

On The Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Fayṣal al-tafrīqa bayna al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa	
Author	Sherman Jackson - PhD (University of Pennsylvania)
Purpose	There needs to be a criterion to distinguish those figurative interpretations that should be accorded recognition from those that should be exposed as attempts to conceal Unbelief
Question	Why should Ash'arites enjoy a monopoly over the truth such that their claims against their adversaries should have any more validity than those of their adversaries against them?
Definition of kufr (unbelief)	According to al-Ghazali: kufr is to deem anything the Prophet brought to be a lie, just as faith (Iman) is to deem everything he brought to be true
Takdhīb versus Tawīl	Takdhīb is to claim that a statement represents no reality at all, that it is a pure lie, and that the Lawgiver's aim in delivering it was simply to deceive people or to promote the common good (maslaha)
Rule of Figurative Interpretation (Qānūn al-ta'wīl)	The permissibility of engaging in figurative interpretation is contingent upon having established the logical impossibility of the apparent meaning (zahir) of a text
Example	<p>It is improper to brand as an Unbeliever anyone who engages in figurative interpretation, as long as he observes the Qānūn al-ta'wīl</p> <p>Every group, even those who go to extremes in holding to the apparent meanings of texts, finds itself compelled to figurative interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ahmad b. Hanbal reportedly figuratively interpreted the Prophet's statement: "The heart of the faithful (qalb al-mu'min) is between two of the All-Merciful's fingers," because he deemed the apparent meaning to be logically impossible</li> <li>- Ibn Hazm, the literalist Zahiri, condemns as an Unbeliever (kafir) anyone who interprets the verses literally that Abraham took the sun, stars, and moon to be his god</li> </ul>
Example	<p>When interpreting statements of the Prophet, one must begin with the ontological level. If, however, the statement cannot be sustained on the ontological level, one must move to the most proximate level of figurative existence</p> <p>"And you see the sun when it rises scale the right side of their cave"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- From the perspective of the senses, a person would be justified in deeming the statement that the sun rises or sets to be true. Ontologically, however, such a statement would be</li> </ul>

	deemed false
Inadmissible figurative interpretation Example	<p>Anyone who alters the apparent meaning of a text connected to the fundamental principles of creed, without a definitive logical proof, must be branded an Unbeliever</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Someone who denies the resurrection of the body on the basis of speculative presumptions, suppositions, and assumed improbabilities</li> <li>- The evidence contained in the Qur'an and the reports (handed down from the Prophet) teaching of the resurrection of bodies are too numerous to accommodate figurative interpretation</li> </ul>
Zanādiqah	<p>This term is used by al-Ghazali for 'Crypto-infidels' who attempt to mask their unbelief in figurative interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This is because proffering non-literal interpretations in the absence of proof indicate that they did not really believe in the tenets</li> <li>- The Qur'an and Sunnah are too repetitive and too explicit to accommodate a non-literal interpretation of the fundamental tenets</li> </ul>
Al-Ghazali's critique against kalam	<p>According to al-Ghazali, the only real function of kalam was to defend the beliefs of the Muslims, particularly against rational attack by the enemies of Islam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- However, it was not the way to acquire true religious convictions</li> <li>- Faith in God comes 'of a light that God casts into the hearts of His servants, as a gift and a gratuity from Him'</li> <li>- The case against kalam was due its tendency to impede the realization of truth since the goal of religion is the realization of the truth behind the information not simply imparting and receiving information</li> </ul>
Experience over information	Al-Ghazali argues that the means by which one comes to realize the truth of the prophethood of Muhammad is not by simply receiving reliable reports of the Prophet's miracles, but by repeatedly observing the truths taught by the Prophet manifest themselves in one's life
Blind following	"If you are fair, you will probably know that one who gives any particular thinker a monopoly over the truth is himself closer to being guilty of Unbelief...because he puts this thinker in the position of the Prophet, who alone is exempt from committing errors (in doctrine) and through whom alone faith (Iman) obtains by agreeing with him and Unbelief (kufr) obtains by disagreeing with him"
Al-Ghazali's advice	<p>Restrain your tongue from indicting the people who face Mecca (on charges of Unbelief) as long as they say, 'There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God,' without categorically contradicting this</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To contradict this categorically is for them to affirm the</li> </ul>

	possibility that the Prophet SAW, with or without an excuse, delivered lies
Twelver Shi'ite	<p>Doctrines that do not constitute a significant detriment to religion should be treated leniently, even if they are substantively abominable and clearly absurd, such as the Twelver Shi'ite doctrine that their Imam is hiding in a vault and is expected to emerge (one day)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not everyone who embraces senseless beliefs must be branded an Unbeliever, even if his doctrines are clearly absurd</li> </ul>
Hadith	<p>"Whenever a Muslim charges his fellow Muslim with Unbelief, this returns upon one of them"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If a person knows that another person believes that everything the Prophet SAW brought is true and despite this he brands the latter an Unbeliever, he becomes himself an Unbeliever</li> <li>- If he sincerely thinks that another is an Unbeliever who holds the Prophet to be a liar, while in fact this is not the case, this does not constitute an act of Unbelief</li> </ul>