Preface

The well-worn claim that a whole is greater than the sum of its parts means many things to many people. Nevertheless, it may be thought to express a particular widespread intuition about the nature of wholes. It indicates, however inadequately and vaguely, that wholes are in some way surprizing, different to what might be expected, non-trivial in their characteristics. Perhaps it hints at the impression that if a whole is composed of several parts, then to tell us all we may wish to know about each of these parts is still not to tell us something crucial about the whole itself. This book may be viewed as an attempt to justify and develop this intuition by focusing on what I take to be a neglected dimension in the nature of wholes. To attend to this dimension is to consider different *ways* in which parts, irrespective of their individual characters and of the relations between them, can compose a whole. My contention will be that contemporary metaphysical discussion by and large fails to notice this dimension, and that this may explain some of its more serious difficulties in treating questions about wholes and parts. I shall suggest that a study of this dimension may have far reaching philosophical consequences.

The task of exploring this neglected dimension is reflected in the structure of the book as follows. In Part One I aim to show that the theoretical space within which a theory of wholes and parts might be devised is larger than is often assumed. This prepares us for the possibility of rejecting certain widely accepted assumptions about wholes. In Part Two I isolate assumptions shared by contemporary theories, showing how they stand in the way of considering the dimension I am referring to, and arguing that they lead to decisive theoretical weaknesses. Finally, in Part Three, I develop a theory - the theory of Unities - which rejects these assumptions, and demonstrate the explanatory power of this theory. Before proceeding to attend to these tasks, however, I devote an introductory chapter to explaining the significance of the project, the motivation for it, and the context in which it is undertaken.

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