

**Evert van der Zweerde**

Faculty of Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies, Radboud University,  
Nijmegen, Netherlands, e-mail: e.vanderzweerde@ftr.ru.nl

**UNEXPECTED ALLIANCES – A FEW REMARKS ON OCCASION  
OF THE DUTCH TRANSLATION  
OF SOULEYMANE BACHIR DIAGNE’S  
“HOW TO PHILOSOPHIZE IN ISLAM?”  
(article received after being in Kazakhstan)**

In the following article, Professor Zwerde follows his research in KazNu and offers several arguments on the significance of translation of the work of famous theologian and philosopher Professor Diagne – “How to philosophize Islam?” – into the Dutch language.

The author highlights the importance of a problem raised by Diagne concerning the fact that there is a wide diaspora of Muslims in the Netherlands, which is threatened by difficulties in assimilation into the European society and rising islamophobia. Despite the fact that Holland hosts a wide range of Muslim schools, over 450 mosques, political parties have parliament seats and are involved in governmental institutions, not all Islamic authorities can defend their rights properly. In this aspect, according to the author, the study of Islamic philosophy can help to resolve this problem. Thorough evaluation of the tolerant features of Islam can help the Islamic communities in Europe and display Islam as a religion of peace on the map of global religions.

**Key words:** Soulemane Bachir Diagne, al-Farabi, Islam, tolerant religion.

Evert van der Zweerde

Рэдбууд Университеті, философия, теология және дінтану факультеті,  
Нидерланды, Нижмеген қ., e-mail: e.vanderzweerde@ftr.ru.nl

**Күтпеген одақ. Сүлейман Бахир Диагненің  
«Исламда философиямен қалай айналысады?» еңбегін  
голландтық тілге аударудың маңызы туралы бірнеше жазбалар**

Мақалада профессор Зверде өзінің әл-Фараби атындағы ҚазҰУ-де болған ғылыми іссапарының нәтижесінде белгілі философ және теолог Сүлейман Бахир Диагненің «Исламда философиямен қалай айналысады?» еңбегін қайта қарастырудың және голландтық тілге аударудың маңызы туралы бірнеше аргументтер береді.

Автор Нидерландыда өмір сүретін үлкен мұсылмандық диаспораның европалық қауымдастыққа араласуда қиындыққа ұшырауымен және исламофобия деңгейінің өсуімен байланысты қазір Диагне көтерген мәселелерді зерттеудің маңыздылығын атап өтеді.

Голландияда көптеген мұсылмандық мектептер, 450-ден астам мешіт бар, мұсылмандық саяси партиялар парламент пен мемлекеттік ұйымдарда өзіндік орындары болса да мұсылмандар өздерінің құқықтарын көп кездерде қорғай алмайды. Осы мәселенің шешімін автор ислам философиясын зерттеп оқумен байланыстырады. Исламның толеранттылық құндылығын терең қарастыру Еуропаға Исламды әлемдік діндер картасында бейбітсүйгіш дін ретінде бағалауға көмектеседі.

**Түйін сөздер:** Сулеймен Бахир Диагне, Эль-Фараби, ислам, бейбітшілік діні.

Эверт ван дер Зверде

факультет философии, теологии и религиоведения,  
Рэдбоуд Университет, Нидерланды, г. Нижмеген,  
e-mail: vanderzweerde@ftr.ru.nl

**Неожиданный союз. Несколько заметок о важности перевода  
на голландский язык работы Сулеймана Бахир Диагне  
“Как заниматься философией в исламе?”**

В данной статье по следам пребывания в научной командировке в КазНУ имени аль-Фараби профессор Зверде приводит несколько аргументов на тему значимости перевода на голландский язык и осмысления работы известного философа и теолога Сулеймана Бахир Диагне «Как заниматься философией в Исламе?».

Автор отмечает важность изучения поднятой Диагне проблемы в связи с тем, что в Нидерландах существует большая мусульманская диаспора, которая испытывает сложности с ассимиляцией в европейское сообщество и повышением уровня исламофобии. Несмотря на то, что в Голландии находится много мусульманских школ, свыше 450 мечетей, а политические партии имеют места в парламенте и государственных учреждениях, исламские деятели не всегда могут достойно защищать свои права. В этом вопросе, по мнению автора, может помочь изучение философии Ислама. Глубокое изучение толерантных свойств Ислама поможет исламскому сообществу в Европе показать Ислам на общей карте мировых религий как миролюбивую религию.

**Ключевые слова:** Сулейман Бахир Диагне, Аль-Фараби, ислам, миролюбивая религия

In 2016, the book by Souleymane Bachir Diagne, a leading philosopher in his native Senegal, and a professor at Columbia University (New York) and the Sorbonne (Paris), entitled *Comment philosophe en islam?* [orig.: Paris, 2014], appeared in Dutch translation: *Filosoferen in de islam?* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2016). A colleague, Herman Westerink, and I wrote the *послесловие* to this translation, and prof. Diagne wrote a new introduction. All of this may strike as odd. After all, the Netherlands are a traditionally Christian country, mostly Protestant (Calvinist), but with a large Roman Catholic minority. The Netherlands, however, are also a country with a long tradition of accommodation of religious diversity. Today, the country has a 6% Muslim population, with many Islamic schools and over 450 mosques. The presence of Islam in the Netherlands is highly contested, because of the spread of salafism / wahhabism and jihadism, and also because a part of the population fears “islami-zation.” At the same time, the speaker of the Lower House in parliament is a woman of Islamic background, the mayor of the second largest city, Rotterdam, is a practicing Muslim, and one predominantly Muslim political party was just elected into the national parliament (with 3 seats out of 150). Radboud University, the university where I teach, houses an active Muslim Student Association, which recently met with prof. Diagne, who gave a public lecture that attracted over 200 people, largely non-Muslim. Where does this interest come from? In this brief presentation, I want to address two issues: the place

of al-Fārābī in Diagne’s conception of Islamic philosophy, and the relevance of the translation of his book for the Netherlands in general, Dutch Muslims in particular.

What is the key message of Souleymane Bachir Diagne, and which is the role played in this message by Kazakhstan’s national philosopher, ‘Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (874-c. 950)? According to Diagne, the tradition of *falsafa* within Islam has always been a history of encounters with other traditions. There encounters have stimulated the critical mind and nourished pluralism within Islam. For this reason, “philosophy in Islam” should not be confused with “Islamic philosophy”: Islamic philosophy is the attempt to arrive at a philosophical underpinning of specific elements of the Islamic faith, and in this it is comparable with Christian or Jewish philosophy; philosophy in Islam, by contrast, is a philosophical exploration of general philosophical questions within an Islamic framework. Philosophy as such, according to Diagne, cannot be Islamic (any more than it can be Christian, or Dutch, or Russian), because people are equal in their rational capacities – which itself is an Islamic point of view.

For Diagne, there are two main reasons why Islam needs philosophy. The first reason is given with the contextual fact that, once more, Islam must relate to its own tradition without cutting itself off from other traditions, esp. those in the West. This is, in a way, for the third time: the first was given with the reception, by thinkers like al-Fārābī, of Greek philosophical thought. The second time

was when, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> C, thinkers like Muhammad ‘Abduh, and Muhammad Iqbal wanted to modernize Islam– the latter in particular, a pupil of Henri Bergson, is one of Diagne’s heroes. But the third time is now: there are a number of global issues that Muslims have to deal with, and philosophy can assist them in thinking rationally and critically. Such issues include the relationship between politics and religion, political order in Islamic countries, ecological issues, and many others. Philosophers of Islamic faith must engage in debate with other, non-Islamic philosophers, in order to arrive at an open, pluriform, and tolerant Islam, as well as to contribute to philosophy itself. He labels this *progressive fundamentalism*, which he opposes to *reactive fundamentalism*. The main feature of the latter is a *defensive* position. Pleading for a *progressive fundamentalism*, Diagne wants to return to *falsafa*, most notably to the rationalist tradition of which al-Fārābī was one of the founders, to the modernizers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> C, and then engage in a pluriform dialogue between Islamic and non-Islamic philosophers.

What is the significance of the appearance of Diagne’s book in Dutch translation? First of all, it certainly make the Dutch public, esp. the academic and intellectual public, more familiar with the Islamic tradition in philosophy. Surely, an educated philosopher in the Netherlands knows the name of al-Fārābī, knows how the works of Aristotle and Plato were translated into Arabic and found their way, at the end of a long history of interpretation, with al-Fārābī as one of the first major commentators, and debate, with the complex figure of al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) at its centre. But better knowledge is needed. Secondly, and more importantly, it may assist Dutch Muslims in playing a more active role in the intellectual community and in public life.

Today, Dutch Muslims tend to cling together in a defensive attitude in reaction to an increasingly unfriendly climate. During the last parliamentary elections, one political party wanted to close mosques in the Netherlands, forbid the Qur’ān (which they compared to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, a book that *is* forbidden), and stop the influx of refugees with an Islamic background. This party did *not* win the elections, but it did get 13% of the vote and 20 seats in parliament (out of 150). Two other parties, who together won 52 seats, have no intentions such as forbidding a sacred text or refusing refugees on religious grounds, but they do spread a discourse in which Islam is treated with caution. The Dutch Islamic community, which in itself is very diverse, tends to close ranks. In the Netherlands, there are Islamic primary and secondary schools named after Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Khaldūn, and al- Ghazālī, but not Ibn Rushd or al-Fārābī. This may be accidental, but it may also be symptomatic for the fear, among Dutch Muslims in this case, to introduce too much philosophy into their cultural identity, for fear of losing Islam to rationalistic and humanistic tendencies.

To me, as a philosopher situated outside Islam, this fear appears understandable, but ultimately unjustified, and starting to engage in philosophy within an Islamic framework would, I am convinced, assist Dutch Muslims in abandoning their largely defensive –again, understandable, but ultimately unfounded – stance, and allow them to play a much needed, more active role in the public sphere. Engaging with philosophy will not only be good for Islam, as Diagne argues, it will also be good for the accommodation in society of Dutch Muslims. This, however, does not only depend their determination to do so, but also on a switch from hostility to openness among substantial parts of the Dutch population.