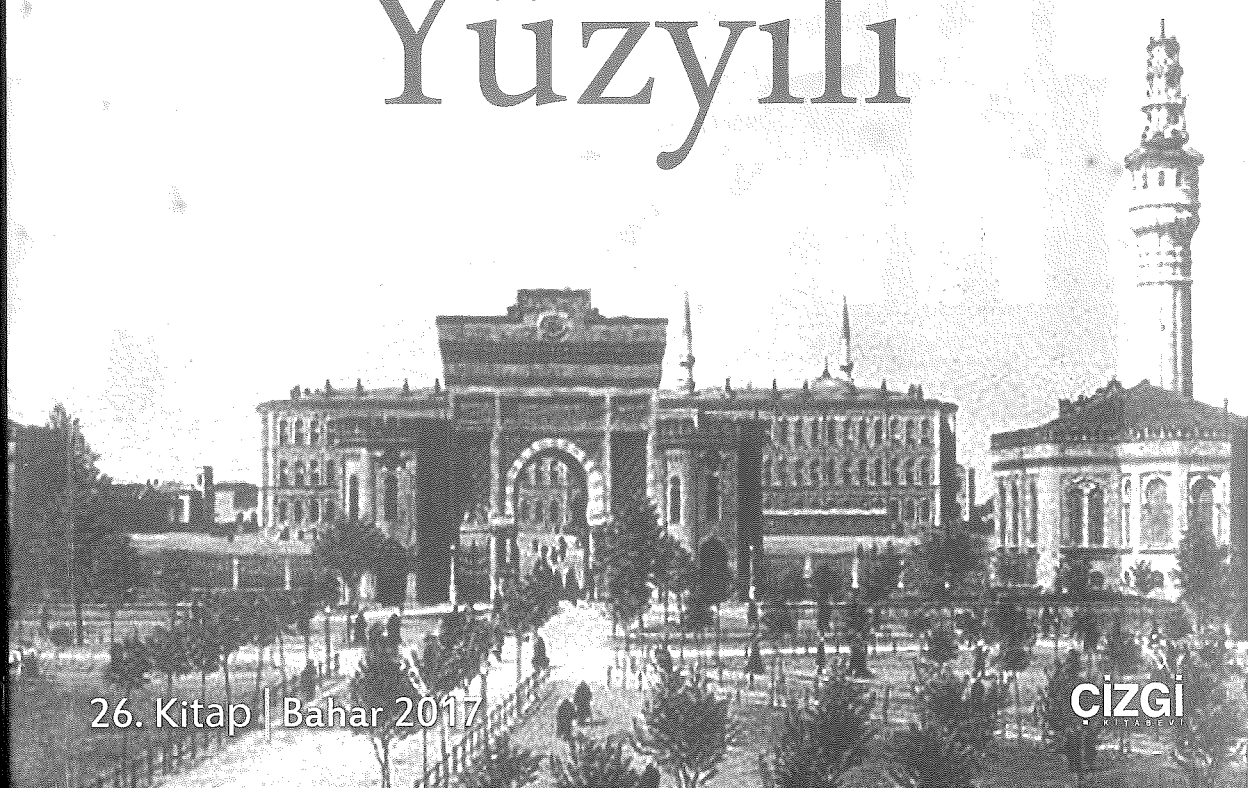
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Ahmet Cemal'in Anısına Saygıyla

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REVISITING NERMI UYGUR'S ARTICLE TODAY: "WHAT IS A *CONTEMPORARY* PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION?"

Güncel ÖNKAL* Ahu TUNÇEL**

Abstract: Nermi Uygur's article -which was published titled as "What is a philosophical question?" -in a world-widely popular journal called *Mind*- reflects a distinguished philosophical point of view comparing his later writings. Despite the fact that Uygur is so famous with his essays in which he presents the philosophical problems of daily life, and brings a philosophical inquiry to the questions and problems within a methodology; in his article he states some principles, which might deepen the gap between theory, and practice that has been under investigation from Plato to our era. In this respect he defends a *detachment* between philosophy and world of acts. Regarding Nermi Uygur's general philosophical attitude, the analysis of this text can be considered as the utmost step in order to understand his process in questioning philosophy during years. Furthermore, in this study, the possibility of defending such an understanding will be questioned in terms of contemporary needs.

Keywords: Felsefe sorusu, Nermi Uygur, Uygulamalı felsefe, Etik, Meta-felsefe.

NERMİ UYGUR'UN MAKALESİNİ GÜNÜMÜZDE YENİDEN DEĞERLENDİRMEK: *"ÇAĞCIL* BİR FELSEFE SORUSU NEDİR?"

Özet: 1964 yılında dünyaca ünlü *Mind* dergisinde yayımlanan "Bir Felsefe Sorusu Nedir?" başlıklı makalesi Nermi Uygur'un ileriki yaşlarında yazacağı pek çok yazısından oldukça farklı bir felsefe anlayışı ortaya koyar. Türkiye'nin felsefe geleneği içerisinde özellikle yazdığı denemelerle felsefeyi pratik alanın sorunlarına yaklaştıran, olaylara, soru ve sorunlara felsefece yaklaşmanın yollarını öğreten Nermi Uygur söz konusu makalede felsefe ve pratik arasında, Platon'dan bu yana süregelen bir gelenekte derinleşen yarığı inceler. Böylece felsefeyi eylem dünyasından uzakta tutan, ondan ayıran bir bakış açısı sunar. Nermi Uygur'un genel felsefi anlayışı göz önüne bulundurulduğunda bu makalenin çözümlenmesi, onun yıllar içinde felsefesinin değişimini anlamak için en önemli basamağı oluşturur. Dahası, bu çalışmada, çağcıl ihtiyaçlar karşısında böylesine bir anlayışı savunabilmenin imkanları soru konusu edilecektir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Philosophical question, Nermi Uygur, Applied philosophy, Ethics, Meta-philosophy.

Nermi Uygur's article titled "What is A Philosophical Question?" first appeared on *Mind* in English in 1964. Those years represents the first world-

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widely known fruits of Turkish philosophy represented by German philosophers such as Heinz Heimsoeth, Walter Kranz, Erich Von Aster and Hans Reichenbach who had escaped of Nazi's violation. Thus, the philosophy tradition in Turkish academia (properly speaking in Istanbul University) concentrated on "philosophical anthropology" under the influence of Nicolai Hartmann's ontology and in general Kantian philosophy with all sub-disciplines of systematic philosophy and an intensive translation movement for early-Greek philosophy master texts. Unlike, Uygur's discourse focused on meaning, discourse and language and it was offering heavily an analytic scope for considering *meta-philosophical* issues. The "big" questions of philosophy were considered as the method of philosophy comparing the daily questions by Uygur's philosophical world which is motivated by "practical" issues of culture, the idea of historicity, and the sustaining anthropological unity. Despite the celebrity of his article as the first systematic English text stating the Turkish academic reception of philosophy, this article partially reflects his understanding of philosophy since the theoretical borders of the "questions of philosophy" is limitedly considered. In this sense, here, our aim is to revisit his question with the requirements of contemporary philosophical concerns. Our focus on Uygur's understanding of philosophy will have three main points; formerly, the nature of philosophical question will be analysed between Russell and Uygur; secondly, Floridi's contemporary contribution addressing directly Uygur's article will be reconsidered; and then some objections will be compared and examined.

I. Why to ask a "question"

In a reflective way, philosophy questions *the questions of philosophy*. This reflexive posture of philosophy first infers the prosperousness of its method and secondly underlines the antithetic structure of philosophical questions that are loaded with "big questions", fundamental inquiries and major issues. The questions of philosophers carry such a motivation that by questioning they feel as if they understand the world and ideas better. Their methodology show us that if we as philosophy addicted minds learn how to ask right questions then we may have proper the key of explaining life. Thus, the questions itself and the volition beyond the questionnaire compounds a world of inquiry in philosophical investigation as Bertrand Russell exposed there is no controversy between "the problems of philosophy" and "the questions of philosophy" in his book, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Russell, 2001).

In 1962, Nermi Uygur had already declared his special interest in his review-article on Russell's philosophical development (Uygur, 1962). This brief review contributes various key-points about Uygur's sympathy of meta-philosophy. It may be supposed that what inspired Uygur's philosophical

approach is the Russellian position of emphasizing the grounded "philosophical attitude" by means of the significance of philosophical questions and the context of use in "My Philosophical Development". Uygur says, Russell follows such a "sonorous and content understanding of philosophy during his philosophical development" which resulted in reconsidering intellectual heritage of major philosophers, adding some remarks on their ideas in terms of contemporary necessities and narrating how he understood philosophy in general during his life span (Uygur, 1962: 105-106). The utmost point for Uygur is to state that Russell, as a leading "positivist" philosopher, has never closed his world of ideas to the metaphysical and ontological issues. On the one way Russell cannot be entirely called as "a philosopher of life", on the other way his discourse shows respect for the internal relations in the sub-disciplines of philosophy as a "science" (Uygur, 1962: 108-109). To be considered Uygur's time, the academic conditions and his intellectual environment in Istanbul University, we may say that Uygur's reading on Russell's idea of "philosophical development" expands his limited horizon of philosophizing. In 1960s, the department of philosophy in Istanbul University was under the hectic influence of German "scientist" philosophers. The defeat of metaphysics was the prior rule to for the candidates of philosophy. The strict naturalistic perspective of the academy shaped the young philosophers so much that Uygur officially did his graduate works on language and meaning. However, Uygur's mature works are on philosophizing philosophy, discourse analysis, anthropological/ethnological motives and literary meaning of daily language usage. After 1980s, through reading and by following his plain concepts, the admirers of philosophy met Uygur's essays on various topics of life-questions and have a notion about how to philosophize in Turkish. In this respect, it is appropriate to say that Uygur produced many concepts in modern Turkish for philosophy and he gave priority to establish a "clear" conceptual meaning in a Russellian way.

Nermi Uygur inclined to elaborate a formula that can unmask non-philosophical questions by way of investigating the permanence of questions through the first ages of philosophy. Since the history of philosophy (i.e.*philosophia perennis*) cannot be omitted in order to figure out the genuine philosophical question, Uygur noted his intention as "to describe [...] the salient characteristics of a philosophical question" (Uygur, 1964: 65). For Uygur, it is so significant to ask the main question as "what is a philosophical question" at the beginning since without this step all the matter of philosophy could be abandoned. If we do philosophy without considering this question, it becomes a profession deprived of target, direction, field, limits and its objects. In this sense, Uygur puts such a *judicial* role to this question in order to divide what philosophy is or not. The judicial role of this question gives responsibility to the one who asks the question and this responsibility results in distinguishing daily life from philosophical one. In his article, likely to Plato's teaching of Ideas,

Uygur supposes philosophical questions ask so less about the details of daily life but they ask the notion, essential, conceptual accretion behind the facts, the world of acts, events and situations; and that refers asking this question requires to keep excluding worldly necessities. The limits of philosophy become known in the question philosophy, question of philosophy become known in language and language determines our world of thought and acts in Uygur's framework. Thus "a philosophical question is no way a rhetorical question" (Uygur, 1964:69). Uygur, here, follows Socratic methodology and he underlines the conceptual and universal analysis of the world of acts cannot be deduced from singular acts. A philosophical question with all analytic attitude turns into an intellectual question about everything but in respect of their *thing-ness*.

Uygur refrains from to define the domain of philosophy because he supposes that whenever we try to determine the domain of philosophy there remains some more (Uygur, 1967:66). In this respect, the ones who deal with philosophy should not say "...This is...", rather they ask "What is..." (Uygur, 1967:66). Following this, the daily life is full of disjunctive questions and those questions presuppose a decision about world that is valid for the majority. Everyday questions are supplied by a definitive fact in the world. But, for Uygur, philosophical questions are sharply contrast to these in a philosophical question the attention is released from the world to concentrate on discourses (Uygur, 1967:67). Uygur sees the world orientations are barriers for putting forward the philosophical concerns (Uygur- 1967:68).

As a result in Uygur's understanding questions of philosophizing are about something we primarily know. But it also means for the philosopher an "amazing" experiment (Uygur, 1967:71). For Uygur's purpose the wonder of philosophy is about the connection between this world-language and meaning. He never inclines on going beyond the concrete world since according to his idea this world is limited to phrases of discourse. In the facts of "this world" he sees disruption and disjunctive trait. "What is ..." as a question of philosophy must stay in the world of concepts (Uygur, 1967:82-83). In such a framework concepts do not source from idealism or nominalism they just are in transcendental one. According to Uygur's philosophy-world, ontological concerns are limited in epistemology.

II. Some Objections to Uygur: Problems vs. Questions of Philosophy

Considering Uygur's this early writing, we may suppose that in such an intellectual profession, philosophers do not occupy with acts, they never act, they are just spectators. This definition has two big challenges for us. Formerly, this position detached philosopher from his age, culture and conditions. Even Uygur calls philosophical problems as "dry" and "lifeless" questions he underlines that it has a positive meaning (Uygur, 1967:69). Such a detached position (but "positive position for Uygur) does not give way to any historical

understanding. Even Uygur says he followed Socratic methodology, we should remember that Socrates tried to figure the idea and meaning of courage out from coward singular samples in his age. Machiavelli lived in independent and free Italian Republic, Hobbes observed denominational differences, Locke was exiled, Rousseau experienced moral corruption and inequalities in his age in France. Their experiments resulted as advancements of the philosophical thought in the history of philosophy. Thus, without the historicity there is no room for progress and the philosophers can be limited with their own individualism.

Latter critique here is philosophers' existential and inquiring engagement to the social events and others. If we accept that -as Uygur did- philosophers ask big questions and write texts for the ideal one, this denies philosophers' awareness, respectfulness and reactionary characteristics. Considering Descartes' *res cogitans*, the philosopher writes even they find the reasons of being in themselves; philosophers are both the subjects and objects of their thought. Among the events of the era, philosophers think, rethink and then write as an impulse to the facts. As in the sample of the representatives of Cambridge School in 1970s, philosophical outputs target the proper problems of the era. Again the years that Uygur wrote his article was the hey-days of Existentialism. But Uygur did not want to hear their scream and it seems as a personal preference he closed himself to the philosophical solitude. Once again, Arendt preferred to hear her own voice and solitude in 1970s but she notes the significance of Other and take dialogue as the possibility of doing philosophy.

After two critiques we brought, the relation between ethics and philosophical questions are not taking for granted in Uygur's overview because he prefers to rename the intersubjectivity as professional field of action. Thus, among his philosophical questions there is no main room for ethics.

A contemporary query on the questions of philosophy is nearly noted by Luciano Floridi's article *using the identical title* after a half-century than Uygur's, in 2013. For Floridi, the questions should be revised by respect of the synthesis of answers and "a philosophy without questions is abortion, but without convicting answers is fruitless" (Floridi, 2013: 196). Floridi's current scope is on epistemology and practical issues, whilst Uygur had asked key-ontological manners in his article. Fifty years is not so long time to have a paradigm shift in philosophy. However, the methodological inclination of philosophy has been largely varied by interdisciplinary studies, and Floridi underlines this shift through reconsidering Uygur's article.

As some objections to Uygur we above have just stated two critics about historicity and philosophical action. Floridi's analytic approach widens the critiques in respect of meaningless-ness of the questions of philosophy. Floridi respects Uygur's questions as "open" questions rather than dry and lifeless

(Floridi, 2013:200) because questions of philosophy are questioning questions. Floridi goes further and says "it would be like asking the price of the second-hand car in absolute figures, insisting that no currency is used in order to express it. Nonsense" (Floridi, 2013:214). Thus, according to Floridi, Uygur's understanding needs some bridge concepts and/or understanding to clarify the nature of the questions of philosophy. However, Uygur never aims to accept a pre-nature of questions.

To conclude, revisiting Uygur in today's conditions after load of discussions about semantics, language, meaning and analytical point-of-view do not give us any clue about the nature of the questions of philosophy. The questions of philosophy, after World War II are oriented questions. In this era it seems impossible to find a pure "ground" of questions of philosophy in order clarify them. The motive of the questions of philosophy stems from history, perceived situations, intersubjectivity, social meaning and facticity. The investigation on the question of "what a question is" does not satisfy philosophers' interest nowadays. Contemporary theoricians feel as if they already had all the questions. Our age rejects a direct thinking on thinking because it is full of tools and intercessors such as politics, ethics, literature, arts, economics, sociological data, psychological terms, the elements of popular culture, etc. Nermi Uygur's attempt to clarify philosophical question was advancement for Turkish philosophy circle in his age and should be remembered in this sense. His early article is dissimilar to his later articles concerning cultural anthropological issues. As all philosophers experience their own progress during ages, in his later works he himself reconsidered philosophical question and supported his core philosophy with the samples of humanitarian conditions.

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