

What is Philosophy?

Al-Kindi ranked philosophy as the highest level and noblest of the human effort in dealing with and in understanding our existence. He defines philosophy as:

“Knowledge of the essence of things, insofar as is possible for man.”¹

This definition immediately causes us to the conclusion that philosophy according to al-Kindi must pass from the natural, phenomenological aspects of the existence to a more essential level that is the cause and the very essence of everything. In order to “understand” the truth rationally, we must know the meaning of “stand – under”. That which stands under is the true cause of every thing that comes to be. Understanding the effects is only possible through knowing their causes, which, in turn, will help in achieving the truth, al –Kindi said:

“It is impossible to find the truth that we are seeking without finding a cause.”²

Natural sciences deal with causes and effects, and our understanding of the effects is enhanced by more theoretical descriptions and explanations of the causes. This type of knowledge is presented in physics, chemistry, biology, etc... But why is philosophy the highest in the search for truth and understanding than any other field of knowledge?

Al-Kindi’s answer might be in three reasons:

To read more on this issue please see:

The Essence of Islamic Philosophy, By Mashhad Al-Allaf.

¹ Al-Kindi (1948): p.77. Author’s translation.

² Al-Kindi (1948): p. 77.