Chapter 2

Reconciling Religion and Philosophy: Reflections on Causality in Al-Kindi
**Al-Kindi: Life and Works**

Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi (ca. 800–870 CE) is well known to Islamic scholars. He is often called the first philosopher of the Arabs. Al-Kindi followed a Neo-Platonic path, although he attempted to argue for the creation of the world as against the theory of constant production and reproduction. In fact, Al-Kindi introduced metaphysics into Islamic philosophical world in which it had not existed earlier.

He worked very hard to introduce specific technical philosophical terms in Arabic. Simultaneously, he reconceived Greek philosophy in terms of Islamic doctrine. Akhtar says: “Al-Kindi was pioneer mainly because he developed a requisite Arabic vocabulary that made Greek thinking expressible in the Arab idiom and thus accessible to Arab Muslims.”

Al-Kindi worked with a group of translators who engaged with the work of Aristotle, Plato, Neo-Platonists, and Greek mathematicians and scientists into Arabic. Jerome Cardano (ca. 1501-1576 CE), the Italian physician and mathematician says in his book *De Subtilitate* that Al-Kindi is one of the most influential figures in human history. Cardano considered Al-Kindi one of the twelve greatest minds in history.

Al-Kindi was born in Kufa in an aristocratic family of Kindah (كندة) tribe, which had played an important role in the early history of Islam. His father was governor of Basra, a south Iraqi city of Persian Gulf, where he received primary education. Then he moved to Baghdad where he enjoyed the supports of Abbasid caliphates. He prioritized Greek wisdom and Persian civilization over Arab virtue and Muslim faith. He became famous in the Abbasid capital as a scholar and physician. He served as a scholar under Abbasid caliph al Ma'mun and Mu'tasim and was appointed tutor of the latter's son Ahmad. His

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52 Leaman, Oliver, (1999), *A brief introduction to Islamic philosophy*, UK: Blackwell, p.5
philosophical career peaked under al Mu’tasim to whom he dedicated his famous work *On First Philosophy*. This was published during the period of speculative theologians’ ascendancy. Their theological view made a deep impact on al-Kindi. Moreover, al-Kindi shared their view on dogmatic questions.\(^{56}\)

But during the caliphate of Al-Mutawakkil (ca. 847-861 CE), al-Kindi lost his privilege within the court and his reputation was sullied. According to some historians, the early period of Mutawakkil was characterized by the clash of two hostile groups. Consequently, al-Kindi was denied his patronage. Apart from this, his personal library in the House of Wisdom was confiscated. But the Caliph didn’t behave like the Byzantine emperor Justinian. According to Akhtar,

> “Individual philosophers like ibn-Rushed (and possibly Al-Kindi) were mildly persecuted but no caliph behaved like Byzantine emperor Justinian who, in 529, closed all schools of philosophy, including Plato’s academy”\(^{57}\).

Overtime, his library was restored through the help of a friend. But he couldn’t regain his reputation within the court and he died in Baghdad in about ca. 873 CE.\(^{58}\) He was one among the important philosophers for whom truth was more valuable than patronage.\(^{59}\) Atiyeh argues that, “His death must have been a quite one, noticed only by those nearest to him. It was the death of a great man out of favor, yet at the same time that of a philosopher who loved solitude.”\(^{60}\)

While having high status, al-Kindi perceives life in a certain way. He says:

> “our residence in the phenomenal world is transitory; it is a journey towards the eternal one. The most miserable man is he who prefers for himself the material above the spiritual, for the material, apart from its ephemeral nature,  

\[^{57}\text{Akhtar, Shabbir, (2008), p 73.}\]
\[^{59}\text{Plott, John c., } \text{Global history of philosophy, the period of scholasticism, p189.}\]
\[^{60}\text{Atiyeh ,G.N,( 1966), } \text{Al-Kindi: The philosopher of the Arabs, Rawalpindi: Islamic Research Institute, p 8.}\]
obstructs our passage to the spiritual world. Man should not disregard any means to protect himself against all human vices, and he should seek to rise to the highest ends of human virtues..., that is, to knowledge by means of which we protect ourselves against spiritual and bodily disease, and acquire those human virtues in whose very essence goodness is grounded. 61

Al-Kindi's philosophical life started around the translation movement that had grown from its early beginning in the eight century which had been supported by the Abbasid caliphs. The Abbasid period (ca. 750 - 1285 C.E.) was the most magnificent period in Arab history which marked substantial material, cultural and intellectual development. The period witnessed two main groups of translators who had translated Greek scientific philosophical text into Arabic. Al-Kindi became a patron of one of the two main groups of translators. This experience contributed much to his philosophical and theological enquiries.

Al-Kindi cannot be considered as a mere translator of ancient text. He had a large number of Christian scholars and translators working with him. It is acknowledged that he guided the effort of several important early translators who had special interest in Greek metaphysical work concerning God and the soul. Al-Kindi's circle included famous translators of the Abbasid period, Yahya b. al-Bitriq, who translated Aristotle's De Caelo and Ibn Na'ima al-Himsi, who translated the logical work of Aristotle and a part of the Enneads of Plotinus.

In a way, within the Arabic philosophical tradition, al-Kindi's philosophical legacy was very persistent and permanent, but in another way it was narrow and temporary. He introduced philosophy into the Arabic speaking milieu through the translation of Greek philosophical texts. To this extent, al-Farabi, Avicenna and Averroes are said to be the true heirs of al-Kindi. 62 But, on the other hand, al-Kindi had a more direct influence on subsequent philosophers through his own works. The philosophers who were influenced by him initiated

61 Ibid, p127.
the 'Kindian Tradition'. It had a significant role in the Islamic scholarly environment for about two centuries after al-Kindi’s death.\textsuperscript{63}

Al-Kindi’s ideas had been followed by his own students and their followers. Two prominent figures of Kindian tradition from the first generation were Abu Zayd Al-Balkhi (died on ca. 934 CE) and Ahmad b. al-Tayyib Al-Sarakshi (died on ca. 899 CE). Unfortunately, no complete philosophical work has been found in the name of these thinkers. According to Peter Adamson, many of the works attributed to Al-Sarakshi resemble Al-Kindi’s works. It is also observed that he used Al-Kindi’s own words as it is to some extent.

While defending the conservative people's argument that “acquisition of knowledge of the reality of things is atheism”\textsuperscript{64}, Al-Kindi said of such accusers, “they disrupted with good men in defense of untrue position which they had founded and occupied without any merit only to gain power and to trade with religion.”\textsuperscript{65} In his paper On the Definitions of Things and Their Descriptions (Risala fi Hududu al-Ashya’ wa Rusumiyya) Al-Kindi gives six definitions of philosophy:

1. He explained the Greek etymology of the words ‘philo’ and ‘sophia’. ‘Philo,’ means friend and ‘Sophia’ means wisdom. So philosophy is the love of wisdom.
2. Then he gives the functional definition by viewing the philosophy as the human endeavour to emulate divine excellence as much as is possible.
3. He added that philosophy is, in a way, the practice of death. While death means the separation of the soul from the body, it also touches upon the meaning of soul.
4. He explained how philosophy allows man to know himself.
5. According to Al-Kindi, philosophy is the science of all sciences and the wisdom of all wisdoms.
6. He also held the view that Philosophy’s proper subject-matter is the study of essence and causes of things. In this definition Al-Kindi becomes a sort of Aristotelian\textsuperscript{66}.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid p 12.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{66} John C. Plott, 'The period of scholasticism' Global history of philosophy, 4 (1) pp. 190-191
In his most significant work, *On First Philosophy*, al-Kindi describes First philosophy or metaphysics as the knowledge of the first cause or that of God. For him, the rest of philosophy is included in this primary knowledge.\(^{67}\) According to Fuad El-Ehwan, al-Kindi’s definition of philosophy proceeds by taking philosophy as the knowledge of the reality of things within man’s possible limits. The philosopher’s end in his theoretical knowledge is to gain truth and in his practical knowledge to behave in accordance with truth.\(^{68}\)

Al-Kindi divided philosophy into two major branches: theoretical and practical. Thus theoretical philosophy is made up of physics and mathematics which had to do with mind and matter that is metaphysics or theology which dealt with non-material things. Practical philosophy included ethics, economics and politics.\(^{69}\) It is equally important to mention here that there was a debate over the philosophical status of Al-Kindi. Some scholars cited that Al-Kindi was not a philosopher because of the lack of logical theory in his system. Said Al-Andalusia says

“Al-Kindi wrote on logic many books which never became popular, and which people never read or used in the sciences, because these books missed the art of analysis which is the only way to distinguish the right and wrong in every study. By the art of synthesis, which is what Ya’qub meant by his writings, no one can profit, unless he has sure premises from which he can make the synthesis.”\(^{70}\)

Tenth century book seller ibn Nadim’s *Catalogue (Fihrist)* lists 260 works under the name of al-Kindi, most of which have unfortunately been lost.\(^{71}\) Thanks to ibn Nadim, we know that al-Kindi has written so many books on a very wide variety of scientific and philosophical disciplines. In fact, the scientific and mathematical works outnumber his philosophical works. Following Ibn Nadim, the versatile Arab writer Al Qifti classified his

\(^{68}\) Ibid, p.424.
\(^{69}\) Ibid, p.424.
\(^{70}\) Ibid, pp. 424-425.
writings, most of which are short treatises, into seventeen groups: (1) philosophical, (2) logical, (3) arithmetical, (4) globular, (5) musical, (6) astronomical, (7) geometrical, (8) spherical, (9) medical, (10) astrological, (11) dialectical, (12) psychological, (13) political, (14) causal (meteorological), (15) dimensional, (16) on first things, (17) on the species of some chemicals and metals etc. 71

Al-Kindi was very much known in the west mainly because of his scientific works which were translated into Latin in the middle Ages: Tractates de Erroribus Philosophorum, De Quinque Essentiiis (matter, form, motion, space and time). 72 Moreover, his well known work on psychology, the Discourse on the Soul is a modification of the views of the Greek philosophers. He mainly focused on Aristotle’s Categories to prove that the soul is immaterial.

In his psychological work On Sleep and Dream, al-Kindi uses Aristotle’s theory of imagination to explain prophetic dreams. In his work on ethics, On Dispelling Sorrows, he tries to theorize his views relating it to psychology. We have to mention here that his contribution to our knowledge of cosmology is profound. He produced cosmological theories in two texts, On the Proximate Agent Cause of Generation and Corruption and On the Prostration of the Outermost Sphere. While these works are influenced by Aristotle, al-Kindi gave extensive attention to Greek scientific sources such as Ptolemy.

Al-Kindi was one of the first Arab thinkers who engaged himself in studying and commenting on Greek scientific and philosophical manuscript. First of all, he wrote books in epistemology and logic. A few years ago, a number of his treatises were found by Ritter in Istanbul which includes most of his philosophical works. 73 These treatises include his famous philosophical works On First Philosophy (Fil-Flasafa al-Ula) and On The Classification of Aristotle’s Works and On The Intellect. 74

71 Ibid, p. 422.
73 Edited in Abu Rida 1950 and 1953; several important texts are edited and translated in Rashed and Jolivet (1998)
In fact, *On First Philosophy's* version which is found in Istanbul is incomplete, comprising only of the first part, which is divided into four sections. The first section praises and honors Greek philosophical wisdom. The second section deals with the author’s deep involvement in the issue of the eternity of the world. His main engagement in the third and fourth sections is to assert the existence of the “true one” i.e. God, which is the source of unity in all other things. In this book, he appropriates various Aristotelian concepts and tries to incorporate them into a world which is shaped by Islam.

He laid the foundations of a new philosophy which was highly influenced by Aristotle (ca. 384-322 BCE) and Greek ideas. The influence of Aristotle and the Greeks could be traced in his work *Fi Kammiya kutub Aristutalis wa ma Yohtaju Ilaihi fi Tahsil al-Falsafa* (The Quantity of Aristotle’s Books and What is Required for the Acquisition of Philosophy) and in his philosophical treatise *Fi Wahdaniyat Allah wa Tunhiy Jism al-‘Alam* (On the Oneness of God and the Limitation of the Body of the World). In these works, he elaborated a system of thought which is based on the logic of Greek philosophy. Thereafter, he applied this logic to the issues of his time, such as creation, immortality, God’s knowledge and prophecy. Al-Kindi’s work, *Introduction to the Study of Aristotle* contains a chapter about the difference between prophetic and philosophical knowledge.

His important treatise *On Cause and Effect* was addressed to Al-Ma’mun which was an attempt to answer the existing theological questions. Then, another long treatise on causality, *Explanation of the Proximate Cause of Coming-to-be and Passing away*, shows Greek influence on al-Kindi.

Al-Kindi’s *On the intellect (Fi al-‘Aql)* is the first treatise to give a taxonomy of the types of intellect. It was translated into Latin by Gerard de Cremona. According to al-Kindi, no one can be a philosopher without studying mathematics. His philosophy, therefore, naturally, consists of mathematics and natural philosophy. He is highly influenced by neo-

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75 Ibid.
Phythagoreanism as well as neo-Platonism. He proved his philosophical theorem with the help of mathematics.

Another of al-Kindi’s book, *Fi Hududal-Ashya’ wa Rusumiha* (On the Definitions and Descriptions of Things), is an attempt to integrate Greek ideas into his own culture in a different way. In this treatise, he indicates the importance of having accurate philosophical terminology. He made a list of technical philosophical terms and definitions. But he faced problems in relation with his use of philosophical terms. This treatise was found in Istanbul as a manuscript which Abu-Rida edited and published in 1952 along with 23 other treatises by al-Kindi. But its authenticity has been doubted. Abu-Rida remarks in the introduction that handwriting of *On the Definitions* differed from the other treatises. But some Islamic philosophers view that the work certainly belongs to al-Kindi’s translation group.

**Al-Kindi and Mu’tazilites**

Al-Kindi’s relationship with mu’tazilite theologians is a matter of debate. The ninth century witnessed debates, in the Islamic world, on various theological matters. Looking back to al-Kindi’s period, Anouar Majid quotes al-Jabri, that “philosophy was never a luxury within Islamic society: it was in fact, ever since its birth, a militant ideological discourse. Abu Yusuf Ya’qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi (ca.800-870 CE), the first Aristotelian Muslim philosopher, was directly involved in the ideological conflict that existed during his lifetime between the Mu’tazilites, then representing the state’s ideology, on the one hand and the Gnostics and the “Sunnites” on the other.”

Although al-Kindi was not a part of the mu’tazilite group, there are several features in al-Kindi’s philosophic corpus that have led many scholars to assert that al-Kindi...
Al-Kindi’s treatise, dedicated to caliph al-Mu’tasim (ca.833-842 CE), *On First Philosophy* shows his affinity towards Mu’tazilites’ thought. He uses mu’tazilite type of exegesis and shares some of their beliefs. For example, this book begins with ostentatious dedication to God, the Merciful the Compassionate. My success is God alone.87

Richard Walzer presents in his article both the external and the internal evidences to support his argument of mu’tazilian orientation in Kindian philosophy. For external evidence, he cites the examples of some of al-Kindi’s works dedicated to Caliphs who supported the mu’tazila. His internal evidence relies upon a number of his treatises such as the *Introduction To the Study of Aristotle* which contains a very instructive chapter about the difference between prophetic and philosophical knowledge.88

Al-Kindi was guided by a sense of the reciprocal relationship between philosophy and theology. Moreover, Walzer writes

“Al-Kindi did not address a sophisticated audience which had been imbued with Greek philosophy for centuries. His intension was obviously to give a philosophical substructure to Muslim religious tradition, understood in the way in which the mu’tazilite theologians interpreted it”89.

His method of interpreting Qu’ran is very much similar to the mu’tazillates’ interpretation. Al-Kindi asserts the supremacy of the Qu’ran over philosophical reasoning.90 For al-Kindi, “his command, when he desires a thing, is to say to it ‘be’ and it is. (Quran, Surah, 36 verses 81). He strongly believes that the world was created from nothing. He interprets God’s pronouncement of the word “be”, in a metaphorical way, referring to an analogy to a poetic metaphor, as practiced by a pre Islamic poet.

87 Netton, Ian Richard, (1989) op. cit, p.54.
88 Walzer, Richard, (1962), op. cit, p.177.
89 Ibid, p.195
According to the Islamic scholar Dr. Adibah Abdul Rahim, al-Kindi’s view was inconsistent when he reconciles philosophy and religion. He put forward two different views: Initially he shared the view of logicians and put philosophy above religion. But later, he valued religion above philosophy and he considered religion as a divine science which can be revealed only to a prophetic faculty by God.

Al-Kindi’s thought is very similar to mu’tazilite in assessing the positive role of reason in the knowledge of good and evil. It made him put philosophy above religion, which has the role of endorsing a higher moral life of the Muslim. Adibah Abdul Rahim gives an example for this, by saying,

“His views that the final end of philosophy lies in its relation to morality. In this regard, the philosopher’s aim in philosophizing is both to know and to become wise, or to act justly. Knowledge and virtue are regarded as equal as important activities of reason. The implication of such a concept is to minimize the role of religion in all ethical obligations or, in other words, to assert the primacy of reason over revelation in matters of morality. It’s a humanistic attitude similar to that of the stoics and the mu’tazilites.”

But the famous Kindian scholar Ivry differs from Walzer’s assertion of mu’tazilite Kindi. The former believes that the evidence put forward by the latter to assert Kindi’s mu’tazilite influence would be an ‘unwarranted inference.’ According to Ivry, the given circumstances can only be indirectly interpreted as a possible basis for mu’tazilite influence in his thought. However, it cannot be construed as real evidence to prove that Kindi can be said to be ‘mu’tazilite Kindi’, just because some of his treatises were dedicated to powerful caliphate patrons. Ivry says,

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92 Ibid.

93 Ivry Alfred L, (1976) op. cit, p.70.

"It would be, moreover, have been gratuitously poor tastes for him not to dedicate at least some treatises to his patrons. That Al-Kindi was not an opponent of the caliphs may indeed be deduced from these dedications and from all we know of his life; yet that he espoused Mu’tazila doctrine in any significant way is an unwarranted inference from this particular source."  

While criticizing Walzer’s attempt to reduce Kindi’s thought in mu’tazilite doctrine, Ivry says, “on the other hand, then similarities with al-Kindi’s thoughts are not limited to the Mu’tazila; while on the other, his differences with the mu’tazila, philosophical and otherwise are real and significant”. He substantiates it further by saying that al-Kindi didn’t believe the mu’tazilite doctrine that the world is divided into atoms and accidents.

Ivry says

“Now al-Kindi has no sympathy with an atomistic physics and apparently no taste for rationalizing theological dogma beyond the most basic beliefs, the once most amenable to philosophical inquiry. Where he does touch on a typical theological issue, such as the subject of divine attributes, he does so in the most general of terms, avoiding the Kalam type discussion of the corporeal attributes found in the Qur’an. It would seem that al-Kindi’s point of reference, his total perspective, is essentially different from the mu’tazila”. 

Ivry asserts his argument against the view of a mu’tazilite Kindi by quoting from On First Philosophy, as al-Kindi says:

“(we must) be on guard against the evil of the interpretation of many in our time who have made a name for themselves with speculation, people who are estranged from the truth. They crown themselves undeservedly with the crown of truth, because of narrowness of their understanding of the ways of truth....(and) because of the filth of the envy that has mastered their bestial
souls, whose veil of darkness cloaks the vision of their thought from the light of truth."\textsuperscript{99}

Ivry has suggested that while accusing of "trafficking in religion" Al-Kindi had mu‘tazila in mind. Referring to the usages "speculation" (nazar), "opinion" (ra‘a) and "judgment" (ijtihad) Ivry states, mu‘tazzilates are identified with these terms and al-Kindi attacks their method of reasoning. According to Ivry when first philosophy was written mu‘tazzilates were enjoying the position of power and they used their political office to enforce their beliefs by threat.\textsuperscript{100}

But Peter Adamson differs from Ivry’s views and says it is very difficult to identify these opponents with mu‘tazila generally. According to the former’s opinion, the idea of mu‘tazilite “school” is somewhat outdated in this context. In fact, the middle of the ninth century saw a number of Kalam theologians having differences and serious contradictions inherent in their theological arguments and they competing each other only within Kalam and it was only later that they realized the differences between them were so minor that they can group all of them under a single mu‘tazilite direction. Moreover, Adamson suspects the people those who has been criticised by al-Kindi in this passage is more likely to be traditionalists like Ibn-Hambal and his supporters. From this passage Adamson feels one can’t infer that Kindi’s opponents are influential theologians but only that they are enemies to Greek philosophical thought. When we read Al-Kindi as trying to refute those philosophers who believe that “knowledge of things in their true natures” is possible, it paves the evidence for Adamson’s suspicion that Al-Kindi’s intention was to attack traditionalists.\textsuperscript{101}

To establish his argument, Al-Kindi’s criticism doesn’t aim at mu‘tazila, Adamson quotes Al-Kindi’s rhetorically charged passage from On First Philosophy:

“We beseech him who can see into our heart- who knows our efforts towards establishing a proof of His divinity, making manifest His oneness, driving

\textsuperscript{99} Adamson, Peter, (2007), op. cit, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{100} Ivry, Alfred L (1974) op. cit, p. 33.
away those who stubbornly resist Him and do not believe in Him by using proofs that refute their unbelief and tear aside the veils of their shamefulness and declare openly the deficiencies of their destructive creed-to protect us and whoever follows our path with the fortification of his unceasing might, to dress us in the armor of his preserving shelter and hand us the aid of the edge of His piercing sword, and support through the might of His victorious strength, so that He may thereby let us reach the end of our intention in aiding the truth and supporting the what is right, and so that He may thereby let us reach the degree of those whose intention pleasing to Him, those whose action He approves, and those who He gives triumph and victory over His opponents who do not believe in His grace, and who contravene the path of truth that is pleasing to Him.102

In this passage Al-Kindi clearly delineates the importance of philosophy, in defending the main tenets of Islam: God's oneness and divinity. He argues that while philosophy has a say in the knowledge of these truths, the effort of traditionalists to reject the use of philosophy in supporting the arguments of Islam, will help the unbelievers (kafirs). In fact, On First Philosophy, al-Kindi attempts to use philosophy to establish the fundamental Islamic theological tenets, though he mainly focused in this treatise to prove God’s existence and Oneness through philosophical argument. Moreover, Al-Kindi uses ‘negative understanding of divine attributes’ as an argument which is a position linked with none other than the Mu’tazila.103

Peter Adamson put this evidence to prove that al-Kindi’s criticism here is not directed against the practice of mu’tazilite speculative theology. Peter Adamson concludes this,

“His aims and even his ultimate doctrines are like those of mu’tazila; it is only Greek materials on which he draws that distinguishes on which he draws that distinguishes his project from theirs. His quarrel, then, is with any theologian

103 Ibid, pp 24-25.  

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(or, presumably, anyone at all) who wishes to deny the utility of Greek Philosophical texts for supporting positions within Muslim theology.”

The above cited different opinions from these thinkers have been given proof that there is wide range of views regarding al-Kindi. In the end, we can say that though, it would be risky to claim al-Kindi as a complete mu’tazilite he did give a philosophical method to some of their basic tenets. However, one can safely say that al-Kindi has had partial influence on some of the mu’tazilites tenets.

**Neoplatonic Tenets in Al-Kindi**

Al-Kindi’s philosophical thought was largely influenced by the Neoplatonic philosophical notion of Plotinus, Proclus and John Philoponus. During al-Kindi’s period there was an anonymous Neoplatonic work called *Theologica Aristotelis* which was the most important source of Neoplatonism for early Islamic scholars. This work was paraphrased from the fourth, fifth and sixth *enneads* of Plotinus. Al-Kindi wrote a commentary on it which was a bridge to the thought of philosophers such as al-Farabi and ibn Sinawhose numerous short writings suggest his significant role in spreading Neo Platonic ideas among the Muslims.

Moreover, in his famous book *On First Philosophy*, Al-Kindi attempts to merge Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian ideas in his coherent philosophical vision.

In fact, it is beyond dispute that, al-Kindi has moulded his thought through a free environment saturated by Neoplatonic ideas. However, some scholars have interpreted the impact of the Neoplatonic system in al-Kindi’s doctrine as somewhat confined within strictly defined limits. These scholars have cited some examples that show al-Kindi didn’t follow throughout the substantial doctrine of Neoplatonism and its founder Plotinus.

Al-Kindi rejected the ontological concept of Neoplatonism even though he used to shape his own doctrine of the ineffable One. And such scholars mention that al-Kindi has taken only a very few ideas which are important, from Plotinus *Enneads* via his

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104 Ibid, p.25.
paraphrase *Theologia Aristotlies*. In the view of these scholars al-Kindi is a Neoplatonist only in a limited way.\(^{106}\) According to Netton, these kinds of remarks do not have a rational base. Moreover it leads the casual readers to assume that the element of Neo-Platonic tenets in Al-Kindi’s work is completely negligible.\(^ {107}\) Even though, he is not a thorough-going Neo-Platonist like al- Farabi and ibn Sina, al-Kindi has more than a little vestige of Neoplatonism in his theological thought. Certainly, these Neoplatonic features in al-Kindi need a detailed investigation here.

Thus, we can see that through his famous book *On First Philosophy*, al-Kindi uses a Neoplatonic pattern to define God in purely negative terms as the First One, the true One (*al-Wahidul Haq*), the creator and the sustainer of all that which he created. While trying to explain the use of negative epithets used by him, Netton quotes al-Kindi’s passages from *On First Philosophy*, Kindi wrote:

> “the True one (*al-Wahid al-Haqq*) is not an intelligible thing (*laysa huwa shay’ min al-ma’qulat*), nor matter (*‘unsur*) nor a genus (*jins*) nor a species (*naw’*) nor an individual (*shaks*) nor a difference (*fasl*) nor a property (*khassa*) nor a general accident (*‘arad amm*) nor a movement nor a soul nor an intellect. [It is] neither a whole nor a part, [nor can it be described by the terms] ‘all’ or ‘some’. It is not [characterized as] One because of [its] relation to something else. No! it is absolutely One and does not accept multiplication…Thus the True One does not have any matter (*hayulaa*) nor form (*sura*) nor quantity (*kammiyya*) nor modality (*kafiyya*) nor relation (*idafa*). It cannot be described by any of the intelligible things which remain, and it possesses neither genus nor difference nor individual nor property nor general accident nor movement. It cannot be described by anything which is not actually considered to be one. It is therefore simply pure unity (*wahda*), i.e. it is nothing but unity while every other one is [characterized by] multiplicity.”\(^ {108}\)

\(^{107}\) Ibid, p.59.  
\(^{108}\) Ibid, p.60.
In this significant passage al-Kindi uses negative terms in a more rigid and consistent Neoplatonic pattern than later philosophers from al-Farabi to Averroes, who combined the Aristotelian concept of God as the supreme mind with the Neoplatonic God who had Negative attributes.\(^{109}\) We can find that these five negative terms are very much present in Porphyry and al-Kindi added one more term that is *individual* (*ashaks*). The same tradition of negative attributes goes back to the Albinus, Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius John of Damascus and others before Islam. The mutakallimun and their successors in eighth and ninth century continued to follow this tradition in various ways and it is also found in the mu’tazilite scholars al-Nazzam and Abu-Hudhayl who uses similar arguments to those used by al-Kindi. Unlike his contemporaries, al-Kindi has a different philosophical approach to issues and he proceeds to refer to a relation of the One to the world via emanation.\(^{110}\) Al-Kindi wrote in *On First Philosophy* that “it is, accordingly, pure and simple unity, i.e., (having) nothing other than Unity, while every other one is multiple.”\(^{111}\) In this passage, al-Kindi describes the true One with the term “pure” (*mahd*) which is found in the Arabic paraphrase of Proclus’ *Element* of theology.\(^{112}\)

In fact, this negative nature of al-Kindi in his above mentioned passage is comparable to the passage to be found in Plotinus’ *Enneads*. Here, Plotinus tries to establish his Concept of *The One* by rejecting all determination and prediction, which is attributed to his creatures, in the fear of compromising its unity.\(^{113}\) Netton quotes Plotinus Passage from *Enneads*:

> “Thus the one is in true beyond all statement: any affirmation is of a thing: but all transcending, resting above even the most august divine mind” - this is the only true description, since it does not make it a thing among things, nor name it where no name could identify it…. We do not, it is true, grasp it by knowledge, but that does not mean that we are utterly void of it; we hold it not

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\(^{111}\) Ibid, p.112.

\(^{112}\) Ibid, p.187.

so as to state it, but so as to be able to speak about it. *And we can and do state what it is not, while we are silent as to what it is...* \(^{114}\)

Apart from the negative side of the Deity, Plotinus stressed on the positive side too. He asserts the True One as The supreme Good, which is responsible for all the existence of the universe and that everything has the presence of his goodness. According to Netton, this kind of Positive nature of God can be compared with the Al-Kindi’s attempts to establish God’s absolute unity. In fact, neither of them avoided explaining in the negative epithets of God but they also dealt with the Positive aspects too. \(^{115}\)

While analyzing various influences on al-Kindi’s thought, Alfred Ivry quotes from his own translated version of al-Kindi’s treatise *On First Philosophy*:

“indeed the human art which is highest in degree and the most noble in rank is the art of philosophy, the definition of which is knowledge of the true nature of things, insofar as possible for man. The aim of the philosopher is, as regards his knowledge to attain the truth, and as regards his action, to act truthfully; not that the activity is endless, for we abstain and the activity ceases, once we have reached the truth. We do not find the truth we are seeking without finding a cause; the cause of the existence continuance of everything is the True One, in that each thing which has being has truth. The True one exist necessarily, and therefore being exist./ The noblest part of philosophy and the highest in rank is the First Philosophy, i.e., knowledge of the First Truth who is the cause of all truth.” \(^{116}\)

In this above given passage, al-Kindi uses some remarks which are used by the Neoplatonists. Mainly, he asserts that the theoretical aim of the philosopher is to attain the truth which is “the first truth who is the cause of all truth.” This remark resembles the Neoplatonic scheme of a single source for all being. It is possible to assume from the above

\(^{114}\) Ibid, p. 61.
\(^{115}\) Ibid
given passage that all beings are obliged to their existence to the necessary existence of the True one. Here while mentioning the ultimate identity in God’s nature, al-Kindi is trying to prove that it is God’s nature which is responsible for the particular happenings and occurrences in the world.\textsuperscript{117}

In fact, there is no doubt that al-Kindi’s involved with the Neoplatonic pattern, as he had used the term “Cause” in the above mentioned quotation. Moreover, in that passage, al-Kindi stresses on the four causes; “material”, “formal”, “efficient” and “final”. While using this Aristotelian pattern, al-Kindi states that “every cause has one or the other of these.”\textsuperscript{118} Ivry says: “this, however, apparently means every cause except for the “first cause” which contains all the others and is pre-eminent in everything.”\textsuperscript{119}

Plotinus perceives that all beings restricted in their essence and forms except The One that is beyond being. The same view is also followed by the Neoplatonic thinkers who immediately preceded him. Moreover, the same concept reverberates in al-Kindi’s view that the God is the Source of all being and God cannot be described as a substance. But, it is also clear that the similarities between the concept of al-Kindi’s True One and Plotinus’ One face rupture when the former does not pursue the logical conclusion of emanation.\textsuperscript{120}

We need to mention here that in the emanation scheme of Plotinus, he put forward the theory of a chain of three eternal hypostases of the One, where there is the intellect and soul which is subordinate to the One. According to him, the Intellect emanated from the One and the Soul emanated from the Intellect. The material universe and the other occurrences of the world then followed. Netton quotes Plotinus to illustrate the concept of cosmos coming into being, as follows: “the soul first laid aside its eternity and clothed itself with the time; this world of its fashioning it then gave over to be a servant of the Time…”\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, p.12.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, p.13.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid
\textsuperscript{120} Netton, Ian Richard, (1989), op. cit, pp. 61-62.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, p.62.
Moreover, Plotinus perceives here that the Soul come into the time and participates in the creation of the world.122

Plotinus compares the emanation process to the Sunlight which emanates from the Sun. According to him the One did not will the Creation but it is the subordinate hypostasis intellect and Soul which played the main role in such kind of activities. Moreover, Plotinus describes briefly that the Soul as the maker, acting in the material and corporeal world with what it receives from the intellect.123

Certainly, when we compare The One of Plotinus with the Deity of Islam, there is sure to be some fundamental question raised on the Omnipotence of the God. The Soul and the intellect taking the major part of the responsibilities of Creation challenges the monotheist concept of Islam in which the Deity as a creator is the omnipotent.

Unlike Plotinus, the concept of Creation in al-Kindi is entirely different; it is the God alone who creates everything, not a universal soul. The Deity produces the Souls with its will without the help of any intermediate hypostasis such as Intellect. Moreover, for al-Kindi, the God, the eternal, rules out the eternal coexistence of Intellect and Soul.124 Al-Kindi says:

"The eternal is that which must never have been a nonexistent being, the eternal having no existential "before" to its being; the eternal’s subsistence is not due to another; the eternal has no cause; the eternal has neither subject nor predicate, nor agent nor reason, i.e.,"125

Certainly, one can see that al-Kindi has Neoplatonic influences in the way he uses the Intellect and the Soul in his writings. In his treatise On the Intellect, al-Kindi divides "universal intellect" into "Universal" and "particular" universal intellect. In some sentences, al-Kindi tries to speak of the individual as an intelligible object. Moreover, he asserts the

123 Ibid, p.63.
124 Ibid, p.64.
ontological relationship between the particular and the Universal while using the expressions "species of individuals" and "individuals of species." Thus he describes his view of the relation of the sensory to an intellectual perception. In fact, it is clear that al-Kindi has Neo-Platonic influences in the way he has arranged the order of the Intellect and Soul in his writings. For example, he assumes that man's intellect derives from the First intellect but he doesn't follow the exact structure of the Neo-Platonic scheme in this matter. Netton says, "The first intellect is not God; what is less clear is the precise degree to which it should be identified with some kind of universal intellect." 

Al-Kindi's handling of the Universal soul is very much rooted in Plotinus' Enneads. In his treatise Al-Kindi takes the idea from the Enneads. Taher quotes al-Kindi,

"The soul, he says is a 'simple entity and its substance emanates from the Creator just as the rays emanate from the sun. It is spiritual and of divine substance and is separate and distinct from the body. When it is separated from the body, it obtains the knowledge of everything in the world and has the vision of the supernatural. After its separation from the body, it goes to the world of the intellect, returns to the light of the creator and sees Him." 

In this passage al-Kindi brings the idea of emanation of the soul as a simple (basita) entity in character and he compares its substance which emanates from the Creator as rays emanating from the Sun. Since al-Kindi doesn't see any need of intermediate hypostasis, he uses Neo-Platonic image to assert his non-Neo-Platonic doctrine.

Al-Kindi's Concept of Being

Before I examine his concept of being, it may be helpful for us to look at the terminology used for "being" by him and his translators. There are three terms we find in the different sources used to mean being: anniyya, huwiyya and ays. The former two terms are

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127 Netton, Ian Richard, (1989), op. cit, p.64.
128 Taher, Mohamed, Encyclopedic Survey of Islamic culture, pp. 64-65.
129 Netton, Ian Richard, (1989), op. cit, p. 64.
used as synonyms of the Greek onta, “beings”. Al-Kindi carried out these terminological features in his own treatises so that huwyya and anniyya seem to be accepted technical terms for the Greek einai (to be or exist) and on. The term ays is more unusual and al-Kindi through his own accord splits the Arabic term laysa (not being). Here la means “not” and ays refers to being.  

Al-Kindi was the first Arabic self-conscious ‘philosopher’ thinker. For him, the study of ‘being qua being’ was central to his own understanding and indeed central to an adequate philosophical understanding of God.  

According to Adamson, al-Kindi has two competing conceptions of being. The first is the ‘simple being’-where being is opposed to predication. And second, a complex being, borrowed heavily from Aristotle’s concept of matter. Adamson goes on to further argue that al-Kindi’s first conception of ‘simple being’ is a precursor to ibn Sina’s distinction between existence and essence, but only to a limited extent.  

Adamson makes use of the following thought experiment found in Liber De Causis to delineate Kindi’s simple being:

“We give as an example of this being, living and man, because it must be that the thing is first being, then living and then man. Living is the proximate cause of the man, and being is its remote cause. Thus being is more a cause for the man than living, because being is the cause for living, which is the cause of the man. Likewise, when you posit rationality as cause of the man, being is more a cause for man than rationality, because it is the cause of its cause.”

Thus when we strip this away all the attributes of a subject, what remains is the “anniyya faqat”-“only a being” or “being alone”.

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131 Ibid, pp. 228-229.
132 Ibid, p.300.
Thus anniyya faqat refers to a pure being, when all sifat (attributes) have been removed. In fact this ‘anniyya faqat’ is equated with God in the Arabic Plotinus. And this may be contrasted with Plato’s epokeina tes ousias, “the One who is beyond being” and to Aristotle’s claim in metaphysics that God is pure actuality. While later writers like Ibn Sinaand Thomas Aquinas have explicitly adopted the Aristotelian standpoint that God is pure actuality, al-Kindi often refers to God as ‘being alone’, putting the emphasis rather on God’s lack of attributes. This concern with simplicity and exclusion of attributes is related to the contemporaneous debates over divine attributes at that time. Kindi asserts that God’s unity excludes the multiplicity of the attributes:

“The True One is not one of the intelligible things, and is neither mater, genus, species, individual, specific differences property, common accident, motion, soul, intellect, whole, part, all or some. It is also not one in relation to any one else, but is an absolute one, neither augmentable, /composed (nor) multiple.”

In a way, al-Kindi was trying to make the point that God was ‘being alone’, and consequently lacking in attributes but His being alone was not just at par with any other attribute, but this being alone-or simple being- is (not an attribute) but prior to all other attributes. This simple being i.e. God is the first cause of all derivatives-the created things which gave attributes.

In fact the simple being of a created thing is the direct effect of God. For, this is what creation amounts to: the bestowal of the simple being upon which the created thing’s complexity is founded. As the liber De Causes notes, “the first of the originated thing is being” and that created being then “receives multiplicity.”

It is observed by scholars that the usage of anniyya in Kindi’s circle has produced different meanings and interpretations; as we have already seen, one is for existence,

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133 Ibid, p. 301.
and the other *anniyya* can be referred to explain the actual nature of essence of a thing. The complex conception of being can be traced from al-Kindi’s passage quoted by Adamson:

“Body is not prior to time, so it is not possible that the body of the universe have no limit, because of its being ((li-anniyyatihi). So the being (*anniyya*) of the body of the universe is necessarily limited.”

In this passage, al-Kindi explicitly explains that the *anniyya* of the body of the universe becomes the causes of its finite existence. Here it is clear that Kindi meant *anniyya* as nature or essence.

**Al-Kindi on Creation**

Even though al-Kindi wrote so many treatises on God and Creation, there were two important treatises inevitably stood for the specific subjects. The treatises were *On Fist philosophy* and *On the Unity of the God and the Finitude of The Body of The Universe*. Although al-Kindi reveals his influence of the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian pattern in various metaphysical subjects, he tries to come up with his own unique conclusions rooted in Islamic principles.

On the philosophical issue of the eternity of the world, al-Kindi opposes strongly the Aristotelian metaphysics. For Aristotle, the world is eternal and its motion and time are also eternal. Aristotle contradicts himself in his argument by saying that infinity can not exist in actuality and at the same time he stated that the actual existent world is eternal and therefore is infinite. al-Kindi’s mathematical foundation reflects the independence of his philosophical reasoning and it gives him a strong identity in his thought.

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He strongly supported the theory of "creation out of nothing" (Creatio Ex Nihilo). Hence, he believes that God was the only creator of the universe and He created out of nothing.\textsuperscript{140}

According to Al-Allaf, Kindi's philosophical notion that the world is eternal is clearly emphasized in the following themes stated by al-Kindi:

A- "The world is created.
B- The world is created from nothing.
C- Allah is the creator of this world.
D- Allah created the world in time (at a specific time), thus the world has a beginning in time.
E- Allah created the world in time by his will.
F- The world not only has a beginning in time, but also will have an end in time, and that end is based on the will of its creator to end it."\textsuperscript{141}

Al-Kindi perceives that the world must have been created because it has a finite body that has motion like human beings, animal, plants all of which seem to have been created in time and they will have to have a definite end. Kevin Staley says that al-Kindi attempts to establish the notion of creation in time and its non-eternity in the following premises.

"1) all that is quantitative (which includes body, time and motion) is finite. 2) But time is the measure of the being of the body of the universe. 3) Therefore, the universe is of finite duration, that is to say, it must have a temporal beginning with regard to its very existence. 4) But the body of the universe cannot have been the cause of its own existence. 5) Therefore, it has been caused to exist by another, in time and from nothing."\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{140} Naseem, Hamid, (2001), Muslim Philosophy, Science and Mysticism, New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, pp. 48-49.
It is very important here to notice that there are three crucial premises in al-Kindi’s arguments. The first one is how he proves that time is quantitatively finite and the second one here is that his attempt to prove that time is not only the measure of the part of the universe but also covers the total measure of the universe. His final argument in these important premises is that the universe cannot have been the causes of its own.\textsuperscript{143}

In the first premise, al-Kindi tries to verify that the eternity of the world is impossible since it is subjected to finite quantity. He says “it is not possible either for an eternal body or for other objects which have quantity or quality to be infinite in actuality, infinite being only in potentiality.”\textsuperscript{144}

In his treatise \textit{On First Philosophy}, al-Kindi demonstrates the non- eternity of the world through the impossibility of an infinite bodily magnitude. Al-Kindi tries to prove this by using the technique \textit{reductio ad absurdum}.\textsuperscript{145} And his reduction technique requires us to make a supposition.

So let us suppose that a finite magnitude-let us call it ‘B’-is subtracted from an infinite body ‘A’, then the remainder ‘C’ will be either finite or infinite. Al-Kindi says, “If there is an infinite body, then whenever a body of finite magnitude is separated from it, that which remains of it will either be a finite or infinite magnitude.”\textsuperscript{146}

(i) But if ‘C’ and ‘B’ are added then we must get ‘A’. But since we already know that ‘B’ is finite and now we assume ‘C’ is finite, then ‘A’ which now the sum of two finite things (B&C) must be finite. So this shows that ‘A’ cannot exists as infinity.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Al-Kindi, (1974), op. cit, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{145} “In the most general construal, \textit{reductio ad absurdum}-\textit{reductio} -for short-is a process of refutation on grounds that absurd-and patently untenable consequences would ensue from accepting the item at issue. This takes three principal forms according as an untenable consequence is: a) self contradiction (\textit{ad absurdum}), b) a falsehood (\textit{ad falsum} or even \textit{ad impossibile}), c) an implausibility or anomaly (\textit{ad ridiculum} or \textit{ad in commodum}). The first of these is reduction ad absurdum in its strictest construction and the other two cases involve a rather wider and looser sense of the term.” – article Nicholas Rescher’s \textit{Reductio ad Absurdum}, See- Rescher, Nicholas, (2002) Reductio Absurdum, \textit{Internet encyclopedia of philosophy}, URL: http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/reductio.htm.
\textsuperscript{146} Al-Kindi, (1974), op. cit, p. 68.
(ii) And if 'C' were finite, and if 'B' were to be added to it, then 'B+C' must be greater than 'C', then 'C' is only a portion of 'B+C'. And whatever is a portion of another cannot be infinite. So, in the beginning of the sentence (ii) 'C' cannot be infinite as that is a self-contradiction as comparison with 'B+C' now shows. 147

In his second premise, al-Kindi deals with time. He was generally affected by Aristotle's argument and he accepted the pattern of Aristotle's argument on time that time is the number of motion. 148 However, he puts forward his own philosophical conclusion to defend the Qur'anic principle that Allah created the world, and that the material world is finite. To establish this argument al-Kindi has to assert that the finite world coexists with finite time and motion.

As I mentioned, according to Al-Kindi, time is the measure of motion and therefore time never exists without motion and vice versa. He perceives that the universe as a whole began in time. 149 Al-Kindi says:

"nor is there any body without time, as time is but the number of motion, i.e., it is a duration counted by motion. If there is motion there is time; and if there were not motion, there would be no time." 150

As a result, he tries to emphasize that if body never exists without motion then body never exists without time. And moreover, time remains co-extensive of the whole universe. 151

For al-Kindi, motion is motion of body so that motion in no way exists without a body. Here, al-Kindi begins his argument with a supposition just opposite to that of his intended conclusion. Al-Kindi says:

147 Staley, Kevin, (1989), op. cit, p.359.
"If there is a body, then there must of necessity either be motion or not be motion. If there is a body and there was no motion at all, then either there would be no motion at all, or it would not be, though it would be possible for it to be. If there were no motion at all, then motion would not be an existent. However, since body exists, motion is an existent and this is an impossible contradiction and it is not possible for there to be no motion at all, if a body exists. If furthermore, when there is an existing body, it is possible that there is existing motion, then motion necessarily exists in some bodies, for that which is possible is that which exists in some possessors of its substance: as the (art of) writing which may be affirmed as a possibility for Muhammad, though it is not in him in actuality since it does exist in some human substance, i.e., in another man. Motion therefore, necessarily exists in some bodies, and exists in simple body, existing necessarily in simple body; accordingly body exists and motion exists.

Now it has been said that there may not be motion when a body exists. Accordingly, there will be motion when body exists, and there will not be motion when body exists and this is an absurdity and an impossible contradiction, and it is not possible for there to be body and not motion; thus, when there is a body there is a motion necessarily"152

In this passage, al-Kindi has structured his argument on motion based on these two possibilities: the first one is that the body exists with motion, and the second one is that the body exists with no motion. Certainly, in this first possibility, al-Kindi believes that when a body exists there is a necessity that it has to exist with motion. And he explains that going from non-existence to existence is motion. Now if we take the second possibility that a body exists with no motion, then it requires further clarification that: a) either there would be no motion at all, or b) it would not be, though it would be possible for it to be. He refutes (A) (the possibility that the body exists and there is no motion at all). Then he explains when a body exists, motion is an existence too and motion is predicated to a finite body. So that motion is

also subjected to finiteness. Therefore, al-Kindi asserts the impossibility of a body's existence without motion.153

Al-Kindi argues the supposition B (motion would not be, though it would be possible for it to be) is also false. For him, if a body exists motion necessarily exists. In the above given passage he tries to explain his argument by giving an example that the writing ability in Muhammad is affirmed as a possibility because it exists in some human substance in actuality, i.e. in another man.154 While describing al-Kindi’s argument Mashhad Al-Allaf says:

“motion, therefore, necessarily exists in some bodies, and exists in the whole body, therefore motion exists necessarily in the whole body; accordingly a body exists and motion exists. Therefore it is impossible for a body to exist and motion not to exist.”155 That’s why Al-Kindi says “when there is a body there is a motion necessarily.”156

It goes without saying that al-Kindi is asserting the actual finite quantitative body has not only a finite motion but also body and motion, which simultaneously co-exist.157 Al-Kindi has no intention to stop here and he goes further to explain certain difficulties related to motion and matter.

In the second argument, al-Kindi deals with the assumption that the universe is originally at rest and only then moves. He says: “It is sometimes assumed that it is possible for the body of the universe to have been at the rest originally, having the possibility to move, and then to have moved”158 Al-Kindi proves this opinion is false by posing another disjunction: his argument is “if the body of the universe was at rest originally and then moved, then (either) the body of the universe would have to be a generation from nothing or eternal.”159 But al-Kindi refutes the argument that the universe is a generation from nothing.

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153 Al-Allaf, Mashhad (2003), op. cit, pp. 58-59.
155 Al-Allaf, Mashhad (2003), op. cit, pp. 59-60.
157 Al-Allaf, Mashhad (2003), op. cit, p. 60.
159 Ibid, p.72.
and he says that if the universe is a generation from nothing, it will exist only with motion; according to him creation itself is a kind of motion.

On the other hand, al-Kindi finds the argument to be inadmissible that the world is eternal having rested from a state of motion. He supposes "if the body of the universe is eternal, having rested and then moved....then the body of the universe which is eternal, will have moved from actual rest to the actual movement." Here, he disproves this supposition and asserts that since the eternal body does not move it is not possible that the body of the universe to be resting in actuality, and then to have passed into movement in actuality. He says "motion, therefore exists in the body of the universe which accordingly never prior to the motion," so he asserts that a motionless universe is impossible. Al-Kindi puts forward a third argument for this premise that the universe is in motion, therefore it should not have proceeded by motion and its motion belongs to body by nature.

These previous arguments strengthen his conclusion that the world has had a beginning in time. According to al-Kindi time, motion, and body are concomitant to each other. And among these three, nothing can be prior to one another thus everything occurs simultaneously. Al-Kindi says:

"Time is not prior to motion; nor, of necessary is time prior to body there is; nor, of necessity, is time prior to body, since there is no time other than through motion, and since there is no body unless there is motion and no motion unless there is body. Nor does body exist without duration, since duration is that in which its being is, i.e., that in which there is that which it is; and there is no duration of body unless there is no motion, since body always occurs with motion, and has been explained. The motion of the body counts the duration of

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161 Al-Kindi says "if the generation from nothing, the coming to be of being from nothing being Generation, then its becoming is motion." (On First Philosophy. 72). Here Al-Kindi assumes that the creation is a kind of motion and generation itself is a kind of motion. see Staley Kevin, (1989) op cit. p. 363.
163 Ibid, p.72.
the body, which is always a concomitant of the body. Body, therefore, is never prior to time; and thus body, motion and time are never prior to one another. 165

Kindi tries to establish that time and motion are of limited duration of changes which means that the body of the universe is also of limited duration of changes. 166 Here we could understand that in his conclusion, al-Kindi wants to prove that the universe has a beginning in time. 167 And body and motion are finite therefore they are not eternal and they will perish at a certain time. But it does not mean that world was created by God; it only has a beginning in time. This means that al-Kindi must prove through other arguments that the creation of the world was through the existence of God.

In the third premise, al-Kindi proves that the universe cannot be the cause of its own essence and its existence is caused by something else other than itself: God. 168 Al-Kindi’s argument is based on four types of possibilities: 1) a thing is nonexistent and its essence is nonexistent, 2) a thing is nonexistent and its essence is existent, 3) a thing exists but its essence is non-existent, 4) a thing exists and its essence is existent. 169 The first is impossible since thing and essence does not exist; in this case once cannot be the cause or effect of the other. The proof applied here is that “nothing” cannot be the cause or effect of a thing. In the second case it is impossible as al-Kindi brings another proof based on the law of identity. When a thing is non-existent and its essence is existent, it’s non-identical: According to the law of identity it’s impossible for one to exist without the other. The third alternative is also impossible for the same reason. On the fourth argument al-Kindi supposes that if a thing and its essence exist, then the same thing cannot be the cause of itself. Therefore it’s clear that something cannot be the cause of its generation of its essence. 170 In fact, al-Kindi concludes

166 Al-Kindi says “Through motion there is time, since motion is change; change is the number of the duration of that which changes, and motion is a counting of the duration of that which changes, see- Al-Kindi, (1974), op. cit. p 73.
168 Al-Allaf, Mashhad (2003), op. cit, p.73.
170 Al-Allaf, Mashhad (2003), op. cit, pp.74-75.
here that the world cannot be a cause of the existence of its own essence and that its cause of existence is Allah who created the world in time.\textsuperscript{171}

Now let me try to trace Kindi’s slight deviation from Neoplatonic thought, Aristotelian thought as well as speculative theological thought, and his influence by them on the various matters regarding the creation of the universe. I have already mentioned that time, motion and bodies are necessarily finite in al-Kindi. This leads him to perceive that there must be a first cause, which is absolutely One, as combating with any other cause. Here, al-Kindi pursues the argument of later mutakallimun to assert the existence of God through the supposition of the impossibility of the eternity of the world.\textsuperscript{172} The famous Islamic philosophy scholar Joseph Kenny says “while mutakallimun based their argument on the temporal origin of all things, al-Kindi bases his argument on the impossibility of arriving at the present moment after crossing an infinite past time.”\textsuperscript{173}

Al-Kindi often agreed with Aristotle’s views but he strongly disagreed when it came to the matter of creation. Aristotle perceives God as a force that turned something with potential into reality. But al-Kindi’s open-mindedness helps him to challenge Aristotle’s views on this point and he strongly stands for the concept of creation out of nothing.\textsuperscript{174} Al-Kindi views the human creation as something passive therefore humanity acts just as God’s ‘agent.’ He challenges the Aristotelian concept of the ‘great causal chain of being’, in the fear of that the denial of total passivity might denigrate total power over creation.\textsuperscript{175}

\textbf{Al-Kindi on Causality}

Al-Kindi’s conception of causality is mostly dependent on Aristotle and is a bit modified by early Neo-Platonic doctrines. Following Aristotle’s material, formal, efficient and final causes, Al-Kindi makes out four categories of “Causes” which are “whether”, “what”, “which” and “why.” Eric Ormsby explains that “the “whether?” of something, is,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{171} Ibid, p.75.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Abound, Tony, (2006), op. cit, p. 19.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Ibid, p.50.
\item \textsuperscript{175} Lancaster, Irene, (2007), \textit{Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham ibn Ezra’s Introduction to Torah}, Routledge, p.66.
\end{itemize}
“does it exist”; the “what?” of something, is, “what it is”; the “which?” of a thing is, the specific category into which it falls; and the “why?” is the ultimate purpose of a thing.” 176

Aristotle’s concept of the God as the prime mover is portrayed as an unmoved cause of the universe. But, al-Kindi defines this Cause in terms of unity which is the ultimate cause of all existing things. According to him this unity is eternal and its unity is to be identified with its existence.177

Kindi perceives that the eternal is perfect and it is independent of any cause. The being of this eternal is simple, unique and changeless. Ivry quotes Kindi from his treatise On Definitions “the eternal is that which has never been non-existent; it does not require another for its subsistence, and that which does not require another for its subsistence has no cause, while that which has no cause endures forever” 178 Kindi’s notion is clearly indebted to John Philoponus’ view of God as the only ungenerated and uncaused and Philoponus rejected Aristotle’s doctrine of eternal world.179

Al-Kindi emphasizes that “the eternal has no cause; the eternal has neither subject nor predicated, nor agent not reason, ie. That for the sake of which it is for there are no causes other than one.”180 In this passage al-Kindi observes that eternal has no subject, predicate, agent and reason (محمول فعل، سبب، موضوع). These synonyms of causal terms are the physical correlation of the causation which is not associated with eternity, and therefore, he asserts that eternal is not caused.181

Despite the fact that, Kindi departed from Aristotle’s view that the world is eternal, he agreed with Aristotle that heavenly bodies and the basic elements of matter are “permanent”. It is ungenerated and imperishable. But al-Kindi clearly states that, they continue like this only until and unless God wills. Therefore, he assumes that the world is

176 Ormbsby, Eric, (2003), op. cit, Arabic Philosophy, p.115.
179 Ibid, p.144.
originally created and it can’t be taken as something which is not ultimately imperishable.
Thus, in his view, the world is being created and now, it’s “ungenerated”. Thus the distinction
is clear in al-Kindi’s terminology that he uses the term Azaliy simply for the eternal and the
objects that are.

These causes are themselves four ways of knowledge. The whole knowledge
system of Kindi in the Almighty is based upon the tenets of causality. He asserts that there has
to be a cause for any existence. He perceives that there are two realms of existence; the realm
of nature and the realm above nature. The first is the created world which is characterized by
movement and material, the latter is the divine realm which is characterized by immateriality
and immovability. According to Kindi, the material world is the subject of natural inquiry and
the divine realm is the subject of metaphysics or the study of first causes.182

For al-Kindi, the series of causes are finite and therefore, there is a ‘true’ or
‘prime’ cause which is God, which always remains infinite. This can be traced along the
trajectory of Aristotle who takes the catalyst of causes as material, formal, efficient or the
final. This kind of philosophy taken into a nutshell proves God to be the efficient cause or the
sole progenitor of action.183

Taking into account the path of efficient causes, it can be compartmentalized
into a significant cause that is the efficient cause and its action is creation from nothing, taken
as ibda. The other causes are intermediate; that is, they are the outcome of other causes. They,
thus become the effects of the other causes and the causes of the other effects. In analogical
terms, this can be taken as synonymous. In real sense they cannot be taken as true efficient
cause. Thus, the moment of God’s act is ever untraceable.184

Al-Kindi portraits God on the basis of three notions: Aristotelian, Neo-
Platonic and creationist which would assert the involvement of God in creation as efficient
cause, not just as a final cause. In his unorthodox interpretation of Aristotle, al-Kindi explains

182 Ibid, p.115.
Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical congress, p. 429.
184 Ibid
that God is an unmoved mover but at the same time God gives himself to his creation. This action of creation is defined by Kindi as "bringing being to be from non-being". Moreover al-Kindi brought the terminology *fayd*, 'emanation' in his treatises and he perceived that the God as *true agent* he acts on the world through intermediary causes.¹⁸⁵

Unlike later Neoplatonic philosophers like al-Farabi and ibn-Sina (who perceived that God has merely a passive role in the emanating orders), al-Kindi asserted that God is an active agent and the intermediate causes cannot act itself at all since these are the mere channels of God's Action. Thus, these intermediate causes are created by God and he acts through the chain of causes to create his production. As I indicated before, for al-Kindi, the true cause is God alone who acts without anything else acting upon him. Therefore he perceived the other thing as 'cause' only as a metaphor due to the reason of the action's dependency on the other's action. According to him, the heavenly bodies are the proximate causes of all changes of the seasons and the variety of weather.¹⁸⁶

Ancient philosophers perceived that the rational explanation of the sensible world is always essentially dependent on causal principles. According to them, everything in the sensible world is composed of the four material elements such as fire, air, water and earth. But, al-Kindi added a fifth element which is celestial world (*jalak*), which is the abode of efficient causes. This celestial sphere is not only different in its style of functioning but also in its nature. The classification of the fifth element is different from other four elements. For example, it is neither slow nor fast nor heavy nor light.¹⁸⁷

Al-Kindi opines that, since heavenly bodies are the causes of the life on earth, they become the cause of human being. Therefore, Kindi reasons that the heavenly bodies themselves are living and intelligent. Al-Kindi's cosmological determinism is indebted to the Greek commentators of Alexander of Alexandria who strongly believed that the heavenly bodies and their changes determine every event in this world. Accepting the principle of

cosmological determinism, Kindi strongly believed that emanation of the heavenly bodies from God and attributing them to human beings isn’t confined only to physical diversity but it can be extended to the level of intelligence as well. Moreover he added that everything that occurs to the human being comes from God’s will and can take it back anytime.

Al-Kindi’s belief that the celestial bodies have an inevitable influence over the terrestrial bodies was derived from Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* as well as Aristotle’s writing on natural philosophy. Al-Kindi’s treatises *De Radiis Stellarum* gives light to the concept of a world which is based on universal harmony. According to him, the function of this world is regulated by the emanating rays from the celestial bodies (planet and constellation). Anything in the terrestrial world is an effect of the celestial realm. From this perception he evolved his concept of magic. He asserts that since celestial bodies have influence on changing things in the terrestrial bodies, the magician who has knowledge about the condition of celestial world, will definitely have the full understanding about the lower world.

As Kindi applied his ‘theory of cosmological determinism’ in his perception on magic, he applied it to music too. His claim that the elementary world order represented in an astronomical model, gave a strong base to his notions of the music of the spheres. According to him, every thing in the elementary world is composed of them and depends on the disposition of the stars. Thus, the rays which are sent by the stars become the reason for this composition. There is amalgamation of different rays from different stars which bring diverse rays into a single one. This harmony becomes the causes of everything which is contained in the elementary world. Moreover, this celestial harmony promulgated by Kindi, has a definite musical component.

"His celestial harmony, although permeated by Al-Kindi’s radiation has an unequivocal musical component, however: the planets make sound, albeit it

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188 Ibid, p. 66.
cannot be heard, and the compound refraction of their rays is contingent not only upon their eccentric and epicyclical motion but also upon the zodiacal aspects, which in turn relate to each other according to musical relations.  

A subtle analysis is needed into Kindi’s compartmentalized causality. He brilliantly stratified into different categories the intellect and soul and made them intermediate causes. In his significant treatise *On Intellect*, Kindi presents a separate immaterial ‘First Intellect’ which is distinct from the human intellect and is not identified with God. Kindi perceives that the human intellect can’t make its potentiality into actuality without the help of the first intellect. Precisely, the first intellect is always thinking about the universals which make the human intellect think about a given universal concept. Al-Kindi gives the example of a wood itself which is potentially hot but it needs fire to become actually hot. This way, the potentially thinking human intellect needs a cause to make it actually think.

It is traceable from Al-Kindi’s treatises that the soul becomes related to the heavenly sphere after one’s death. He argued that the heavenly bodies must be alive since it is moving around the earth. Therefore, he perceives that the Stars possess rational souls which can be inferred from the Qur’anic verses that Heavens “prostrate themselves” or “bow down” before God.

From the philosophical point-of-view, one can understand Kindi’s assertion that the motions of the heavenly bodies are the instruments of God’s intervention in causation. Precisely, everything in the world is the effect of the heavenly bodies and heavenly bodies are the proximate cause which is made to move by the agent cause. At the same time, the true Agent (God) is the originative source of Action, who transfers this action through the proximate effect, the heaven, to the world which we live.

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191 Ibid, pp. 69-70.
193 Ibid, p.43.
194 Ibid, p. 44.