

## **A COMPARISON OF CLASSICAL AND MODERN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY: FROM AL-KINDI TO SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR**

**Adit Mohammad Aziz**

Institut Agama Islam Muhammadiyah Kotamobagu  
[aditmohammadaziz@iaimkotamobagu.ac.id](mailto:aditmohammadaziz@iaimkotamobagu.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

A comparison between classical and modern Islamic philosophy can be seen through the works and thoughts of two great intellectuals: Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Al-Kindi, as an icon of classical Islamic philosophy, is famous for his efforts to incorporate Greek philosophical thought into Islamic teachings, showing openness to knowledge from diverse civilisations. On the other hand, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a contemporary thinker, rejected the influence of modern secularism and materialism, emphasising the importance of maintaining the integrity of Islam's spiritual tradition. Although their approaches differ, both share a dedication to the propagation and maintenance of Islamic intellectual and spiritual values. This analysis illustrates how Islamic philosophy evolves in the face of the challenges of each age, remaining relevant and providing a rich perspective in understanding and dealing with the dynamics of the modern world.

**Keywords:** Comparison, Classical Islamic Philosophy, Modern, Al-Kindi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

### **Introduction**

Islamic philosophy is an integral part of Islamic civilisation that contributes significantly to the world's intellectual heritage. From the heyday of Islam to the modern era, Islamic philosophy has undergone profound transformations, covering various aspects including metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics (Daghistani, 2022).

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that examines the nature of reality, existence, and entities. The main focus of metaphysics includes the question of what exists and what it means to be. It seeks to understand the basic properties of anything, such as space, time, cause and effect, and possibility and actuality. A well-known sub-field within metaphysics is ontology, which specifically examines the categories of existence and how entities are connected to each other (Rezaeinabard & ghehi, 2020).

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the theory of knowledge. The term comes from the Greek 'episteme' meaning knowledge and 'logos' meaning study or theory. Epistemology seeks to answer questions regarding the sources, forms, limits, and validity of knowledge. This includes discussions about what knowledge is, how we gain knowledge, and the extent to which our beliefs or beliefs are meaningful and justifiable (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with morality, which is the concept of what is good and bad, right and wrong. Ethics studies and formulates various moral

theories that help humans determine the actions that should be taken in various situations. Ethics can be divided into three main types: descriptive, normative, and metaethics.

Descriptive ethics focuses on describing existing moral practices, normative ethics deals with establishing moral principles or rules that should be followed, and metaethics studies the nature of ethical concepts (Rafly et al., 2022).

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy concerned with art, beauty, and taste. Aesthetics addresses questions regarding what makes something beautiful, how we judge works of art, and the role of aesthetics in human life. It includes the study of the perception of beauty, artistic experience, and the criteria used to appreciate and judge works of art. Types of aesthetics include formal aesthetics, which emphasises the analysis of form and structure, and subjective aesthetics, which focuses on the individual and emotional experience of beauty (Nasr, 2020).

Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi, known as the first philosopher in the Islamic tradition, stood as a pioneer in integrating Islamic thought with the Greek philosophical tradition. As a polymath, Al-Kindi introduced important concepts that not only popularised Aristotelian logic but also built the foundation for the development of Islamic philosophy in the classical world. Through his work, he sought to understand and explain the relationship between reason and revelation, which became a major topic of intellectual debate among Muslim scholars (Sayem, 2022c).

On the other hand, in the modern era, Seyyed Hossein Nasr emerged as one of the major figures influencing contemporary Islamic philosophy. Nasr is known for his efforts to rescue traditional philosophy from the decadence of modernity and stimulate dialogue between the Islamic philosophical tradition and the intellectual challenges facing Muslims in the 21st century. Nasr's thought also reflects his concern for the ecological and spiritual crisis caused by the modern worldview (Sayem, 2022a).

Although these two figures lived in different historical and cultural contexts, both made invaluable contributions to the understanding of Islamic philosophy. A comparative study between the thought of Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr can reveal the evolution of thought in Islamic philosophy from classical to modern and help explain how Islamic philosophy can be relevant and applied in addressing contemporary issues (Sayem, 2022b).

The importance of this research lies in the exploration of practical and theoretical shifts in Islamic philosophy and the critical assessment of how these classical and modern thoughts can be synthesised to provide new insights that benefit Muslims today. Therefore, an in-depth study of the comparative thought of Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development and future direction of Islamic philosophy.

## **Research Methods**

The study in this research uses the literature method. The literature research method is an approach that involves collecting, evaluating, and synthesising information

that has been previously published in various sources, such as books, scientific journals, articles, and other documents. This research aims to explore topics, identify knowledge gaps, discover trends or patterns, and build a strong theoretical basis through critical and comparative analyses of existing literature (Nasution, 1996); (Sukmadinata, 2009). Researchers usually start by formulating a research question or hypothesis, then conducting a systematic literature search using relevant databases and information sources, and finally conducting an in-depth analysis of the documents found to support or refute the arguments put forward (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Differences in Philosophical Views Between Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr**

Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr are two important figures in the world of Islamic philosophy, although they lived in very different times and contexts. Al-Kindi, known as the first Muslim philosopher, lived in the 9th century during the golden age of Islam and is known for his efforts to bridge Greek philosophy with Islamic teachings. On the other hand, Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a contemporary philosopher born in the 20th century, who is famous for his views on the integration of Islamic tradition with the challenges of modernity. This difference in historical context and intellectual concerns makes their philosophical views have different focal points and methodologies (Sayem, 2022b).

Al-Kindi was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle and Plotinus. He believed that the use of reason and logic was the primary means of achieving truth, a view that fused the Greek philosophical tradition with Islamic theology. Al-Kindi emphasised the importance of the connection between divine revelation and rational reasoning, where he saw both as complementary ways of understanding the world. Nasr, on the other hand, criticised views that overemphasised reason alone, and tended to emphasise the importance of revelation and spiritual experience as the primary means of achieving truth (Saumantri, 2023).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr often criticises materialism and secularism in modern science, and argues that the modern world has lost its spiritual aspect. Nasr sees the current environmental crisis and moral degradation as a result of the separation between knowledge and spirituality. He advocates a return to a traditional worldview that emphasises the hierarchy of existence and the unity of all things in a perspective that includes God. Al-Kindi, although living in a different context, focused less on criticising modern materialistic science and more on absorbing Greek thought into an Islamic framework (Khalili, 2024).

In terms of epistemology, al-Kindi laid important foundations for Islamic philosophy by emphasising the continuity between reason and revelation. For al-Kindi, human reason is a gift from God that must be used to interpret His revelation correctly. Nasr, on the other hand, emphasised the metaphysical and intellectual approach of the perennial tradition, which assumes that all major world religions share a common core of truth. Nasr focuses more on spiritual awareness and direct experience as a way of understanding reality, reminding us of the urgency of awareness of the Divine as the centre of philosophy (Sururi

et al., 2020).

The views of these two philosophers also differ in terms of method. Al-Kindi adopted a rationalistic and analytical method, using logic as the main tool in his philosophy. Nasr, while not completely rejecting logic, favoured a more intuitive and intuitive method, which emphasised hikmah (deep wisdom) often combined with spiritual experience. He feels that an approach that is too intellectually dry can lose its true meaning and purpose, which is union with the Divine (Muda, 2020).

Thus, the differences between Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr lie in their historical contexts, epistemological priorities and methodologies. Al-Kindi sought to synthesise Greek philosophy with Islamic theology with a focus on reason and logic, while Nasr emphasised the awakening of the spiritual dimension in the face of the challenges of the modern world through traditional philosophical views. Both offer rich and different insights into how to understand the relationship between knowledge, humans and the universe within an Islamic framework.

### **Major Similarities and Differences in the Contributions of Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr to Islamic Philosophy**

In the history of Islamic philosophy, two philosophers who are often discussed are Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Al-Kindi, known as the first ‘Arab Philosopher’, lived in the 9th century and was a pioneer in introducing and developing Greek philosophy in the Islamic world. On the other hand, Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a contemporary philosopher whose works focus more on traditionalist thought and Sufism (Wasil & Muizudin, 2023).

Al-Kindi made a significant contribution in introducing Greek philosophy, especially Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism, to the Islamic world. He wrote many works on logic, metaphysics, mathematics and astronomy. One of his famous works is ‘Fi al-Falsafa al-Ūlā’ (On First Philosophy), in which he discussed the concepts of metaphysics in depth. Al-Kindi was also one of the intellectuals who was dedicated to combining Islamic teachings with Greek philosophy, endeavouring to show that the search for truth can be done through both philosophy and religion (Vella & Rizal, 2024).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, on the other hand, emphasised the importance of a traditionalist understanding of philosophy and exploring the spiritual depths of Islamic teachings. Nasr has written extensively on the role of Sufism in understanding Islamic philosophy and critiquing modernity. One of his famous works is ‘Knowledge and the Sacred’ in which he presents his views on the importance of sacred knowledge and critiques modern, materialistic science. Nasr also promotes interfaith dialogue and the importance of understanding other cultures through a more holistic lens (Riza & Zainuddin, 2023).

The main difference in the approach of these two philosophers lies in the way they view the integration of outside cultures with Islamic philosophy. Al-Kindi was active in translating and adapting Hellenistic works into an Islamic context, seeing the value in utilising knowledge from other civilisations. Nasr, on the other hand, focuses more on the authenticity of the Islamic tradition and criticises the influence of modernism, which he

says tends to undermine traditional spirituality. Nasr promotes a deep understanding of the teachings of Islam itself, rather than combining them with thoughts from other traditions (Wahyuni et al., 2021).

Despite significant differences in their approaches, both philosophers share a strong dedication to promoting and defending Islamic intellectual and spiritual values. Al-Kindi and Nasr both saw the importance of philosophy as a tool to explore truth and deepen understanding of existence and spirituality. Both also had great influence in the education and intellectual training of the next generation (Mumtaz, 2020).

Thus, in the final analysis, both Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr played important roles in the development of Islamic philosophy, albeit in different ways and with different focuses. Al-Kindi laid the foundation for the integration of Greek philosophy in the Islamic world, while Nasr highlighted more the importance of maintaining the authenticity and depth of the Islamic spiritual tradition itself. Both show that Islamic philosophy is a rich and dynamic field, constantly evolving and adapting to the challenges of the times.

## **Conclusion**

The comparison between classical and modern Islamic philosophy can be well illustrated through the works and contributions of two major figures: Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Both represent different eras in the history of Islamic philosophy, with approaches and foci that reflect the context and challenges of their respective times. Analysing this comparison helps us understand the development and changes in Islamic philosophical thought from the classical period to the contemporary era.

Al-Kindi, as a representative of classical Islamic philosophy, is known for his efforts to integrate Greek philosophy, especially Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism, into the Islamic intellectual world. Al-Kindi's approach shows his openness to knowledge from different civilisations and his attempt to synthesise Hellenistic thought with Islamic teachings. In contrast, Seyyed Hossein Nasr criticised modernity and emphasised the importance of maintaining the authenticity of the Islamic spiritual tradition. Nasr rejects the influence of materialism and secularism brought about by the modern era, and highlights the values of Sufism and sacred knowledge.

While there are significant differences in the approaches taken by Al-Kindi and Nasr, there are similarities in their dedication to the propagation and maintenance of Islamic intellectual and spiritual values. Both regard philosophy as an important means of exploring truth and deepening the understanding of human existence and religion. They endeavoured to provide a strong intellectual foundation for Muslims and strengthen education within their cultural and moral contexts.

In conclusion, the comparison between Al-Kindi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr shows the dynamic development of Islamic philosophy from classical to modern times. Both illustrate how Islamic philosophical thought adapts to the needs of the times while maintaining the essence of its teachings. Al-Kindi's work shows the importance of openness and dialogue with other civilisations, while Nasr reminds us of the importance

of maintaining the authenticity and spiritual depth of the Islamic tradition in the face of the challenges of modernity. Through this study, we can see how Islamic philosophy remains relevant as a source of thought in understanding the challenges and opportunities in the contemporary world.

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