under al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861 CE), who actively suppressed rationalists (Ivry, 1976; Levey, 1962).

Al-Kindī's final years were marked by political intrigue and professional decline. Rival scholars, including the *Banū Mūsā* brothers, conspired against him at court, resulting in the temporary confiscation of his extensive personal library and a loss of favour (Ivry, 1974; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Although his books were eventually returned, he never regained his former influence and spent his later life in relative seclusion in Baghdad (Adamson, 2007; Gutas, 1998). Historians estimate his death occurred around 866 CE (252 AH), though some sources suggest a date as late as 873 CE (Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Zhuldyz et al., 2023).

Throughout his prolific career, al-Kindī produced between 239 and 350 works spanning diverse fields such as philosophy, logic, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, music, and cryptography (Adamson & Pormann, 2015). His efforts to integrate Hellenistic philosophy with Islamic thought were foundational for later philosophers and even influenced medieval European scholarship through Latin translations of his treatises (Adamson, 2007; Arroisi et al., 2023). As Gerolamo Cardano famously noted, al-Kindī ranks among the pivotal thinkers who profoundly shaped human intellectual history (Zhuldyz et al., 2023).

In summary, al-Kindī's life exemplifies the rich interplay of religious, political, and intellectual currents that defined the Islamic Golden Age. As the "Philosopher of the Arabs," he bridged Greek and Islamic thought, championed reason within faith, and laid the groundwork for generations of scholars to come.

AL-KINDĪ'S NOTABLE WORKS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Al-Kindī was instrumental in introducing and naturalising Greek philosophy in the Arabic-speaking world and laid a foundation for early Islamic philosophy and psychology (Arroisi et al., 2023; Lindberg, 1976). His intellectual legacy is remarkable for its breadth, covering nearly every branch of knowledge known in his time. The 10th-century bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm lists over 240 titles attributed to him, spanning about seventeen different fields (Puspita, 2023), though many survive only in fragmentary form (Khatchadourian & Rescher, 1965; Najati, 2002). Despite the loss of many writings, the surviving corpus testifies to an encyclopaedic intellect whose curiosity knew few bounds (Arroisi et al., 2023).

Philosophical Contributions

Al-Kindī's pioneering role in Islamic philosophy is evident in how he systematically reworked Aristotelian ideas for an Arabic audience and inaugurated what became known as *falsafa*, philosophy in the Islamic tradition (Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Among the Aristotelian concepts he adapted were the doctrine of the four Causes, Aristotle's theory of the First Cause, and the distinction between matter and form. Aristotle had taught that all beings are explained through material, formal, efficient, and final causes, and that the chain of efficient causes ultimately leads to an unmoved First Cause (Barnes, 1982). Aristotle also distinguished between primary matter as pure potentiality and form as its actualising principle (Adamson, 2007; McGinnis, 2010).

Al-Kindī accepted these metaphysical frameworks yet significantly reshaped them within an Islamic worldview. He reformulated Aristotle's unmoved First Cause into the actively creative God affirmed in Islamic monotheism, arguing that God is not only the ultimate cause but the creator who brings all things into existence *ex nihilo*, a view fundamentally different from Aristotle's philosophy (Adamson, 2007). Likewise, Al-Kindī replaced Aristotle's eternal cosmos with a universe that is temporally originated and wholly dependent on God's will (Adamson & Pormann, 2015).

Al-Kindī major work, *On First Philosophy* (*Kitāb fī al-Falsafa al-Ūlā*), is the earliest original philosophical treatise in Arabic (Adamson & Pormann, 2015). In this work, he assimilates metaphysics to theology, arguing for God as the "First Truth" and "First Cause," and defends creation *ex nihilo* using a mathematical methodology inspired by Euclid (Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Haque, 2004; Shamsi, 1978). Notably, al-Kindī emphasised that one should accept truth from any source, reflecting his openness to non-Arabic wisdom (Zhuldyz et al., 2023).

In exploring metaphysics, he addressed complex notions of being, coining Arabic philosophical terms such as *ays* (being) and *lays* (non-being) to articulate the process of creation as the "coming-to-be of being from non-being" (Adamson, 2002). He also offered one of the earliest Islamic philosophical treatments of the Soul and intellect. Works like *Opinions on the Soul* (*Fī al-Qawl fī al-Nafs*), *Discourse on the Soul* (*Kalām fī al-Nafs*), and *On the Intellect* (*Risāla fī al-'Aql*) analyse the Soul as a divine, luminous substance originating from

God's light (Afrizal, 2014; Puspita, 2023). His fourfold classification of intellect, such as active, potential, actual, and acquired, became foundational for later thinkers such as al-Fārābī and Avicenna (McCarthy, 1964; Ivry, 1974).

Al-Kindī's ethical writings further illustrate his synthesis of Greek thought and Islamic values. In *On Dispelling Sadness (Risāla fī daf' al-aḥzān)*, he promotes philosophy as an imitation of God's characters and emphasises abstinence and intellectual contemplation as the path to happiness (Haque, 2004; Ivry, 1974; Groff, 2004). He argued that knowledge perfects religious understanding, thus fostering virtue (Stefaniuk, 2022).

His work on logic is equally notable. Al-Kindī engaged deeply with Aristotle's *Organon* and Porphyry's *Isagoge*, using Greek logic to critique Christian doctrines such as the Trinity (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1976). He compiled works like *On Definitions and Descriptions of Things (Fī Hudūd al-Ashyā' wa-Rusūmihā)* to create a lexicon that made Greek concepts accessible in Arabic (Zhuldyz et al., 2023).

Scientific and Mathematical Works

Al-Kindī's scientific endeavours were no less impressive. He regarded mathematics as fundamental to all sciences (Druart, 1993) and produced treatises on arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music (Arroisi et al., 2023). His *Treatise on Hindu Numerals* helped popularise the Indian numeral system in the Islamic world (Adamson, 2007).

Al-Kindī also emphasises the importance of mathematics as foundational for all sciences and philosophy, advocating an axiomatic method for attaining certainty (Adamson, 2007; Rescher & Khatchadourian, 1965).

In optics, he expanded upon Euclid's work in *On Perspectives (De Aspectibus)* and *On Rays (De Radiis)*, influencing figures like Ibn al-Haytham (Adamson, 2007; Lindberg, 1976). His medical works, such as *On Degrees*, introduced a quantitative approach to pharmacology, applying mathematics to drug formulation (Hamarneh, 1965).

Al-Kindī also made pioneering contributions in cryptology (the scientific study of techniques for secure communication, encompassing both the creation and analysis of systems that protect information). His *Treatise on Deciphering Cryptographic Messages (Risāla fī Istikhrāj al-Mu'ammā)* is the earliest known text on frequency analysis for codebreaking, earning him recognition as an early founder of cryptanalysis (Haque, 2004).

In cosmology and astrology, al-Kindī wrote texts like *On the Prostration of the Outermost Sphere (Maqāla fī Sujūd al-Falak al-Aqṣā)*, where he blended astronomical knowledge with Qur'anic exegesis (Adamson, 2002; Janssens, 2007). In this work, al-Kindī interprets Qur'anic references to the heavens "prostrating" before God such as Qur'an 22:18, which states that "...the sun, the moon, the stars... and many of the heavens prostrate to God..." through the lens of Aristotelian-Ptolemaic astronomy. He argues that this prostration is not a literal act but is manifested through the continuous, orderly circular motion of the celestial spheres (Janssens, 2007; Saruhan, 2023). Such motion, he maintains, expresses their obedience and dependence on God, thereby harmonising cosmological theory with Qur'anic revelation (Adamson, 2002; Janssens, 2007).

Al-Kindī even ventured into music theory, writing five works that applied mathematical principles to scales and tuning, thus laying the groundwork for the science of music in the Arab tradition (Wright, 2006). Among these treatises are *Risāla fī Hubr Ta'līf al-Alḥān* (Treatise on the Composition of Melodies) and *Risāla fī al-Mūsīqā* (Treatise on Music), both of which survive in partial form (Farmer, 1929; Shiloah, 1995). In these works, Al-Kindī approached

music as a quantitative science, following the Pythagorean tradition that linked musical intervals to numerical ratios (Shiloah, 1995). He explained how consonance and dissonance arise from mathematical relationships between string lengths, and he offered one of the earliest systematic accounts of the Arab musical scale (Farmer, 1929). Al-Kindī also discussed the therapeutic and psychological effects of music, arguing that specific tonal patterns could influence emotional states (Wright, 2006). His work represents the earliest known attempt in Arabic scholarship to integrate mathematical acoustics, instrument construction, and melodic theory into a coherent scientific framework, making him one of the foundational figures in the development of Islamic music theory (Farmer, 1929; Wright, 2006).

Role in the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement

Al-Kindī was a key figure in the translation movement, patronising, overseeing, and editing translations of Greek works by Aristotle, Euclid, Ptolemy, and Plotinus (Adamson, 2002; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Though not a translator himself, he was crucial in shaping the philosophical terminology that made Greek ideas intelligible in Arabic (Staley, 1989). He edited and revised translations to ensure accuracy and supervised translators like Yahya b. al-Bitriq and Ibn Na'ima al-Himsi (Adamson, 2002).

Intellectual Orientation and Legacy

Al-Kindī learned much from Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and Plotinus. Even so, he often charted his own course, diverging from Aristotle on key issues while aligning more closely with Neoplatonism in his conception of the soul and intellect (Ivry, 1974). Despite his foundation in Greek philosophy, he never lost sight of Islamic principles, holding that divine revelation transcends human reason and that philosophy and religion share the ultimate aim of uncovering truth albeit by different means (Ivry, 1974).

Al-Kindī's students, such as Abu Zayd al-Balkhī and Ahmad b. al-Tayyib al-Sarakhsi, carried on the Kindian tradition for two centuries, preserving his ideas and method (Adamson, 2007). His influence extended into Latin Europe through translations by Gerard of Cremona and others, and he was recognised by Gerolamo Cardano as one of history's great thinkers (Arroisi et al., 2023; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). While later philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes would refine and surpass his work, al-Kindī's role as the trailblazer who laid the groundwork for *falsafa* remains indisputable.

In sum, al-Kindī exemplifies the intellectual synthesis that defined the Islamic Golden Age, such as an openness to Greek wisdom, rigorous rational inquiry, and a commitment to harmonising philosophy with faith. His legacy lives on as a testament to the enduring power of cross-cultural scholarship and intellectual curiosity.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS OF AL-KINDĪ

Al-Kindī was the first major philosopher of the Islamic world and a pioneering figure in integrating Greek philosophical thought into an Islamic framework (Adamson, 2007). His wide-ranging corpus reflects a bold attempt to harmonise reason and revelation, drawing heavily on Aristotelian, Platonic, and Neoplatonic traditions while remaining grounded in Islamic monotheism (Arroisi et al., 2023). Al-Kindī's philosophical thoughts are evident in his positions on epistemology, ontology, and axiology.

Epistemology (Theory of knowledge)

Al-Kindī defines philosophy as “knowledge of the true nature of things, insofar as it is possible for man” (Druart, 1993; Groff, 2004; Ivry, 1974; Staley, 1989; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). For him, the ultimate aim of philosophy is not only to attain knowledge but also to live in accordance with it, since genuine philosophical understanding should shape one’s conduct and cultivate virtue (Druart, 1993). Al-Kindī argues that when philosophical knowledge informs one’s character and actions, it leads to inner equilibrium, moral refinement, and liberation from destructive emotions (Adamson, 2007). For example, in his treatise *On the Device for Dispelling Sorrows (Risāla fī ḥīla li-daf‘ al-aḥzān)*, al-Kindī explains how living according to philosophical insight directly enhances a person’s well-being and social relationships by enabling the management of grief, the moderation of desires, and the achievement of psychological stability (Adamson, 2007; Druart, 1993). In this sense, philosophy is not merely theoretical but provides practical guidance for living a balanced, virtuous, and purposeful life. Al-Kindī identifies two principal modes of human perception and knowledge, which are sensory (*ḥissī*) and intellectual (*‘aqlī*) through which humans attain truth (Ivry, 1974).

Sensory knowledge concerns the understanding of the external, manifest forms of things. This capacity is not unique to humans but is shared with animals (Arroisi et al., 2023). Sensory perception captures particulars, which are inherently unstable due to their perpetual change (Adamson, 2007; Meguid, 2018). As a result, sensory data is transient, and any lasting awareness of particular objects must be preserved through faculties such as imagination and memory (Adamson, 2007).

Rational or intellectual knowledge, by contrast, is a uniquely human capacity that allows access to the essential and universal aspects of reality (Arroisi et al., 2023). Unlike sensory knowledge, intellectual perception offers certainty, grounded in the necessity and intelligibility of its principles. Al-Kindī maintains that such knowledge is acquired directly from the “first intellect” and is perfectly certain due to its basis in necessary truths (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1974).

A central concept in al-Kindī’s epistemology is the “epistemic gap”, which is a fundamental divide between sensory and intellectual knowledge. He strongly emphasises their dissimilarity and insists that sensation plays no direct role in the acquisition of intelligibles (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1974; Meguid, 2018; Stefaniuk, 2022). In this framework, the body and its associated faculties often serve as obstacles to true intellectual understanding (Adamson, 2007; Stefaniuk, 2022).

Despite this divergence, al-Kindī acknowledges the existence of intermediate faculties such as imagination (*phantasia*), memory, and thought (*fīkr*), which mediate between sensation and intellect (Adamson, 2007; Stefaniuk, 2022; Stern, 1959). Among these, imagination holds a status superior to sensation, as it allows the retention and manipulation of sensory images even in their absence (Adamson, 2007). Similarly, the cogitative power of thought can engage with sensible forms, serving as a preparatory stage toward intellectual abstraction (Adamson, 2007).

While al-Kindī generally maintains the sharp epistemic distinction, certain texts reveal a more comprehensive view of sensation’s role. For example, in *On the Quantity of Aristotle’s Books (Risāla fī Kammiyyat Kutub Aristū)*, he asserts that knowledge of “secondary substances” (such as species and genera) is grounded in “primary substances” (sensible particulars) through their quantifiable and qualifiable aspects, features that are accessible via

sensation (Adamson, 2007; Meguid, 2018). However, he clarifies that although the mathematical sciences originate in sensible experience, they ultimately abstract their objects (quantity and quality) from these experiences through the intellect (Adamson, 2007; Meguid, 2018). Similarly, Al-Kindī implies that the soul is a receptacle for both sensible and intelligible knowledge, suggesting that “all knowledge comes from reason or the senses” (Meguid, 2018).

A distinct category in Al-Kindī's epistemological scheme is prophetic knowledge, which he calls “Divine science.” This form of knowledge surpasses philosophy in its certainty and clarity, as it is granted through divine revelation rather than intellectual exertion (Ivry, 1974; Janssens, 2007; Staley, 1989). Whereas philosophy seeks truth through methodical inquiry and reasoning, prophecy communicates comprehensive truths in an easily intelligible form (Janssens, 2007; Staley, 1989). Nonetheless, Al-Kindī endeavours to demonstrate philosophical arguments without appealing to supernatural intervention, affirming that philosophical and revealed truths ultimately align (Ivry, 1974; Staley, 1989; Zhuldyz et al., 2023).

Al-Kindī's approach to epistemology directly informs and shapes his methodological framework. He consistently emphasises the necessity of employing the appropriate method for each distinct field of inquiry (Adamson, 2007). Central to his methodology is the concept of *'illah* (causality), which plays a crucial role in systematic investigation and ultimately leads back to God as the final cause of all things (Sahidin & Abdurahim, 2023). While Al-Kindī's philosophical method shares significant similarities with that of Aristotle particularly in its reliance on logical reasoning and critical analysis, it is distinguished by its incorporation of Islamic theological principles (Alagab, 2025).

Among the methodological tools he advocates, Al-Kindī gives particular priority to mathematics. He considers the mathematical sciences, such as arithmetic, geometry, harmonics, and astronomy, to be essential foundations for acquiring deeper knowledge (Adamson, 2007; Rehman, 1920). Importantly, he extends mathematical reasoning beyond its traditional domains and applies it to metaphysical inquiry. For instance, in discussions about the eternity of the world, Al-Kindī employs a Euclidean-style axiomatic method (Adamson, 2007; Rescher & Khatchadourian, 1965). Modelled on *Euclid's Elements*, this approach begins with precisely defined terms and self-evident axioms, then proceeds step-by-step toward conclusions reached through strict rational deduction (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1974). This method forms the core of Al-Kindī's mathematical-philosophical approach. By framing philosophical problems with clear definitions and deriving conclusions through demonstrative proofs, Al-Kindī follows what Rescher and Khatchadourian (1965) characterise as a rigorous, proof-driven adaptation of mathematical reasoning to metaphysics. In doing so, he treats complex metaphysical questions as abstract issues best addressed through disciplined intellectual reflection especially those involving concepts such as infinity and magnitude (Adamson, 2007; Rescher & Khatchadourian, 1965; Zhuldyz et al., 2023).

Al-Kindī also reserves purely rational arguments for metaphysics, the domain concerned with non-sensible substances (Meguid, 2018). He is careful to maintain a distinction between sciences, arguing that mathematics should not be applied to physics, as the latter investigates sensible substances subject to motion and change (Meguid, 2018). This clear differentiation among theoretical sciences (i.e., mathematics, physics, and metaphysics) corresponds to the different cognitive faculties employed by the soul in each respective domain (Meguid, 2018).

Ontology (Theory of Being/Reality)

Al-Kindī's ontology is fundamentally theocentric, centring on the conception of Allah S.W.T as the *True One*, the absolute source and cause of all being. Al-Kindī engages deeply with the metaphysical tension between Allah's essential unity and the multiplicity evident in creation. For al-Kindī, Allah is not merely a being among others but the *First Cause*, the originator (*mubdi'*), and the sole creator who brings everything into existence *ex nihilo* (Adamson, 2007; Bertolacci, 2001; Ivry, 1974; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Allah is described as "the First True Who is the cause of every truth" (Adamson, 2007), the efficient cause from which all being emanates (Druart, 1993).

According to Al-Kindī, Allah's unity is absolute and beyond all predication or conceptual comprehension (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1974). He describes Allah as "only and purely unity," whose essence is utterly ineffable and transcends any attributes, particularly those ascribed by heretical interpretations (Adamson, 2002, 2007; Ivry, 1974; Stefaniuk, 2022). Al-Kindī approaches divine unity by emphasising what cannot be affirmed about Allah rather than by describing what Allah is (Adamson, 2007). In this apophatic method, he denies that God possesses multiplicity, composition, spatial location, or any qualities that imply limitation or likeness to created beings (Ivry, 1974; Druart, 1993). This approach is known as negative theological discourse, which maintains divine transcendence by asserting only what God is *not* (Adamson, 2007; Druart, 1993). By focusing on such negations, Al-Kindī safeguards the radical transcendence of Allah and avoids attributing human-like characteristics that would compromise the simplicity and singularity of divine unity (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1974). Al-Kindī further argues that human language inevitably introduces distinctions and multiplicity, and thus any affirmative description of Allah risks distorting the divine essence, which is absolutely one and without differentiation (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1974). In relation to creation, Allah is not a number but the cause from which numbers and all beings are derived, external to them in both nature and existence (Adamson, 2007).

Al-Kindī outlines two conceptions of being which are *simple* and *complex* that are distinct yet reconcilable (Adamson, 2002). *Simple being* refers to the bare fact of existence without any attributes, essence, or differentiation (Ivry, 1974). It serves as the fundamental bearer of all predicates (Ivry, 1974). In other words, "existence itself," or *being qua being* in its most abstract and indeterminate sense, exemplifies simple being. This notion parallels Aristotelian matter as the "first bearer of predication" (Adamson, 2002; Ivry, 1976; Meguid, 2018). By contrast, *complex being* refers to entities that already possess an essence along with distinct characteristics (Adamson, 2002). A human being, for example, has specific features such as rationality, corporeality, emotions, and a determinate physical form. Such attributes transform bare existence into a fully constituted and differentiated entity (Meguid, 2018). These beings are therefore complete and distinguishable from one another (Adamson, 2002). Al-Kindī reconciles these two conceptions by proposing that complex being emerges when an essence is predicated of simple being (Adamson, 2002). Once simple being receives an essence, it becomes the subject of additional accidental predicates, thereby yielding the differentiated entities that populate the world (Adamson, 2002).

In opposition to the Aristotelian doctrine of the world's eternity, Al-Kindī famously defends the Islamic position of the world's temporal creation. He argues against the notion of an eternal universe, instead asserting its origination in time through *creatio ex nihilo* (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Staley, 1989; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Drawing heavily from John Philoponus's critiques of Aristotle, Al-Kindī employs rigorous philosophical arguments to demonstrate the impossibility of actual infinite magnitude, motion, or time (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1974; Meguid, 2018; Shamsi, 1975; Staley, 1989). He argues that time is intrinsically tied to motion, which in turn is coextensive with the existence of the universe itself (Meguid, 2018; Staley, 1989). While the world is not eternal, Al-Kindī concedes that it may be described as *sempiternal*, not infinite in actual duration, but conceptually unending both in the past and future (Shamsi, 1978).

Axiology (Ethics and Values)

Al-Kindī's ethical vision is deeply integrated with his metaphysical and psychological thought, promoting an intellectualist and ascetic lifestyle aimed at spiritual perfection and ultimate happiness. Ethics, described as the "fruit" of metaphysics, serves the higher purpose of achieving *faḍīlah* (full human excellence) and attaining happiness in both this life and the hereafter. For Al-Kindī, the philosopher's moral responsibility is to act truthfully in alignment with the truth (Druart, 1993; Groff, 2004).

True happiness in Al-Kindī's view, is found through intellectual contemplation. He contrasts the eternal, incorruptible realm of the intellect with the transient and perishable sensible world. Thus, ethical living involves detaching from the physical world and orienting the soul toward the immaterial domain of intelligibles (Adamson, 2007). This contemplative turn is complemented by a strict asceticism. Al-Kindī urges the suppression of passions and worldly desires, which he sees as impediments to the soul's purification and its pursuit of authentic knowledge (Adamson, 2007; Arroisi et al., 2023; Groff, 2004; Stefaniuk, 2022). The perfection of the soul is achieved by its full immersion in the intellectual realm (Adamson, 2007).

A cornerstone of Al-Kindī's ethics is the concept of *tashabbuh* (imitation of Allah's characters), which involves acquiring knowledge of noble, intelligible realities. While this does not imply any equivalence with the divine, it encourages humans to align with God's attributes within the bounds of His transcendence (Adamson, 2007; Druart, 1993; Groff, 2004). Al-Kindī's ethical framework is also shaped by several philosophical traditions. From Platonism, he adopts the division between the intelligible and sensible realms, and he aligns virtues such as wisdom, courage, and self-control with those in Plato's *Republic* (Adamson, 2007; Stefaniuk, 2022). Stoic and Cynic influences are evident in his emphasis on the suppression of passions, the valuation of what cannot be lost through external events, and the practice of *muhāsaba* (self-examination) to overcome egocentric tendencies (Adamson, 2007; Druart, 1993; Groff, 2004; Stefaniuk, 2022). Although less prominent, Aristotelian elements appear in his notion of habituation as a means of moral development (Adamson, 2007).

Finally, Al-Kindī conceptualises freedom in a limited yet meaningful way. Freedom refers to the soul's capacity to shape itself according to reason. True freedom is found in submitting to the guidance of the intellect and resisting the sway of bodily emotions (Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Emotions, being corporeal, are to be governed or opposed by the rational soul in its quest for virtue and self-mastery (Stefaniuk, 2022; Zhuldyz et al., 2023).

AL-KINDĪ'S CONCEPTION OF THE SOUL

Al-Kindī offers one of the earliest systematic articulations of the soul in the Islamic tradition, drawing on Platonic, Aristotelian, and Galenic sources to develop a framework that is simultaneously metaphysical, ethical, and systematic (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015). This section examines al-Kindī's account across five key dimensions: the soul's nature and definition, its faculties, its relationship with the body, its connection to the intellect, and its relation to concepts such as *al-rūh* (spirit) and *al-qalb* (heart). Together, these elements reveal al-Kindī's broader effort to synthesise Greek philosophical doctrines with Islamic metaphysical concerns into a coherent vision of human nature, intellectual development, and moral perfection.

The Nature and Definition of the Soul

Al-Kindī defines the soul (*al-nafs*) by synthesising Greek philosophical traditions, identifying it both as the animating principle of the body and as a divine, simple, and immaterial substance (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Arroisi et al., 2023; Stefaniuk, 2022). His account is "much more Platonic than Aristotelian" (Adamson, 2007), reflected in his emphasis on the soul's nobility, perfection, and dignity (Arroisi et al., 2023; Druart, 1993; Puspita, 2023; Rahman et al., 2022). He describes its essence as deriving from the Creator, likening the soul's emanation to light radiating from the sun (Arroisi et al., 2023; Druart, 1993; Puspita, 2023; Rahman et al., 2022).

Although he incorporates the Aristotelian definition of the soul as the "first perfection" (*istikmāl*) or "completion" (*tamāmiyyah*) of a natural organic body, al-Kindī maintains that the soul's divine origin and independence from the body render it inherently immortal. Upon bodily death, the soul returns to the realm of intellect, fulfilling its ultimate purpose to live eternally in the realm of intellect, contemplating truth, united with its divine origin, freed from the limitations of bodily existence (Arroisi et al., 2023; Puspita, 2023; Rahman et al., 2022).

Faculties of the Soul

Al-Kindī's account of the soul's faculties integrates Aristotelian and Galenic philosophy with Neoplatonic metaphysics (Adamson, 2007; Druart, 1993; Stefaniuk, 2022). Although some contemporary summaries present his psychology in tripartite terms (e.g., Arroisi et al., 2023; Puspita, 2023), al-Kindī himself does not adopt Plato's tripartite model. Instead, he distinguishes between the rational soul and a set of bodily faculties that support its functions (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Druart, 1993; Stefaniuk, 2022).

Bodily faculties include the appetitive and irascible powers as well as nutritive and sensory functions (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015). Rooted in the body, these are considered "lower" because their impulses can impede the soul's perfection when left unchecked (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Arroisi et al., 2023; Druart, 1993). To achieve virtue and self-mastery, the rational faculty must discipline these bodily tendencies (Adamson, 2007; Stefaniuk, 2022).

Beyond these, al-Kindī identifies intermediary or psychic faculties, including imagination, memory, cogitation, and retentive capacities, which process sensory data and prepare it for intellection (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Arroisi et al., 2023).

Following Galenic physiology, he locates these faculties not in the heart, as Aristotle proposed, but in the brain, reflecting his commitment to contemporary medical science (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Arroisi et al., 2023; Puspita, 2023). Table 1 summarises al-Kindī's explanation of the faculties of the soul.

Table 1: Faculties of the Soul in al-Kindī's Philosophy

Category	Faculty	Description
Rational Soul (Essential, Immaterial)	Rational / Intellectual Faculty (<i>al-quwwa al-'aqliyya</i>)	The true essence of the soul; immaterial, simple, divine; responsible for intellection and ethical judgment; governs the lower faculties.
Bodily Faculties (Lower / Corporeal)	Appetitive Power (<i>al-quwwa al-shahwāniyya</i>)	Desires, inclinations toward bodily pleasure; tied to the body and can hinder perfection.
	Irascible/Emotive Power (<i>al-quwwa al-ghaḍabiyya</i>)	Anger, courage, emotional responses; also embodied; must be governed.
	Nutritive/Growth Power	Basic biological processes (growth, nutrition).
	Sensory Power	External senses that mediate perception of the physical world.
Intermediate / Psychic Faculties (Between Body and Reason)	Imagination (<i>al-quwwa al-muṣawwira</i>)	Retains and recombines sensory forms; mediates between sense and intellect.
	Memory (<i>al-dhākira</i>)	Stores and recalls forms.
	Cogitation / Thought (<i>fikr</i>)	Manipulates mental images; prepares forms for intellection
	Retentive Faculty	Holds perceptual and imaginative forms.
	Internal Sense Processing	Processes, organises, and conveys sensory input to the intellect; located in the brain.

The Soul and the Body

Al-Kindī presents a dualistic view of the relationship between soul (*al-nafs*) and body (*al-jism*), portraying the soul as a transcendent, immaterial substance that only accidentally inhabits the body (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Arroisi et al., 2023; Stefaniuk, 2022). The body serves merely as an instrument enabling the soul to interact with the material world through sensation, desire, and motion (Adamson, 2007; Puspita, 2023).

Although he accepts the Aristotelian description of the soul as the principle of life for a natural body, al-Kindī insists that this relationship remains incidental. Bodily faculties can constrain the soul's intellectual ascent and thus must be governed through reason (Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Arroisi et al., 2023; Druart, 1993; Stefaniuk, 2022).

Because the soul is simple, divine, and immaterial, it survives bodily dissolution and returns to the intellectual realm near the Creator. Al-Kindī evokes Qur'ānic verse "Now We have removed your veil, so your sight today is sharp" (Qur'ān 50:22) to illustrate the soul's clear perception once freed from corporeal impediments (Adamson, 2007; Arroisi et al., 2023; Puspita, 2023).

The Soul and the Intellect

In *Risāla fī al-'Aql*, al-Kindī presents his most systematic theory of rational activity, outlining four types of intellect: the First Intellect, the Second Intellect, the Potential Intellect,

and the Actual Intellect (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Stefaniuk, 2022). This hierarchy describes the progression of the soul from sensory engagement to complete intellectual actualisation. Table 2 summarises al-Kindī’s four types of intellect.

Table 2: Al-Kindī’s Four Types of Intellect

Type of Intellect	Description	Examples of Application
First Intellect (<i>al-‘aql al-awwāl</i>)	The transcendent First Cause; always in act; source of all intelligible forms. Enables the lower intellects to know.	Contemplating metaphysical truths such as the existence or unity of the First Cause.
Second Intellect (<i>al-‘aql al-thānī</i>)	Realm of universal intelligible, contains genera, species, abstract concepts. Provides the content known by the human intellect.	Understanding abstract universals like “justice,” “humanity,” or geometric forms.
Potential Intellect (<i>al-‘aql bi’l-quwwa</i>)	The human mind as potentiality: capable of knowing but not yet actualised. Prepared to receive forms.	A learner capable of grasping mathematical principles before fully understanding them.
Actual Intellect (<i>al-‘aql bi’l-fi‘l</i>)	The intellect in act, having fully apprehended intelligible forms. Represents intellectual perfection.	Demonstrating mastery by proving a theorem or understanding metaphysical principles without sensory aids.

For al-Kindī, the rational faculty is both the soul’s essence and the foundation of moral and spiritual refinement. Reason must govern bodily impulses, enabling alignment with divine attributes (Druart, 1993; Haque, 2004; Zhuldyz et al., 2023). Intellectual contemplation purifies the soul, while the purified soul more fully apprehends universal truths (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1974; McCarthy, 1964; Rahman et al., 2022; Stefaniuk, 2022). Thus, intellectual discipline and ethical self-mastery are inseparable dimensions of human perfection.

The Soul and al-Rūḥ

Al-Kindī does not explicitly define the relationship between the soul (*al-nafs*) and the spirit (*al-rūḥ*) (Adamson, 2007; Druart, 1993; Ivry, 1974). Some contemporary authors draw parallels between the two concepts because *rūḥ* in Islamic thought signifies divine origin and life-giving power (Haque, 2004; Puspita, 2023; Stefaniuk, 2022), leading to claims that *nafs* may be identified with, or emanate from, *rūḥ* (Kamaruddin, 2014; Rahman et al., 2022). Yet such interpretations reflect later theological frameworks, not al-Kindī’s own writings.

In his philosophical psychology, the soul is a simple, immaterial, and noble substance deriving from the Creator (Adamson, 2007; Adamson & Pormann, 2015; Arroisi et al., 2023; Druart, 1993; Puspita, 2023; Rahman et al., 2022; Stefaniuk, 2022). By contrast, al-Kindī adopts the Greek distinction between psychē (immaterial soul) and pneuma (material spirit), using *rūḥ* to correspond to the latter in physiological contexts (Adamson, 2007; Gutas, 2014; Pormann & Savage-Smith, 2007). His notion of *rūḥ nafsānī* refers to a subtle corporeal substance responsible for voluntary motions, distinct from the rational soul (Arroisi et al., 2023; Ivry, 1974; Stefaniuk, 2022).

Thus, while both terms carry connotations of divine vitality, al-Kindī maintains a conceptual distinction between the soul and *al-rūḥ*: the soul is immaterial and eternal, whereas *rūḥ* may also denote a physiological life-force associated with embodiment.

The Soul and al-Qalb

Al-Kindī's view of the heart (*al-qalb*) diverges from broader Islamic traditions that treat it as the locus of spiritual perception and wisdom (Haque, 2004; Stefaniuk, 2022). Rejecting Aristotle's heart-centred psychology, he follows Galenic medicine in locating perceptual, imaginative, and cognitive faculties in the brain (Adamson, 2007; Arroisi et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, the *qalb* retains symbolic and ethical significance. Al-Kindī associates affective states such as sadness with the heart (Adamson, 2007) and exhorts readers to "humble your heart," indicating its role in moral cultivation (Adamson & Pormann, 2015). Thus, while the *qalb* represents an ethical and emotional centre, it is not, in al-Kindī's system, the physiological seat of perception or intellection (Adamson, 2007; Arroisi et al., 2023).

AL-KINDĪ'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE EARLY UNDERSTANDING OF MENTAL HEALTH, HUMAN NATURE, AND COGNITIVE THEORY

Al-Kindī sought a synthesis of Aristotelian logic, Plotinian metaphysics, and Islamic monotheism, demonstrating that reason and revelation share a single aim which is the knowledge of truth (Ivry, 1976). This approach laid the groundwork for later thinkers like al-Fārābī and Avicenna, though they developed the tradition further in their own ways (Rahman et al., 2022). Al-Kindī offers valuable insights into human nature and well-being that resonate with and, in some cases, even prefigure modern psychological theories and practices, especially through his intricate understanding of the Soul (Arroisi et al., 2023). By blending Greek philosophical traditions with Islamic thought, he established a metaphysical and epistemological foundation for early Islamic psychology that continues to resonate until today (Arroisi et al., 2023).

According to Adamson (2007), although al-Kindī is widely known as a philosopher, he also merits recognition as an early contributor to the field of psychology, particularly in areas that correspond today to mental health and cognitive psychology. His analyses of the soul, emotions, perception, and cognition provide significant insights with clear implications for contemporary psychological discourse (Adamson, 2006; Ivry, 1974). This section highlights how al-Kindī's works laid early foundations for several areas of psychological and philosophical inquiry, including the understanding of mental health and cognitive therapy, a holistic and spiritual view of the human nature, theories of sleep and dreams, theories of vision, and his significant influence on later scholars.

Early Understanding of Mental Health and Cognitive Therapy:

One of al-Kindī's significant contributions is his recognition that mental health concerns are a universal aspect of human experience (Puspita, 2023) and that they may be addressed through cognitive, ethical, and spiritual strategies (Groff, 2004). He analysed psychological states such as sadness (*ḥuzn*), identifying their causes and proposing remedies long before the emergence of contemporary psychotherapy as a formal discipline (Haque, 2004). Although modern readers might notice similarities between al-Kindī's descriptions of excessive sadness and what we now classify as neurotic distress or depressive tendencies (Groff, 2004; Puspita, 2023), it is important to stress that his understanding is rooted in a very different intellectual tradition. Al-Kindī's attribution of prolonged sadness to cognitive factors

(e.g., believing that worldly matters are permanent or truly ours) reflects a philosophical and spiritual framework rather than a clinical or empirical one (Puspita, 2023; Haque, 2004).

In *The Device for Dispelling Sorrows*, al-Kindī formulates what may be viewed as an early cognitive theory of emotion, arguing that it is not external loss itself but our mental evaluation of it that generates sorrow (Haque, 2004). His well-known assertion that “sorrow is not within us; we bring it upon ourselves” (Hamarnah, 1965; Haque, 2004) resonates with Stoic reflections and appears superficially similar to modern cognitive-behavioural perspectives (Groff, 2004). Yet it is essential to emphasise that these similarities should not be taken as equivalences. Modern psychology, having largely moved away from metaphysical inquiry, rests on empirical methods and secular frameworks, whereas al-Kindī’s approach is grounded in a philosophical anthropology that sees the soul as immortal, ethically perfectible, and oriented toward the divine. Because these foundations differ so profoundly, it would not be academically fair to equate al-Kindī’s ideas with contemporary psychological theories or practices.

The present study is therefore not intended to compare al-Kindī’s works with modern clinical models; rather, it aims to show that centuries before psychotherapy emerged, al-Kindī was already articulating profound insights into human cognition, emotional suffering, and the cultivation of well-being. His counsel to cultivate rational habits (Hamarnah, 1965; Puspita, 2023), moderate desires through reason (Puspita, 2023), and redirect one’s attachment toward enduring virtues rather than transient possessions (Haque, 2004) illustrates a sophisticated therapeutic outlook embedded within early Islamic philosophical thought (Arroisi et al., 2023).

While some of al-Kindī’s recommendations resemble what modern psychology calls cognitive reframing, values clarification, or behavioural training (Groff, 2004; Haque, 2004; Puspita, 2023), these resemblances are thematic rather than methodological. They simply underscore that al-Kindī identified psychological mechanisms that later became systematised in modern therapy. Table 3 provides a structured overview of where such thematic parallels appear, while equally emphasising the deep conceptual differences between al-Kindī’s metaphysical framework and the secular foundations of contemporary psychology. His work ultimately demonstrates that mental health, for him, was inseparable from ethics, metaphysics, and the cultivation of the soul. This is an integrated vision that continues to offer valuable insights for contemporary discussions within Islamic psychology.

Table 3: al-Kindī’s Contribution to Psychotherapy:

al-Kindī’s Works	Similarities with Modern Psychology	Differences
<p>For al-Kindī, sadness (<i>al-ḥuzn</i>) is “the pain of the soul resulting from valuing sensible and corruptible objects” (Druart, 1993). Emotional distress does not arise from external events themselves, but from the <i>false belief</i> that material goods, relationships, or worldly conditions are stable, permanent, or absolutely possessed (Groff, 2004). Because</p>	<p>Cognitive Theory of Emotion: In modern psychology, cognitive theories similarly argue that emotions arise primarily from appraisals or interpretations, not from events themselves (Beck, 1964; Lazarus, 1991). A person’s thoughts about a situation, rather than the situation per se, shape the emotional response (Clark & Beck, 2010).</p>	<p>Although al-Kindī’s view anticipates certain mechanisms later articulated in cognitive psychology, the foundations of his model differ significantly from modern therapeutic frameworks. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is pragmatic, empirically oriented, and secular, focusing on modifying maladaptive cognitions to reduce symptoms. Its conceptual foundation lies in</p>

<p>the sensible world is transient, attachment to it inevitably produces sorrow when loss occurs.</p> <p>Thus, for al-Kindī, emotional suffering is fundamentally a metaphysical error, that is based on a mistaken appraisal about the nature of reality, the soul, and the impermanence of worldly things.</p>	<p>Distressing emotions persist when individuals hold maladaptive evaluations or beliefs, which can be modified through systematic cognitive intervention (Beck, 1964; Lazarus, 1991).</p>	<p>observable behaviour and cognitive processes, without reference to metaphysics, cosmology, or the soul.</p> <p>By contrast, al-Kindī's emotional theory is rooted in a Platonic and Islamic metaphysical worldview in which the soul is immortal, immaterial, and oriented toward the eternal (Druart, 1993). Emotional disturbance arises not merely from distorted thoughts but from a mistaken attachment to transient, corruptible objects and a failure to recognize the soul's transcendent nature. The remedy, therefore, is not only cognitive reframing but reorienting one's values and desires toward what is permanent and divine.</p>
<p>In <i>The Device for Dispelling Sorrow (al-Ḥilāh li-Daf' al-Aḥzān)</i>, al-Kindī teaches that possessions are merely things on loan from the Creator and will inevitably be returned (Groff, 2004). By reframing loss as the return of borrowed property, he reduces its irrational emotional impact such as shame, despair, or excessive grief, and promotes a more rational, spiritually grounded cognitive shift (Groff, 2004; Jayyusi-Lehn, 2002).</p>	<p>Cognitive Reframing: Cognitive therapies similarly focus on identifying and challenging false beliefs and maladaptive appraisals. Emotional distress is understood to arise not from events themselves but from the individual's interpretation of those events. Through cognitive re-appraisal, clients learn to replace distorted thoughts with more balanced and adaptive evaluations (Beck, 1964; Lazarus, 1991; Clark & Beck, 2010).</p>	<p>Al-Kindī's therapeutic strategy is grounded in a metaphysical and spiritual worldview, often requiring detachment from material possessions and bodily needs, which he views as impediments to the soul's tranquility (Puspita, 2023). In contrast, modern techniques such as CBT prioritise adaptation to worldly functioning, aiming to improve daily coping, behavioural effectiveness, and psychological well-being without requiring metaphysical commitments.</p>
<p>Al-Kindī emphasises the necessity of practicing steadfastness (<i>al-'azm</i>: persistence of opinion in action) by training the soul in commendable habits, beginning with small tasks and gradually increasing their difficulty (Druart, 1993; Jayyusi-Lehn, 2002; Puspita, 2023). This method anticipates behavioral therapy by outlining a process of progressive habituation to virtue, building moral resilience through repeated, disciplined action.</p>	<p>Behavioural Prescriptions: Behavioural approaches use gradual exposure and habituation techniques grounded in classical (Pavlov, 1927) and operant conditioning (Skinner, 1938). In exposure-based interventions, individuals confront feared or avoided situations in manageable steps that progressively increase in difficulty, reducing emotional reactivity through habituation and inhibitory learning (Foa & Kozak, 1986). Similarly, behaviour modification emphasises shaping adaptive behaviours through small, incremental changes reinforced over time (Kazdin, 2001). This graded progression mirrors al-Kindī's emphasis on cultivating virtue through incremental practice and the disciplined training of the soul.</p>	<p>Al-Kindī's therapeutic aim is not merely behavioural adaptation but the overcoming of innate dispositions including temperamental tendencies shaped by astral influences and bodily humours (Druart, 1993). His model therefore integrates moral psychology with cosmology and natural science. In contrast, modern behavioural therapies are secular, empirically based, and non-metaphysical, focusing on observable behaviour change without reference to celestial or humoral determinants.</p>

<p>Al-Kindī recommends engaging in introspection and rational contemplation (<i>nazar</i>) on universal and immutable truths as a means of avoiding sadness (Arroisi et al., 2023; Haque, 2004). He teaches that intellectual reflection helps detach the individual from immediate emotional attachments by redirecting attention toward higher, abstract realities. This method functions as an intellectual defence mechanism, allowing the soul to transcend unstable worldly emotions (Druart, 1993; Haque, 2004).</p>	<p>Cognitive Strategies: Modern approaches similarly employ introspective and reflective strategies, such as monitoring one’s internal states, examining thought patterns, and engaging in guided self-reflection. These techniques cultivate metacognitive awareness, allowing individuals to gain psychological distance from emotionally charged situations and re-evaluate their cognitive responses (Beck, 1976). Such strategies are foundational in cognitive therapy and mindfulness-based cognitive interventions, where noticing and reassessing internal experiences is essential for emotional regulation and cognitive change (Segal et al., 2002).</p>	<p>For al-Kindī, contemplation aims at accessing objective metaphysical truths such as the nature of being, the soul, and ultimate reality as part of “First Philosophy” (Arroisi et al., 2023). Modern psychological introspection, by contrast, focuses on subjective experience, emotional regulation, and cognitive restructuring rather than metaphysical knowledge. The goals, therefore, diverge: al-Kindī seeks intellectual ascent toward eternal truths, whereas modern psychology seeks improved self-regulation within lived experience.</p>
<p>Al-Kindī asserts that reason (the rational aspect of the soul) must take supremacy over non-rational desires and impulses in order to prevent affliction and moral deviation (Puspita, 2023). The imperative to use the Rational Faculty (<i>al-quwwah al-‘aqliyah</i>) to dominate harmful passions such as anger (<i>al-quwwah al-ghadabiyyah</i>) and desire (<i>al-quwwah al-shahawāniyyah</i>) reflects his belief that emotional regulation requires intellectual mastery and disciplined self-governance (Puspita, 2023; Rahman et al., 2022).</p>	<p>Rational Emotive Approach (REA): Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), developed by Ellis (1962), emphasises the primacy of reason in regulating harmful emotions. REBT teaches that irrational beliefs generate dysfunctional emotional responses and that individuals can reduce distress by identifying, disputing, and replacing these irrational cognitions with rational alternatives (Ellis, 1962). This approach highlights the role of logical analysis, cognitive dispute, and rational self-instruction in countering destructive emotions, similar to al-Kindī’s emphasis on using reason to constrain impulsive passions (Dryden, 2003).</p>	<p>For al-Kindī, the domination of reason over the passions is not merely a psychological technique but part of a metaphysical and ethical project aimed at purifying the soul and attaining closeness to the Creator (Arroisi et al., 2023). In contrast, REBT is secular, therapeutic, and pragmatic, concerned with reducing emotional distress and improving daily functioning without appealing to metaphysical truths or spiritual transcendence.</p>
<p>Al-Kindī teaches that one should pursue eternal, intelligible realities in the <i>World of the Intellect</i> (<i>‘ālam al-‘aql</i>) rather than transient sensible things (Druart, 1993; Haque, 2004). He presents a hierarchy of values in which rational and enduring goods, such as knowledge and virtue, are inherently superior to corruptible, sensory goods such as wealth, pleasure, or social status (Druart, 1993). Orienting the soul toward what is eternal promotes genuine flourishing and protects the</p>	<p>Values Clarification: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) emphasises values clarification, encouraging individuals to identify and commit to values that promote psychological flexibility, well-being, and long-term stability (Hayes et al., 2012). ACT distinguishes between enduring, chosen values and fleeting desires or impulses, guiding clients toward goals aligned with health, meaning, and personal integrity (Hayes et al., 2012). This process</p>	<p>For al-Kindī, the ultimate fulfilment of values is metaphysical perfection and the immortality of the soul, attained through alignment with eternal truths and closeness to the Creator (Arroisi et al., 2023). This spiritual and religious telos lies beyond the scope of secular therapeutic models such as ACT or CBT, which aim primarily at functional well-being rather than metaphysical realisation.</p>

individual from sorrow rooted in worldly attachments.	mimicked al-Kindī's emphasis on prioritising higher-order, stable goods over transient, sensory ones.	
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Holistic and Spiritual View of the Person:

Al-Kindī's conception of mental health was holistic, in the sense that he did not separate the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional aspects of the self. For him, optimal well-being ("a calm soul") required harmony between one's beliefs, one's character, and one's lifestyle (Adamson, 2007; Fakhry, 1987; Gutas, 1998; Puspita, 2023). In contemporary psychology, there is growing recognition of the importance of spiritual and existential factors in mental health. Al-Kindī anticipated this by grounding psychological well-being in the alignment of the soul with higher truths (Adamson, 2007; Fakhry, 1987; Gutas, 1998). He effectively suggests that an individual's mental disturbances can be alleviated by reconnecting the soul to its spiritual purpose (knowledge of the eternal) and disentangling it from excessive worldly anxieties (Puspita, 2023). Modern approaches like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) or meaning-centred therapy echo these themes, encouraging individuals to commit to deeper values and accept the uncontrollability of certain outcomes (Hayes et al., 2012). This aligns with al-Kindī's emphasis that peace of mind comes when the soul finds rest in what is meaningful and eternal, rather than remaining in constant turmoil over what is fleeting and beyond one's control.

Furthermore, al-Kindī implicitly recognised what we know today as the psychosomatic connection (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2002). This concept elaborates on the way the state of the Soul (mind) can affect the body and vice versa. By classifying sadness as an "illness" and speaking of cures, al-Kindī was treating psychological illnesses with the same seriousness as physical ailments (Puspita, 2023). He also noted that emotional disturbances like fear and anger have bodily manifestations and can even contribute to physical sickness (Adamson, 2007; Ivry, 1974). While his remedies were largely cognitive and spiritual, he acknowledged the interplay of mind and body, which aligns with the holistic approach in health psychology today that treats the person as an integrated whole.

Theory of Sleep and Dreams:

Al-Kindī's treatise *Fī Māhiyyat an-Naum wa ar-Ru'yā* (*On the Essence of Sleep and Dream*) describes sleep as a natural state in which the soul's practical faculties withdraw from sensory and bodily activities, thereby allowing the imaginative faculty to function independently (Najati, 2002). During wakefulness, the soul remains engaged with external senses; however, when these senses are dormant in sleep, the imaginative power (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*) becomes dominant, generating dreams (*ar-ru'yā*) from residual sensory impressions and spiritual influences (Adamson, 2007; Najati, 2002). In this framework, sleep is described as a condition where the animal soul (*an-nafs al-hayawāniyya*) recedes from its lower functions, while the rational soul (*an-nafs al-nāṭiqā*) can still receive true visions or distorted images, depending on its purity and the physical state of the sleeper (Adamson, 2007).

Building on this, al-Kindī's *De Somniis* (*On Dreams*) interprets dreams as natural phenomena linked to the imagination (*khayāl*) and the soul's operations when freed from sensory distractions (Adamson, 2007; Druart, 1993). He argued that the soul's imaginative

faculty stores images that emerge during sleep, aligning with the Aristotelian view that the soul can function imaginatively when bodily senses are inactive (Adamson, 2007). Al-Kindī distinguishes four types of dreams: *Ar-Ru'yā at-Tanbī'iyah* (prophetic dreams) that convey true knowledge of future events, *Ar-Ru'yā ar-Ramzīyah* (symbolic dreams) requiring interpretation, *Ar-Ru'yā Dhikrīyah* (recollecting dreams) dreams replaying past experiences, and *Ar-Ru'yā Badaniyyah* (false dreams) false dreams arising from physical imbalances (Najati, 2002).

Theory of Vision:

Al-Kindi's contributions to the theory of vision primarily advanced the extramission (visual ray) theory, aligning him with the "perspectivist" tradition that included figures like Euclid and Ptolemy (Lindberg, 1976). He refined earlier Euclidean optics by arguing that the visual ray forms a continuous cone, not discrete lines, to explain the continuous perception of the visual field (Adamson, 2007). His most significant innovation was his explicit articulation of "punctiform analysis," positing that visual rays originate from every point on the surface of the eye and radiate in all directions (Adamson, 2007; Lindberg, 1976). This enabled him to geometrically explain observed phenomena such as why objects appear clearer at the centre of the visual field and when closer, due to a greater number of visual connections from the eye to the object (Adamson, 2007). Although Al-Kindi used this principle to support his extramission view, it proved to be a fundamental concept for Ibn al-Haytham's (Alhazen's) later intromission theory, thereby laying crucial groundwork for subsequent optical science (Lindberg, 1976). This rigorous approach to optics exemplifies Al-Kindi's broader philosophical commitment to mathematical methodology as essential for understanding the natural world (Adamson & Pormann, 2015).

Influence on Later Scholars:

Al-Kindi's ideas about the soul and mind directly influenced later scholars who wrote more explicitly on psychological disorders and their treatment, such as Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (Adamson, 2007; Fakhry, 1987). Al-Balkhī, often cited as a pioneer in cognitive therapy for his book *Masālik al-Abdān wa-l-Anfus* ("Sustenance of Body and Soul"), likely drew on the general intellectual climate that al-Kindi helped establish such as the one where psychological well-being is seen as part of philosophical ethics and medicine (Badri, 2013; Gutas, 1998). Al-Balkhī classified obsessional disorders and depression in ways that resonate with al-Kindi's descriptions of sorrow and anxiety. The continuity suggests that al-Kindi was part of the genesis of a distinctly Islamic psychology tradition, one that modern researchers are now studying and reviving (Cucchi, 2022; Haque, 2004; Mayi & Tahir, 2025). Recognising al-Kindi's role helps contemporary psychologists appreciate the historical depth of concepts like cognitive restructuring and holistic health in non-Western contexts. It reminds us that the idea of psychotherapy is not entirely new or Western; Muslim scholars like al-Kindi were dealing with mental well-being and devising interventions centuries ago. His systematic exploration of the soul's faculties and their relationship to human behaviour places an essential foundation for Islamic psychology, blending Greek philosophical insights with Islamic principles to advance theories of reason's governance over passion, emotional well-being through cognition, and habituation in character development (Arroisi et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

Abu Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī emerges as a foundational figure in the development of Islamic philosophical psychology, distinguished by his successful integration of Greek philosophical insights within an Islamic monotheistic worldview. His extensive reflections on the nature, faculties, and interaction of the soul provide one of the earliest holistic frameworks for understanding human nature that unifies the physical, rational, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of the person into a coherent vision of well-being.

At the heart of al-Kindī's system is the conviction that the soul shapes personality, moral character, and intellectual development. By articulating the soul's relationship to cognition, emotion, and self-governance, he laid a conceptual foundation for areas that today correspond to psychotherapy, cognitive appraisal, emotional regulation, and ethical self-cultivation. His emphasis on the intellect as the pathway to virtue and psychological stability situates mental health within a broader metaphysical and ethical horizon, extending beyond the limits of purely medical or behavioural models.

The continued relevance of al-Kindī's thought lies in its capacity to inform contemporary efforts to develop holistic and Islamically grounded approaches to psychology. His analyses of sadness, cognitive errors, habituation, and the interplay between reason and passion anticipate enduring concerns in modern therapeutic discourse, while his discussions of dreams, imagination, and perception enrich the historical understanding of cognitive theory. Revisiting al-Kindī's intellectual legacy thus offers valuable resources for advancing contemporary conversations on human cognition, character, and well-being, and affirms the significance of early Muslim scholarship in shaping a more integrated and spiritually attuned psychology for the modern world.

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