

The Creative Relation of Whole and Part

Philip Franses

Part 1: The Dance

Creative novelty

Our starting point is a simple shift in the relation of whole to parts. Normally we imagine the whole as something already there and the parts as the logical constituents. This article follows a long tradition, where the whole comes into being through the part; and the part is representative of the whole. The whole and the part are in a dynamic interaction. There is no whole without the part, and no part without the whole. The relation of parts to the whole inhabits the novel, which is thereby given the means of expression.

Circular definition

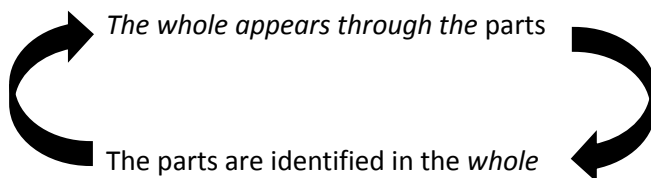
One of the dilemmas is that of circular definition where we define the whole through the parts and the parts through the whole. Immediately there is a problem in this circular definition. Do we start with the whole and get to the parts and then go back to the whole? Or do we start with the part and through this get to the whole? We seem to find that the dynamic of whole and part is illogical. We need another approach before we can deal with this circular definition.

That which is not yet set

The approach requires an attitude of *that which is not yet set*. This could also be described as something emerging, or about to emerge; still undefined; not yet categorised, fixed or compartmentalised.

Play

In order to approach this circular thinking, the whole is in the part, the part is in the whole, we have to develop this attitude of *that which is not yet set*, or not yet having a definition so we are able to play around with this dynamic before it realises itself. We can play with the whole and the part, before they are actually committed to a form, to a definitive relation. The circular definition of whole and part is between two statements:



Each statement rests for its definition on the other one. So we have a circular type of logic, where we do not know which to begin with. The crucial point is that we cannot get out of this dilemma rationally by fixing the whole to allow us to know the parts or vice versa. We have instead to approach this circular definition in an existential way by starting with the attitude of *that which is not yet set*. This attitude allows the possibility of meeting the whole and the part on their journey of mutual transformation. We allow the dynamic interplay of whole and part to realise together a form.

The play of whole and part precedes the arriving at form. We are able to live with the coming-into-being of the form, by cultivating that attitude of *that which is not yet set*.

Two-fold arising

The pre-existence of *that which is not yet set* has the two possibilities for expression, as wholeness or part. It is an emptiness, that is not dead or passive, but which has two modes of expression implicit or latent within it. Because there is this double possibility of wholeness or part implicit within that emptiness, it gives the coming-into-being out of *that which is not yet set*, a form or structure. Both wholeness and the part are embedded within the attitude of developing themselves through *that which is not yet set*. First let us look into wholeness.

Wholeness

We meet wholeness, not as a thing or something that is already there. We meet wholeness elusively, on a path that leads through that moment to other moments. It is not something that is ever finished. It appears to us at a particular moment, but that moment does not exhaust what wholeness is, or what it tries to tell us, or what it is communicating about the world. Wholeness always meets us in a way in which there is something beyond, along its path, which we have to wait for or allow to unfold. Wholeness gradually reveals itself, by always transforming itself into something new, in a process that is never finished.

Travelling illustrates this. When I go travelling, I set out with a fixed idea of what I am trying to do. And the first days are a complete nightmare because I am trying to follow this plan I thought beforehand. And then I have one disastrous day, where my bag gets stolen and it rains all day and I think I should better go home. And then I realise I have to surrender. And once I have surrendered and start living in faith, then this trip has a meaning for itself. Amazing things start to happen, because I am not in control any more, I am just allowing what appears to come. It might be a meal with friends, or a temple I see, or a village I visit, each event having a quality that leads onto the next.

The implication of this understanding is that wholeness is always something we are meeting newly. We never understand it, we never fix it, we never say, "this is what wholeness is". It is always presenting itself to us newly. There is always the chance that wholeness may appear to us in a different way. Wholeness has a concentrated quality of all things and can tell us something beyond our fragmented knowledge. Wholeness is always leading us beyond where we are. Wholeness is always taking us further, asking us to participate in it in order to give it expression. But that participation never exhausts it, we never come to the end of it.

The parts

Wholeness is an elusive concept. But equally when we come to the parts that are identified in the whole and we approach them with the attitude of *that which is not yet set*, we again meet something that is not yet fixed. A part is something that fits exactly as one piece of an exhaustive description of a phenomenon. We could say, "leaves" are the parts of the tree. But when we look closely at leaves, we find that each one is different and that the cloak of part-hood fits rather loosely. The parts are also wholes in themselves at another level of nesting.

The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) is attempting to get to the fundamental particle, or parts of matter. But what we understand as the parts of matter has shifted greatly in the last hundred years. First the atom was the fundamental part, then there were protons, neutrons and electrons as the fundamental parts; then they worked out there were quarks in the protons and the neutrons; then the quarks had flavours and colours. And in the LHC experiments, now there is an excitement that they might find a new particle foundation.

Even after years of experiment, the problem remains in physics about the fine-tuning of the properties of the particles in such a way as to allow a universe to develop through them. Even at the level of the particles there is a sophisticated interplay that has to be just right for the order of the universe to have emerged through them. An answer to this conundrum is that the part is not just a static element of an objective universe, but the part is primarily related to a dynamic whole. The part is adapting its foundational basis in order to allow the whole to be born through it. The part is something that is becoming itself in order to realise the whole. This gives us another way to see development as the fitting of the parts to the whole in a pre-play of existence.

Growing

That which is not yet set, puts in another perspective, the dynamic between the whole and the part. *That which is not yet set* is a condition of growing, not yet fixed, a growing towards what is going to realise the form. The growing is not a material consequence of the causal interactions of the atoms or proteins. The growing is an attitude of something that is not yet set and is trying to find itself through the potential of wholeness and part. Growth is a consequence of something that has to transform itself to become itself. It is nothing when it starts, but there is the opportunity that through its journey, it can become itself.

Being

There is no being before the journey. There is a necessary journey in which *that which is not yet set* of wholeness, and *that which is not yet set* of the parts, find a way of relating together that realises being. The whole is self-differencing in the parts, and the parts are the journey to the whole. Both these things are happening at the same time. The difference in the parts is the journey that allows the whole to be. The conundrum, of the whole that appears through the parts and the part that is identified in the whole, is miraculously resolved. And when we see it we feel the miracle. Suddenly everything is fitting together. We haven't started with the whole and then tried to find the parts, and we haven't started with the parts and then tried to piece together the whole. When we allow the dance between the two, the whole is the origin of the parts in its differencing and the journey through the differences is the ground of the whole.

Singularity of identity

The relationship between the whole and the part is realised in another dimension. The happening, retrospectively, gives a logical connection to all the partial expressions on the way, so that all of the growth of the parts perfectly fits the *whole*. That moment in which all possibilities connect is in the dimension of the identity of the being, becoming itself (the challenge inquired into in part 2).

The dimensions of whole and part fall together into the fulfilled unity of being. We might say, "I had this fantastic journey with this being", and the onlooker might respond "Did you?"

Part 2: The Challenge

Encounter

One day I was in a bookshop and had picked up *Dancing Wu Li Masters* by Gary Zukav. In this book every chapter is called Chapter 1 to illustrate how modern physics references the void, where nothing is able to build consequentially out of anything else. I was wandering between the physics section behind me and the theology section before me. The reading brought me into an attitude of *that which is not yet set*, as something inherent in modern physics. At a given moment, I had a feeling of a relationship between the theology section and the physics section. This crystal clear insight said that every culture is this dialogue of wholeness and part, playing in the dimension of *that which is not yet set*.

Prior to this encounter, I had been trying to talk about wholeness exclusively as its own property, something I wanted people to 'get'. But this encounter made me realise that only by looking into the culture's science, would I be able to appreciate its theology, its religiosity. Without knowing very much about physics at the time, or theology, I plunged into an investigation to explore this mirror reality between the parts as understood through science, and the whole as investigated in theology. Whole and parts have to find relation to each other in order to know themselves. Different cultures have expressed this in different ways. The whole-part relation can be explored through the different ways it has been practised in cultures.

Harmony of the One

The Ancient Greek culture saw wholeness as the essential thing. This is illustrated in their relation to number, as Klein writes:

The discreteness of "numbers" is based solely on the discreteness of the units. This discreteness makes something like a "count" and a "number" possible; as "a number of...", every number presupposes definite discrete units. Such discrete units form the homogeneous medium of counting only if each unit, whatever its nature, is viewed as an indivisible whole. That is why Aristotle can say: 'Every quantity is recognised as quantity through the one, and that by which quantities are primarily known [as quantities] is the one itself; therefore the one is the source of number as number.' (Aristotle quoted in Klein, p.53)

Only in relation to an indivisible one in the world, do two, three, four... have any meaning. For the Greeks, there is no such abstract thing as number. One, as the indivisible unity, is the basis of the world. This was given expression in the aesthetic of proportion, ratio and harmony.

Proclus meanwhile in the 5th century AD was equally exploring the existential ground of the cosmos.

The concept of the One is the ground of the cosmos. The form this cosmos takes is phenomenal. It is the divine self-appearing which is the same time a divine self-othering and a divine self-return or identity. The Principle of the One qua One is simply its primary simple singularity. In phenomena this singularity, in its otherness and identity, takes various forms. Proclus is led therefore, to consider what the structure of these forms can be.

The whole cosmic order has its structure in unity and being. Being is the self-negation of the One, the self-diremption into otherness or division. Being is thus the unity which negates itself and then is self-negated. (Lowry, 48-49)

Proclus is working with the One and the many, but he is starting with the One. The One breaks apart into otherness and then returns to unity. And he calls that production, return and wholeness. Wholeness is always trying to produce itself into many and then there is a movement of return back into identity, the completion of the cycle.

Competing parts

Through the Roman civilisation and the adoption of Christianity, culture moved to another notion of the relation of wholeness to the parts. Wholeness identified with God was completely hidden from us. But God had given us an intellect capable of perceiving the many. The relation of whole-part turned around. Oneness became this hidden secondary thing and the many became the world on which we primarily focussed.

The pure intellect in itself has no relation at all to the being of the world and the things in the world. What characterises it is not so much its “incorporeality” as just this unrelatedness. Descartes examples are characteristic of this. ‘We must comprehend that the power through which we properly know things is a purely spiritual one and no less distinct [separate] from all body, than blood from bone, or hand from eye.’ (Klein, p.202)

Wholeness is exiled to such an extent that all we are left with is the many. Wholeness is hidden as something before the parts. The only bridge to the whole is man’s intellect.

Choice

This relating of whole and part that keeps reappearing through cultures is found again in quantum theory. Quantum theory deals in a world of possibility of all the particles before we can say anything about any individual. Wholeness again becomes the question that engages scientists. One answer is to rely only on the mathematics, which allows a calculation of the outcome of any experiment. But Pauli, Bortoft and others have a different approach. We can understand the experiments by saying that the enigma of the wholeness and the part is not in the mathematics, but in this very fact, how *that which is not yet set* can reveal itself both as the whole and as the part. This two-foldness is the very nature of how that which is possible can express itself. Bortoft even gets to the point where he can feel his mind jumping between these modes. One moment, he is the unseparated whole, and the other moment, the separated part, the particle.

There are two perspectives on this science. When we close our fist, we hold the fixity of the element of matter that is the atom. When we open our fist, *that which is not yet set* is seen in the unity of whole-part resolution. This two-fold nature in *that which is not yet set* allows one to directly experience the puzzle in quantum theory without any difficulty, the structure already there, in the forming. Science reunites with the actual journey into wholeness, which is the driving impulse behind every culture. We are involved in the whole-part relation as the very act of the world revealing itself. It is a highly creative and vital work that re-appears in this age, at this time, with our science and with our need to return to wholeness.

Even when we have abandoned the whole and made something separate of the parts, there is still this possibility of wholeness manifesting itself in this world. We do not start with the whole as the Greeks, nor with the parts as in classical science. Instead, the whole-part relation gives us a stark choice. We can close our fist and thereby gain access to an ultimate knowledge of destruction in the

splitting of the atom. Or we can open our fist, freeing the whole-part relation, and find together a doorway to creation.

Our endeavour is to surrender to this journey of wholeness and part, not by imposing an understanding, but by allowing the dynamic to express itself. Without imposing a template, we allow the dynamic between wholeness and part to find its own expression. Our faith is, that without any framework, the dynamic of wholeness and part still plays itself out. We surrender the primal relationship of whole and part, to its own realisation.

Note from the author

In sharing this paper, my aim is to introduce the book ***Time, Light and the Dice of Creation*** as a collective journey to find our culture's relation of wholeness newly, through our scientific insight into whole and parts. In a culture that seeks new explanation by colliding together particles, we offer a rare event of wholeness revealing its meaning directly through a journey into science.

How can we make visible this existential choice we collectively face? Do we close our fist in fear about the splitting of the atom, or do we open our fist, at the doorway of creation, in the tradition of people who did this before us such as Leibniz, Goethe, Pauli and Bortoft? On what ground do we live meaning?

Please add your inputs, write, share, download, respond. In appreciation of your response, there is an introductory author's discount of 40% on ***Time, Light and the Dice of Creation***, by emailing me at info@holisticsciencejournal.co.uk.

The article is also to appear in the next issue of Holistic Science Journal a special issue on phenomenology. A digital copy of this article is available as open-access and can be downloaded from www.holisticsciencejournal.co.uk

Many thanks,

Philip Franses

References

Franses, P. (2015) *Time, Light and the Dice of Creation*; Floris Books

Klein, J. (1968) *Greek Mathematical Thought and The Origin of Algebra*, Dover(1992)

Lowry, J. (1980) *The Logical Principles of Proclus' Elements of Theology as Systematic Ground of the Cosmos*, Rodopi NV