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- [Archive Policy](#)
- [History](#)
- [Help](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Journal Eprint Policies](#)
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Cartwright on wholism

Esfeld, Michael (2007) *Cartwright on wholism*. [Preprint]



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Abstract

This paper proposes a critical examination of the wholism that Cartwright contemplates. The first part spells out the consequences of this position – notably our principled ignorance of nature as a whole. The second part considers that physical theory which is widely claimed to exhibit some sort of wholism, namely quantum physics. I sketch a wholistic model of quantum physics and compare this model to the wholism that Cartwright considers. The result is that – contrary to what Cartwright suggests – we do not have to see ourselves as being ignorant of nature as such and our scientific view of nature can be quite systematic instead of being a patchwork. Finally, Cartwright’s wholism is confronted with confirmation wholism and semantic wholism. The result is again that these sorts of wholism speak against a patchwork view of our knowledge.

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