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## **THE QUESTION “WHY?” AS THE FOUNDATION FOR KNOWLEDGE OF CAUSES IN ARISTOTLE**

The search for the universal causes of the world's existence has bothered thinkers since ancient times. This cognitive unrest spurred the rise and development of philosophy. Although initially it was in the realm of religious beliefs, it gained a new formula in Hellenic culture as it appealed to empirically and rationally justified assertions about the world. This “shift” occurred as soon as the object of inquiries was properly established; that which is visible (that which can be known directly) became the object of inquiries. As a result, there was a transition from the level of a poetic story about the gods (*mythos*) to the level of the rational study of the world (*logos*). Questions concerning the source of everything that exists appeared at the point where human knowledge and reality came into contact. Those questions demarcated the proper aspects for the investigation of the world and provided the opportunity for the beginning of scientific knowledge. For this reason, to this day, philosophy understood as the explanation of reality constitutes in its essence a rational response to questions posed in the context of the discovered nature of the world. Aristotle was the first one in the history of philosophy to systematize such an approach.

The ideal of philosophical knowledge that Aristotle proposed consisted in the discovery of the first causes and principles of things. For this reason, a quantitative and essential analysis of the causes was the fundamental task for philosophical reflections. The act of showing the ways that causes are discerned is considered as a priority in the aspect of the questions that are asked and occur in the cognitive process. The questions refer

to the chief states of being and their internal structure. Thus the question of the cause is a question of the relation that occurs between a real state and that which constitutes the reason why it came into being. On this basis we can discover the legitimacy of the causes proposed, their specific character, and their ontological functions. In this context, the analysis of the questions that form the starting point of cognitive acts becomes the mental beginning of philosophical thought. In this way a body of knowledge arises that in a proper sense constitutes the answer to the question. The question that Aristotle posed as the fundamental question for acquiring philosophical knowledge is the question “why?” For this reason we can present the preliminary thesis that in Aristotle’s philosophy, the question “why” demarcates the purpose for cultivating philosophy and the way it should be cultivated.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Grounds for the Question “Why?”**

In the framework of the analysis of questions posed in the context of reality, we should discern three aspects in Aristotle’s philosophy. The fundamental aspect from the side of the cognitive act is the subjective condition behind the questions formulated; those questions result from the human potentiality and openness to knowledge. Then we should indicate the logical structure of the questions and the way they are formulated. The third aspect is the metaphysical grounding of the questions, that is, the objective reasons for their existence.

The subjective aspect is connected to the mental attitude of human being to the world. In this context, the innate desire for knowledge, and the wonder that arises in man in relation to the world become the foundation for posing questions. Aristotle says at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* that “all men by nature desire to know.”<sup>2</sup> This special need reveals man’s proper attitude toward the world. Here it is not only a question of a specific

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<sup>1</sup> This article addresses a problem with Aristotle’s conception of philosophy. On the current discussion about Aristotle’s understanding of philosophy, see, e.g., N. Fujisawa, “Aristotle’s Conception of Philosophy in the *Protrepticus*: Comparison with Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle Himself in his Later Treatises,” *Journal of Classical Studies* 21 (1973): 1-19, 133-134; T. Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles* (New York 1988), 14-25; A. Potaga, “The Persisting Vigor and Fertility of the Aristotelian Concept of Philosophy,” *Philosophical Inquiry* 21 (2:1999): 109-121.

form of the cognitive act that occurs in man, but it is a question of the ability to know, which is the ability that leads to the acquisition of knowledge. Aristotle completed that moment with the psychological factor that is wonder (*thauma*): "For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and first began to philosophize."<sup>3</sup> Wonder is the awareness that one lacks knowledge; that lack appears in the context of difficulties that one encounters in explaining known facts. Here we are touching on man's original cognitive opportunities; not only do these result from his natural inclinations, but they are also an expression of the philosophical attitude that aspires to explain the world as a whole.<sup>4</sup> The natural desire to know is a condition for wonder, which is the beginning and foundation for philosophical thought.

Wonder appears as the result of one's being aware that one lacks knowledge; we discover that lack in our cognitive contact with reality. Apart from a simple description of real states, the explanation of reality requires that we also show the causes of those states, and those causes are not given to us directly. Wonder occurs when we do not know the reasons why the states that have been discovered have come into existence. This leads to the rise of a cognitive obstacle (a problem), which is an expression of a difficulty resulting from our inability to explain reality in a univocal way.<sup>5</sup> The problem's appearance and first formulation appears in the intellect under the form of a question. When we become aware of the imperfection of the knowledge we have acquired in some respect (a lack of knowl-

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 980 a 21. The same idea appeared in an earlier work of Aristotle, *Protrepticus*, cf. frg. 7 and 41. In the text we are citing the edition of *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. into English under the editorship of J. A. Smith and W. D. Ross, vol. 1-12 (Oxford Clarendon Press 1908-1952).

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 982 b 12-13; cf. also id., *Rhetoric*, I, 1371 a 31-35. We find this way of understanding the beginning of philosophy earlier in Plato. In the dialogue *Theaetetus* he says, "for wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder," *The Dialogues of Plato translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett, M.A. in Five Volumes*, 3rd edition revised and corrected (Oxford University Press, 1892), *Theaetetus*, 155 D.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, vol. I: *From the origins to Socrates*, ed. and trans. by J. R. Catan (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 314-315.

<sup>5</sup> "And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant," *Metaphysics*, I, 983 a 17. The discovery of causes becomes the main intellectual response to wonder.

edge), a question arises. The question at the same time becomes the expression of a task of investigation.

The questions that man poses can vary because they refer to various states or elements of known things. Here we start from particular questions that concern accidental causes. Starting from the apprehension of individual and sensibly perceptible phenomena, we gradually discover relations between phenomena. Here more than once we encounter problems with the explanation of relations of causal dependence. However, in philosophy we arrive at fundamental questions that refer to all reality. To reach knowledge we follow the course of explanation that Aristotle presented and strive to obtain the state that is contrary to wonder.<sup>6</sup> This consists in a search for the necessary factor what will constitute the cause of a certain state of affairs, and at the same time will constitute an explanation for it.

The questions formulated in this way do not constitute a purely intellectual operation, but they are “forced” by reality (or properly speaking, by the lack of a full reading of reality). Just as the world is variously complex and relational in its structure, so also the questions formulated with reference to the world must have such a character. This happens when we correlate states of affairs which have been cognitively grasped but are not directly intelligible with a factor that allows us to explain them. In this way the process of the formation of knowledge begins and knowledge from the cognitive apprehension of states of being becomes a rational explanation of reality. Aristotle tried to construct such a body of knowledge. In his investigations he looked to the mathematics of his time and to knowledge of nature. However, he always regarded the investigation of the essence of things as the purpose of knowledge. The results of his investigations he tried to formulate on the basis of real states of being so that any connection in thought had to match a real connection, and to make them the foundation of the syllogism. For this reason, the fundamental manner of explanation was based on showing a causal relation.<sup>7</sup>

The large number and variety of questions posed during the process of knowing the world need to be set in order on account of the procedure of

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, I, 983 a 17-19.

scientific knowledge. Aristotle indicates that it is necessary to pose questions from which follow the answers proper to knowledge of a scientific character (*episteme*). This happens in an assignment to what is general and stable. Therefore we consider only questions of an essential character, not questions of an accidental character. There can be no scientific knowledge of accidents as such because their causes are based on individual instances that are not necessarily repeatable.<sup>8</sup> This condition greatly limits the scope of questions posed in philosophy.

Aristotle based the ways to investigate knowledge on four questions, which were expressed in four fundamental formulates: "that it is" (*hóti*), "why something is" (*dióti*), "whether something is" (*ei ésti*), and "what it is" (*ti ésti*).<sup>9</sup> The material and formal structure of these questions allows us to reduce them to two types that become sufficient for the process of acquiring scientific knowledge. The decisive element here is their degree of generality. Thus *ei ésti*, which concerns the being of a thing, was reduced to *hóti*, that is, the question concerning a thing's attribute. This is because we cannot speak of an attribute without the existence of that to which the attribute pertains. Since *hóti* is wider in denotation than *ei ésti*, *ei ésti* in this question loses the character of a question, because it is contained in *hóti*. There is a similar situation in the second pair, in which their *ti ésti* is reduced to *dióti*, because to know "what something is" is reduced to knowing "why something is." The question "what something is" (*ti ésti*) is for Aristotle one of the possible variations of knowing *dióti*. Consequently, two types of questions remain, and at the same time they mark two types of knowledge: *hóti* – as knowledge about a fact, and *dióti* – as knowledge about a cause.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 85 b 23-86 a 3. Cf. also A. Mansion, *L'origine du syllogisme et la théorie de la science chez Aristote*, in: *Aristote et le problèmes de méthode* (Louvain-Paris 1961), 57-81.

<sup>8</sup> "Accident means that which attaches to something and can be truly asserted, but neither of necessity nor usually," *Metaphysics*, V, 1025 a 14-16. For this reason, apart from mentioning the same types of accidental modifications, the number of such modifications cannot be determined. On this, cf. *ibid.*, VI, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, II, 89 b 24-26, 78 a 20-79 a 11.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, II, 2. W. Kullmann considers in detail the topic of causal knowledge and knowledge based in *hoti* and *dioiti*: *Wissenschaft und Methode* (Berlin 1974), 154-268.

Knowledge concerning a cause (*dióti*) and the question *diá ti* that underlies it are always directed to that which constitutes an essence. At the same time, it is the most general question because it concerns everything in a given genus. It is also important to make a distinction between the aspective references to reality on the basis of which various formulations of this question arise, such as “due to what,” “from what,” “through what,” etc. On this basis we obtain a method that allows us to discover the elements or relations that occur in the form of necessary connections.

On this basis, we obtain a method that allows us to discover the elements or relations that occur in the form of necessary connections. In the structure of the question *diá tí*, a relational bond is present between “something” and “something else.” Therefore these questions were treated as the middle term in a syllogism. This is because an essential connection appears between the states and process that occur in reality, and the logical apprehensions of them in a syllogism.<sup>11</sup> The middle term becomes a function of a real cause, and Aristotle’s logic (or analytics) constitutes a “tool” (*órganon*) for setting in order our knowledge of reality.

When he analyzes questions, Aristotle also looks to metaphysical foundations, because a question springs from an “aporia” discovered in reality. At this level, knowledge about a fact (*hóti*) concentrates only on showing that something is (in the sense of the possession of attributes), and it is a preliminary stage on the path of scientific knowledge. Only knowledge about a cause (*dióti*) is valuable knowledge because knowledge of causes becomes the method for explaining reality. Thus knowledge takes shape in response to the question *diá ti* – “why?” – and in this context we can call this question the fundamental question of knowledge-formation. The question *diá ti*, which was systematized in logic, finds its full rational justification in metaphysics. A typical feature of metaphysical questions is that they are constructed on the basis of knowledge of the structure of real things. The first philosophers (the pre-Socratics) had asked about what things were constructed of, and they searched for the principles of life or asked about the one all-encompassing principle (*arché*) of the whole world.<sup>12</sup> In his philosophical inquiries, Aristotle went further and asked

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, II, 90 a 6-9. A separate problem is whether the middle term refers to all causes or only to the formal cause (as the essence and definition of a thing).

“why things are,” and thereby he searched for the necessary elements of a being in its internal structure. The structure of reality appears as non-uniform and dynamic. Therefore in response to the question posed in this way we discover the world as composite and causally conditioned.

As Aristotle suggests, the question “why” is always understood in this way: “why does one thing attach to some other?” In this formulation a cognitive relation to real states of being is implied. In this way, the compositions and relations that appear in being are discovered. At the same time, this allows us to show the plurality and diversity of being. The meaning of the above statement in relation to monistic conceptions is formulated in the further part of this statement – “*why a thing is itself* is a meaningless inquiry for giving meaning to the question *why*.”<sup>13</sup> We do not err about the fact that we know “something,” but we can only err about what and why “something” is. For this reason the number of causes and their nature needs to be understood and justified, and this happens with reference to real states of being.<sup>14</sup>

Metaphysical questions by their formal structure reflect a pluralistic image of the world. At the same time, the question of which of the elements discovered in reality provides a rational justification in a given aspect takes on essential significance. In this context, the questions concerning the cause, which is posed both with respect to beings as a group, and to each individual being taken on its own, acquires a real cognitive function. Therefore the question whose structure and meaning corresponds to real states of being provides the basis for the possibility of knowledge that un-

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<sup>12</sup> We can infer this from the statements the first philosophizing thinkers made that pointed to various sorts of material primordial elements (such as water, air, fire, etc.) that were uniform in their nature and constituted the foundation of all reflections concerning the world. Consequently, that was a monistic interpretation of reality in which causes were reduced to a material “primordial building material.” Cf. A. Maryniarczyk, *The Monistic and Dualistic Interpretation of Reality*, trans. by H. McDonald (Lublin 2010), 66-70.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1041a 10-15. Here Aristotle’s philosophical realism is clearly seen.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore metaphysical pluralism, which was the evident and objective starting point for Aristotle, should not be called into question. Maryniarczyk indicates that “The mystery of composite things, of their identity, coming-into-being, and perishing, lies in their internal structure, not apart from that structure,” *The Pluralistic Interpretation of Reality*, trans. by H. McDonald (Lublin 2011), 19.

covers necessary elements of being (recognizing their plurality) and indicates the existence of causes.

### The Cause as the Response to the Question “Why?”

On the basis of the formulated metaphysical questions that remain in close connection with the structure of reality, Aristotle builds a method for causal knowing. Scientific knowledge, as he remarks in the *Posterior Analytics*, is based on the discernment of causes and the demonstration of necessary factors in things: “We suppose ourselves to possess unqualified scientific knowledge of a thing, [...] when we think that we know the cause on which the fact depends, as the cause of that fact and of no other, and further, that the fact could not be other than it is.”<sup>15</sup> The search for necessary causes becomes for Aristotle the foundation for explaining reality. Therefore the position of the question “why” (*diá ti*) in relation to other questions becomes justified, because knowledge is synonymous with the explanation of the causes of being, that is, it is synonymous with the answer to the question “why?” Giving an answer to the question is synonymous with showing the cause.<sup>16</sup> On this basis, Aristotle identifies the question “why” and the cause, which consequently becomes the rule for his conception of causal knowledge. For this reason, questions and formulations of causes that arise on the basis of questions become the proper tool for philosophical explanation. They constitute a reading of the real causes that occur in the world and the relations in the world. A cause as a fact that becomes legible only through the formulation of the question “why” (because it contains the character of a relation), constitutes a real factor discovered in reality.<sup>17</sup> The close connection of the cause with the question

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 71 b 9-12. Aristotle emphasize on necessity as a condition for causal knowledge is noteworthy (“that the fact could not be other than it is”).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, I, 75 a 35. Cf. also Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 194 b-195 a, and M. Hocutt, “Aristotle’s Four Because,” *Philosophy* 49 (1974): 392-399. Questions such as “how,” “how much,” “where,” and so forth in relation to questions concerning the cause become merely the basis for the verbalization of accidents in being. Therefore even physics as a science concerning nature that answers the question “what is something like?” was supported by Aristotle with causal explanation.

<sup>17</sup> J. Owens writes: “*Causa* means something real. It is not understood as an abstraction,” *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Toronto 1957), 90.



"why" seems to be fundamental from the point of view of the structure of philosophical knowledge. Of course, it is not a question of treating both processes as if they were the same in meaning, but of showing the dependence between them. The question "why" is therefore soundly posed when it has its resolution in the showing of a cause. The verbal response to the question "why" is "because," that is, the indication of a "reason" that possesses more than the dimension merely of linguistic formula or a cognitive construction. The "reason" expresses the apprehension of the "factor" that in the order considered leads to the discovery or assertion of that same state or process.<sup>18</sup> It is what reveals the causal conditions that occur in reality.

For this reason, the indication of the pluralism of being that occurs in the structure of reality allowed Aristotle to make a sound distinction between causes and the verbalization of causes. This is because compositions of being are correlates of diverse relations, among which the most essential relations should be discovered. This means that in philosophy we search for the causes that will guarantee a real and complete way of explanation. Aristotle says that "we cease our inquiry for the reason and assume that we know it when we reach a fact whose existence or coming into existence does not depend upon any other fact; for the last stage of an inquiry by this method is *ipso facto* the end and limit."<sup>19</sup> Therefore philosophy is not based on showing proximate causes or showing series of intermediate causes, but it is based on the discovery of the first, and at the same time ultimate causes. Such a procedure constitutes the method for explaining reality as a whole in its ontological foundations. For this reason, the question "why" is for Aristotle the fundamental question that forms science.

However, we cannot treat the question "why" in a univocal way. If it is to be adequate to the plurality of reality, then it must be posed analogously to the real ways of being of reality. Therefore Aristotle distinguishes between four types of questions that are the reason for the discovery of the causal mode of the being of things. They constitute formulations

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. G. Vlastos, *Reason and causes in the Phaedo*, in: *Platonic studies* (Princeton 1981), 78-81; M. Hocutt, *Aristotle's Four Because's*, op. cit., 385-387.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 85 b 27-31. We find similar statements in *Metaphysics* (IV, 1003 b 17-19), and at the beginning of *Physics* (I, 184 a 15-19). The purpose of scientific knowledge is to discover ultimate causes.

of *diá ti* that are adequate to the aspect from which we apprehend reality. Thus we ask “what is something from?” (as a reference to matter), “what is something?” (as the form), “through what is something?” (as the source of motion), and “on account of what is something?” (as the end).<sup>20</sup> These four ways of formulating the question underlie the discernment of the different causes that appear in reality. The first two causes, as matter and form, concern the internal structure of being. The efficient cause of motion and the end are called external causes, and they explain the dynamism of being. They all, however, constitute a search for a reason, that is, a proper real factor, which provides a rational justification for reality.

The cause as matter indicates that from which a thing arises and persists as such. It is often described as the material substrate for all things and for their changes. Each being possesses “something” that constitutes its material (its raw material). While it is a cause, however, it is not something independent, because the causal conditioning connects matter in the context of being as a whole.<sup>21</sup> Therefore when we indicate the structure of a being we cannot apprehend matter in itself without reference to form. In the question of the raw material, we are thus guided to what undergoes formation and is at the same time a real factor of being (this is in harmony with the structure of being). Matter as such is the reason for the individuation of being, and therefore it becomes the cause of all accidental features. Beings that from the side of form are in the same species acquire diversity through matter.<sup>22</sup> This follows from the potential mode of the being of matter.

In Aristotle’s philosophy, a cause as a form has many references, and these are reduced to a fundamental understanding as “that which something was and is” (*to ti en éinai*). The form is the subontological element whereby a thing always remains what it is despite the changes that occur in it. Aristotle shows that the form in itself is not anything concrete and de-

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 3 and 7. Such a schematic of causes also appears in other texts, mainly in Books I and V of the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle reduces all causes to the four kinds, cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V, 1013 b 17-18.

<sup>21</sup> This is how Aristotle overcome the monism of the pre-Socratics for whom a material *arché* was the fundamental factor.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VIII, 6, *On the Heavens* I, 277 b 30 – 278 a 10.

terminated, but only the connection of matter with form allows the concreteness of a being to be seen.<sup>23</sup> In the cognitive order, form becomes the foundation for general apprehensions and becomes the major factor in the definition of being. This is possible because the form constitutes the reason for constancy and immutability, that is, it is the essence (*éidos*) of a being. For this reason, it is the foundation of knowledge of universal and necessary knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Aristotle also describes form as a “model” or “pattern” (*parádeigma*), which to a certain degree corresponds to the Platonic conception of causal relations that occur with reference to ideas. Aristotle also includes numbers and the relations that accompany numbers among the factors that set apart form as the causal apprehension of a shape.<sup>25</sup> This conception of form concerns the sphere of creativity (*téchne*) and the world of products (art, craftsmanship, technology). It should be added that the cause is not limited here only to the form. The model (*parádeigma*) functions apart from the thing, and with the causation of the model there must be the cooperation of external causes.<sup>26</sup>

The explanation of being in itself concentrates on the question “what something was and is” (*to ti en éinai*), that is, on form. For this reason form seems to be the sufficient cause that provides a rational justification for all modes of being. This is also confirmed because explanation by syllogism where the middle term is identified with the formal factor is also based on form. We also find in Aristotle’s writings (especially the writings on nature) formulations that reduce both types of external causes (the efficient cause of motion and the end) to a form that becomes the foundation of specific references.<sup>27</sup> However, we cannot forget that the problem of

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII, 1033 b 22-24.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Owens, *The Doctrine of being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, op. cit., 216.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 1013 a 27-29; *Physics* II, 194 b 20-21. It is not a question here of the Pythagorean *number-arché*, nor of the Platonic distinction between the *one-dyad*, (although they had a purely ontological meaning). Aristotle applied such a conception of form in his conception of science where the thought-pattern contained in the maker’s mind constitutes the foundation (or cause) of the realization of the concrete product.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII, 1032 b 1-30.

<sup>27</sup> In the *Physics* Aristotle emphasizes that the three causes – form, the efficient cause of motion, and the end – can be reduced to one cause, cf. Aristotle, *Physics* II, 198 a 25-26. They may be reduced, however, to form understood as the factor that expresses species, cf. *ibid.*, 198 a 26-28; and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 1015 a 10-11.

external causes appears mainly in the analysis of being in the aspect of its changes, and then the form becomes an insufficient cause for the explanation of this phenomenon (and the form itself requires explanation). This is because the form is unable to provide a rational justification for the dynamism that occurs in things.

The next cause discerned by Aristotle on the basis of the question “why” is the cause of motion. It is the source of changes and rest in things.<sup>28</sup> The evidence of changes that occur in the world did not cause Aristotle to abandon the search for a cause of motion. This is because motion is not something independent, but it is always the motion of something. Motion is a property of being and forms the foundation of all being. It demarcates the real ontological space of the sublunary world and the celestial spheres. Therefore the cause of motion (although it comes from the outside) permeates a being in its ontological structure. The dynamism of being is based on actualizing and potential factors, which make an ontological dependence in the being. The efficient cause of motion is realized through that act that occurs when something acts on a potentialized factor. The occurrence of changes that go beyond physical change reveals the relations of dependence that occur in the processes.

The last of the causes that Aristotle lists is the cause as the end. Here we are dealing with the question of the cause of being or of action. The end shows “that on account of which” (*to hou héneka*) there is a being or action occurs. The cause as an end constitutes the primary motive for the occurrence of changes. In this aspect, the dependence of external causes occurs. The cause as the end constitutes the immediate reason for the action of the efficient cause of motion.<sup>29</sup> Consequently it becomes the cause of a perfection that is specific to a particular action. The formulation of this cause most often encountered in Aristotle’s writings is *telos* (that is, that which

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* II, 194 b 29-30; 198 a 15-16. The conception of the a cause as such was most often associated in the history of philosophy with the occurrence of changes. However, it was reduced to motion understood in a physical sense. Aristotle in his search for the cause of motion in a broad sense, made a distinction between motion in the physical sense and motion in the metaphysical sense (introducing the categories of act and potentiality). On this basis, the cause of motion as a real cause that occurs in reality was discerned. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX, 1065 b 5-14.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* II, 194 b 29 – 195 a 3.

finishes, or to which a change strives, a term or limit). In this way the successive stages of changes are explained, and continuity is given to them (causal dependence), which is directed to a specific end.<sup>30</sup> The ultimate motive of all action (also understood as the universal motive), which is the good (*agathón*) thus possesses essential significance in this aspect of causal explanation. Therefore the end in Aristotle (notwithstanding a conceptual difference) basically coincides with the good, because every action as a realization of an end occurs in a reference to the good.<sup>31</sup>

The causes expressed in this way become a real completion of the answer to the question concerning the reason for the existence of reality – *diá tí*. The formulations of causes are thus a particular expression of the question, and the answer to the question “why” becomes the ultimate end of knowledge. Among them, the cause understood as the end most fully answers the contents of the question, because “that on account of which” (*to hou héneka*) something occurs most fully coincides with “why” (*diá tí*) something occurs. For this reason, the cause understood as the end seems to be the chief cause. However, this does not mean that it is possible to reduce all the causes to the end. The meaning of ontological pluralism requires us to show all the sub-ontological elements that occur in a being, and to discover the factors that have an essential influence on a being.

### Conclusions

The problem of the beginning of philosophy, understood as the first cognitive operations to explain reality, seems to be closely connected with man’s natural cognitive attitude to the world. Aristotle emphasizes in this attitude the function of wonder as the fundamental intellectual attitude that is a condition for acquiring knowledge. It is difficult to overestimate the role of wonder as the beginning of philosophy, but already the questions that are raised on this basis become the foundation for the formulation of corresponding tasks of inquiry. Questions that have the purpose of acquiring knowledge are called knowledge-making questions. One such question

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals* I, 639 b 26 – 640 a 2. The end (*telos*) is an equivocal term in Aristotle. Cf. M. R. Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford 2008), 82-85.

<sup>31</sup> In book I of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle says that the fourth cause is “the purpose [*to hou héneka*] and the good (for this is the end of all generation and change),” 983 a 31-32.

in philosophy, according to Aristotle, is the question “why” (*diá ti*). The phenomenon of this question is revealed when we indicate that it corresponds to the causes discovered in reality.

Thus the subject’s openness to reality makes us arrive at the discovery of the causal mode of the being of things in the world. As we show the systemic foundations of Aristotle’s discernment of the causes, we see that a cause is understood as a real factor. Therefore the descriptions or definitions of the causes refer to real states of being discovered in reality (matter as a substrate, substance or essence, the source of motion, and the good as an end). The causes discerned in this way become the foundation for building a method of causal knowledge; in Aristotle’s philosophy this constitutes the foundation of philosophical knowledge. The questions that have been raised are crucial in the context of the study of the role of causes in the philosophical explanation of reality.

The language that Aristotle used in formulating the causes is also noteworthy. It was not the language of generalizations in which one seeks to find a univocal definition of terms, but it was an attempt to formulate a philosophical language based on the discovered pluralism of being. The formulations often used today, such as the material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, and final cause, appeared much later (in the scholastic period). Aristotle, however, formulated his definitions of the causes in close connection with the real way they occur. The process of speaking of the causes had its own foundation in the structure of being, and linguistic descriptions of the causes took such a form. It seems that Aristotle was aware of the role such an approach to philosophical language plays. The rules of knowledge and language that he formulated in his works on logic (especially in the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and the *Prior and Posterior Analytics*) show how very seriously he treated those questions.

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### THE QUESTION “WHY?” AS THE FOUNDATION FOR KNOWLEDGE OF CAUSES IN ARISTOTLE

#### SUMMARY

According to Aristotle, philosophical knowledge consists in the discovery of the first causes that occur in reality. For this reason, the quantitative and essential analysis of the causes was

the fundamental task for philosophical reflections. Aristotle considered it a priority to show the ways the causes are discerned in the aspect of questions that occur in the cognitive process. The question "why" is the question that Aristotle regarded as fundamental for the acquisition of philosophical knowledge. The phenomenon of this question is revealed when we indicate that it corresponds to the causes that occur in reality. The causes discerned in this way become the foundation for building the method of causal knowledge.

**KEYWORDS:** Aristotle, cause, the question "why," reality.