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Simple Wholes and Complex Parts: Limiting Principles in Spinoza

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One would expect that any thinker exploiting these two pairs of terms, *part/whole* and *simple/complex*, would correlate them in a manner exactly converse to the expressions in my title. That is, we would normally understand “simples” in important senses to be also “least parts.” And we would likewise take “complexes” in correlated ways to be also most “inclusive wholes.”

Both pairs of terms are critical in Spinoza’s philosophy, but my thesis here is that in using them, he correlates them conversely to our normal assumptions, just as I do in my title. That is to say, he understands parts to be also complex, and he understands wholes to be correspondingly simple. In this paper, I wish to urge this redistribution of our normal (and roughly organic) understanding of these two pairs of terms. I shall conclude that only the correlation I allow is viable at any limit, and that one only of these two can serve as ultimate principle.

I take it to be clear that both *part/whole* and *simple/complex* are relative terms having a variety of uses dependent on the mode of consideration or on the viewpoint adopted on a sort of sliding scale. Thus a number of familiar items like human organisms, hands, triangles, communities, and hammers may be considered in diverse ways. We may take any of them to be wholes made up of parts (in relation to “elements” or “aspects”) or we may take the same to be parts in some greater whole (in relation to “something including” them or “binding them together”). Moreover, this double viewpoint results from the fact that such things stand in intermediate range on a sort of scale. For convenience, I shall call them “mid-region beings.” Mid-region beings are so positioned that, Janus-like, they may look in either direction toward opposite extremes. That is, we are tempted to characterize them either as wholes in relation to included parts or as parts in relation to included wholes, dependent on their comparison to other items on the scale. Indeed, there is a reflexive

question. Any such item — each of us for example — may be tempted to consider itself in the same duplicitous or ambivalent manner. We humans, since we are mid-region beings, consider ourselves now as wholes made up of lesser parts, now as parts included in a larger whole.

By a *question of principles*, I mean a query about the extreme points determining such a scale or about the assignment of priorities to one or the other of these poles. Can the extremes, in this case, be least parts and greatest wholes, as they appear to be? And is the one or the other controlling, in the sense that either is ontologically prior, while its opposite may be defined merely as a negation of it or may even be cited as an error? It is the question of principles at the *limit* in this sense that I investigate here, rather than the locations, perplexities, interdependence or illusions of mid-region beings.

Nevertheless, I shall take both beginning and preliminary definitions from a striking passage in which Spinoza does explore the thicket in which mid-region beings find themselves and shape their self-images or prospects in the world. In Letter 32,¹ he indulges an elaborate fiction concerning the meditations of a “worm” found in our own viscera. With as much playfulness as he can muster, he inverts and compares that personified being’s double outlook and egocentric mistakes with our own. The moral he implies is that we are both mid-region beings, parts within a “larger region of the universe.” Hence we are also much inclined, by a kind of self-deception, to suppose ourselves self-sufficient wholes that are independent of such environs and antagonistic to all remaining things.²

In setting up this exercise, Spinoza provides his own effective definition of *part* and *whole*. It is as puzzling as its consequences are instructive:

With regard to whole and parts, I consider things as parts of some whole, in so far as their natures are mutually adapted so that they are in accord among themselves, as far as possible; But in so far as things differ among themselves, each produces an idea in our mind which is distinct from the others, and is therefore considered to be a whole.³

I shall begin with this formulation, begging the admission that we and most of the existing items we try to understand, and with whom or which we engage ourselves ordinarily, are mid-region beings. But my inquiry will zoom back and forth, so to speak, on the implied scale between two

¹ To Oldenburg in *The Correspondence of Spinoza*, trans. A. Wolf (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), pp. 209-14.

² I discuss this letter at length in “Spinoza on Part and Whole: The Worm’s Eye View,” *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 8 (1977): 139-59 (reprinted in *Spinoza: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert W. Shahan and J. I. Biro [Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1978], pp. 139-59).

³ Letter 32, p. 210.

extremes. In place of humanoid or worm-like dilemmas, I investigate whether progress toward either pole also determines and discriminates "up from down," as we might say, in exploiting a usual metaphor for philosophic principles.

I adopt a schematic convenience in using the expression *mid-region beings* and in treating *part* and *whole* as characterizations applicable relative to positions on a scale of degrees. Except at either extreme, or at the principles defining that scale itself, any intermediate may be described in either way. Each may be labeled in turn either *part* (relative to its container) or *whole* (relative to its ingredients). A mid-region being like ourselves (or the worm) may be considered (and may consider itself) to be a whole made up from lesser parts, perhaps from organs, or from items ingested, or from chemically elemental constituents. Or instead, it may be considered (and may consider itself) to be a part within a larger whole, perhaps within some neighboring region, or within a set of envioning opponents, or within some continent more gross than these.

Not only may any item residing in an intermediate location be conceived (or conceive itself) either to be made up of more elementary parts, or (alternatively) to be contained in a larger whole according to redirection toward one or the other extreme. It *is* both. Mid-region beings exist both as parts and as wholes. That is, they may be referred to one or the other extreme on the scale, or they may be compared to a proximate item at some next level in either opposed direction. The way of being correlates thus with the way the subject is considered. Either characterization is true only in so far as the item is referred to the chosen limit or to neighbors on one or the other side of its location. Likewise, beings like ourselves construct our self-image largely by adopting one or the other perspective. We refer reflection on our nature and guidance for our action to one or the other direction or to either extreme category as a principle.

When we note such a scale including mid-region beings both containing other like beings as parts and themselves contained in some other like whole, we may further visualize two series advancing in opposite directions. Whichever way we turn our gaze or our steps, we may pursue repeated procedures progressing further according to alternative criteria. Any mid-region being thus occupies a sort of way-station attained either by progress toward one limit or category, or by progress (or regress) toward the opposite. In attaching either parts or wholes to mid-region beings, we are induced to say "and so on" and to suppose a further included part or a further containing whole depending on the way we turn.

From this disposition arises the question whether there is a limit at either pole of the scale thus articulated. Thereafter, we may ask whether either (or both) limit(s) can function as a principle that begins or completes the series, and how they are respectively determined in playing this role. Any reference to a systematic pair such as *whole/part* implies a question whether one or the other of them indicates what is more real or more knowable. The question thus raised regarding the ordering of Spinoza's philosophy concerns the conceivability, possibility, and priority of something we might suitably call the "least" part (or the atom, the ultimate particular, or the true individual) and, conversely, of something we might suitably call a "greatest" (or "most complete") whole (or the entire universe, or the whole of nature, or a true individual).

Reduced to logistic formulae, the question at one pole is whether there is some whole so complete that it cannot at the same time be further conceived as a part in another relation. At the other pole, the question is whether there is some part so irresolvable that it cannot at the same time be further conceived as whole respecting others.

Before I make trial of extension to either extremity for the notions of *part* and *whole* as implicated by a seeming succession of partitions and inclusions, I should like to note one peculiarity common to both concepts when effectively defined as they are in Letter 32. Neither part nor whole is a viable notion by itself, when one item is considered in isolation from some correlated fellow units. That is, calling anything either part or whole is possible only when it is juxtaposed with something other than itself. For Spinoza, any part is one among many, and so likewise is any whole. For his controlling criteria are mutual agreement and difference among themselves. Things are considered "parts of some whole so far as their [several] natures are mutually adapted so that they are in accord among themselves." Conversely, each thing is considered to be a whole "in so far as [several] things differ among themselves." This scheme requires my interpolated word, *several*, because there is no way in which one unconnected item, considered apart from reference to others, can be called either part or whole. Rather, anything is called a part in view of a common nature shared with others. It is called a whole in view of its opposition to some other thing. No unitary or ultimate unit, in consequence, can be either whole or part as so defined.

It is not very surprising to us that when we inquire after a "least part" (advancing by division on the presumed scale) we find it to be multiple. The very act of division leads us to anticipate that parts will be many. In addition, it seems plausible for us to anticipate that increasingly elemental parts will also be progressively more simple and increasingly interchange-

able with their companions. Our habitual modes of thought lead us to something indivisible, to an atom or least particle, which is conceived as a unit — as just what it is in itself, so to speak. This is the ultimate element, and we like to think that it possesses its own inherent nature. The many parts, we think, are simple.

Mid-region beings, we suppose, are made up of many such components, though perhaps exemplifying various types assorted in chemical-like terminology. The whole universe, we are inclined to add, can be no more than the sum of these. Whatever we may correctly say about the whole thus projected we take as resulting from their successive interrelations and complications.

Conversely, when we pursue our suppositions in the opposite direction, inquiring after a “greatest whole” (advancing by compounding on the presumed scale) we are astounded to discover one such simple whole to be inconceivable. The very act of compounding encourages us to anticipate that the final result will be a unity. Moreover, it also seems plausible for us to expect that any increasingly complete whole will be progressively more complex and more inclusive of innumerable items that would otherwise stand outside it. Our habitual thought leads us toward total inclusion, toward an entire cosmos or toward an exhaustive universe. Such a whole is conceived as summated by successive ingression of otherwise alien factors. We label it the ultimate complexity, and we are tempted to think that it possesses no one inherent nature apart from either fragments or members included or from these various ways in which such factors are disposed.

Mid-region beings, we suppose, are included in such a total universe, though their multiplicity introduces additional complications in their modes of interconnection. Reducing either its occupants or their arrangements to elemental items and recurrent orders, we are inclined to expect, will enhance our understanding of either unlimited multiplicity. Whatever we may correctly say about the parts thus projected, we take simplification to result from their converse successive analyses.

Now Spinoza frustrates both of these congenial and habitual images pointing us toward least parts or greatest wholes. The interrelational definitions of *part* and *whole* I have cited evade the kind of determination of units we anticipate. Our comfortable presumptions concerning the respective loci of items thought to be simple and complex are overturned. Further, usual rubrics for interpreting his entire philosophy are challenged. Whether with approval or suspicion, we often understand God, in Spinoza’s scheme, to be the greatest whole, ultimate if also complex.⁴

⁴ It is in this sense that H. F. Hallett rejects interpreting God as a whole in *Benedict de Spi-*

And likewise — though with more suspicion than approval — we often take it for granted that both his dissection of the attribute of extension and his strange parallelism presume that there are least parts, that is, bodily (and also mental) particles that are ultimate as well as simple.

The first move toward harmonizing these theses is to give up our expectation that in defining *part* and *whole* Spinoza is designating fundamental units. Either concept may serve for a temporary unity, adopted *en passant*, or for special purposes, benign or obstinate. But in neither is that integration ultimate. Being intermediate, each is subject at all times to correction and — quite possibly — to exact inversion by juxtaposition and playful contrast with its opposite. Both *part* and *whole* indicate modes of interconnection, and these are, respectively, harmonious or antagonistic. Others with whom a single self agrees are companion parts; others to whom a single self is opposed are enemy wholes. The logic of each concept presupposes relation to other things: they (with whatever self so views them) are necessarily more than one. Things are several. Claims to unity for either part or whole are spurious. Or at least it is attained by absorption into some more adequate unit.

But to identify either part or whole presumes some sort of conceptual unity, irrespective of misapplications or vacillation among perspectives looking at each. Moreover, contrary to our presumptions about his “holistic” philosophy, Spinoza seems to prefer exploiting the concept of part, because of the harmony involved. A whole is identified as such in that respect in which it differs from other things to which it appears to be opposed. But such contrariety is a kind of failure in efforts to conceptualize. A whole identified through conflict is taken as if self-sufficient, whereas it fails of unity to that extent. For its existence must include some other. That other may be constituted by a recognized limitation or by an unrecognized cause. But in either case, the whole turns out to depend on that opponent. Some opposed other is required for adequate understanding of what it is. Stated differently: another is something else without which the proposed whole can neither be nor be conceived. It would appear that pretension to be that whole reflects both complex insides and interdependence with outside opponents.

Conversely, in the definitive passage, a part is identified precisely by reference to a unitary nature — not its own, but that which it shares with other parts. The multiple parts are what they are to the extent that they are

noza (London: Athlone Press, 1957), p. 13. In no strict sense may we call God a whole, as is shown by attempting to reduce God to some causative other. There is no other, inside or out, respecting which God could be discrepant. Rather He is that to which neither characterization could be applied, not “part,” and not “whole.” He is simple, being of one nature and constituting his own law.

conceived under common laws and their interactions are referred to respects in which they are adapted to each other. Were that citation lacking, aspects of that order and of those others on which they all depend would be omitted. Or else, that unity would be betrayed by respective insistence from each on its fancied independence as a whole unit. When their agreement with others is cited, all parts are subsumed under a concept (further and single) that is more adequate. Improved understanding is attained, since the manner of conception includes causes through which they must be conceived and on which their being depends. The concept is more true, for it indicates more completely what that part is. It does so, it would appear, by reducing parts to their role in a more complex whole.

The reassortment of systematic notions thus instigated by Spinoza in the passage in Letter 32 suggests a revised and more congenial resolution of the search for least part and greatest whole. An organic reinterpretation seems to be implied, though it is oblique to defining *part* and *whole*, respectively, according to agreement and difference. Parts and wholes alike are reinterpreted to indicate unit items that are contained and containing in a prior order having some greater complexity. In this way, we might think that epistemic and ontological perplexities may both be resolved by finding greater wholes among successive composite organizations and by finding lesser parts, finally discrete, among successive elemental ingredients.

According to this disposition, the term *least part* may then indicate elements ultimately indivisible and interchangeable, whereas the term *greatest whole* indicates the completed and inclusive order itself. Using Spinoza's principles, then, it seems plausible to understand God or "the whole of nature" as the complex total order; and to understand most simple parts (bodily or mental) as the elements so interrelated. Postulating one ruling order thus gives both terms their meaning. Redefined according to it, parts within are simple. By this disposition of *simple/complex*, mental or bodily ingredients seem atomic parts, roughly elemental, while God or Nature or Whatever seems a pantheistic whole, roughly organic.

But again, Spinoza frustrates this elaborate and initially plausible interpretation. He cannot allow the implied correlations of paired opposites, in this case, *whole* and *part*, respectively, with *complex* and *simple*. Rather, he inverts this correspondence. The greatest whole in this sense (or even God) cannot be complex. Rather, it is simple. The least part in this sense (or anything to be called "elements") cannot be simple. Rather they are complex. The added pair of terms, *simple/complex*, emerge

as controlling. Contrary to our initial assumption they are correlated respectively with *whole* and *part*.

Let me assign for them meanings suitable to my argument and (as I hope) to the redisposed interpretation of Spinoza I propose. I understand something to be called "complex" when a proper conception of it (or one sufficient for its possible understanding and existence) entails reference relating it to something other than itself or subsuming it under some distinct outside heading. It cannot be anything just by itself, apart from some remainder to which it must be referred. It might, however, so appear, whether viewed from within or from outside.

Conversely, I understand something to be called "simple" when a proper conception of it (or one sufficient to its possible understanding and existence) entails no citation referring it to something other than itself or subsuming it under some different heading. It can be whatever it is, apart from other things. It is not dependent on something else for existence or conception. To that extent, it is sufficient and real, yet further determination of it may add supplements showing its dependence on something even more simple.

Now these terms are implicated in the imaginative exercises among the worm's perspectives and in the resolution of human perplexities they encourage. Mid-region beings are never simple. That is not so merely because they may be thought of as complex beings made up of lesser parts. The reason, rather, is that they depend in complex ways on other mid-region beings they encounter. These alien influences to that extent determine their existence. They must be referred to in some adequate conception showing their nature. When these addenda are overlooked, we err in conceiving them, or they err in their self-image. Moreover, the complex of many several mid-range beings may always be reduced to greater simplicity by citing a further rule — either that in which their natures agree or that simple nature expressing whatever law of conjunction they (and like mid-region beings) may be said to obey.

It is no more than a logical transposition of these assertions to say that mid-region beings are always complex. What they are (or what we might adequately conceive them to be) entails innumerable external factors. Complicating factors, seemingly internal, are also involved, for their own inner struggles too may perturb mid-region beings. They are dependent on alien others (inside, and out) and they are confused by incomprehensible irritations. Any mid-region being is unintelligible so far as conceiving it must omit either outside things (on which it depends) or visceral things (which interfere with its condition in unrecognized ways). Because mid-region beings have incomplete understanding of others (inside and out)

which yet contribute to their being and true conception, they lack adequate knowledge of themselves. They are complex. But their endeavor is toward imagining or knowing a simple self. The consequence is a vision — often deluded and “simplistic,” as we say — converting complexities requisite to their proper identity into other beings opposed as enemies. Mid-region beings err in overlooking their own perturbed complexity and in pursuing spurious simplicities. It is hence that the “idea constituting the actual being of the human mind is not simple, but compounded of a great number of ideas.”⁵

When we reflect on this incorrigible complexity in mid-region beings, we are able to see that any relative correction of their misconceptions is attained by appeal to a greater simplicity. Conception more true and more real is *not* also more complex. Rather, it grasps a greater simplicity that is for that reason more true and real. We reason properly about mid-region beings by tracing respects in which they agree with other things. Presumably, were mid-region beings able to attain it respecting themselves or other mid-region beings, complete grasp of this sort, overlooking nothing, would reduce to simplicity the innumerable factors mistakenly thought self-sufficient.

In the definitive passage from Letter 32 that higher simple concept is supplied by indicating a “nature in which they agree.” It should be noted that *nature* here does not mean compiling shared descriptive components in which separate items are alike.⁶ It is rather that connection where “the laws, or nature of one part, adapt themselves to the laws, or nature, of another part, in such a way as to produce the least possible opposition.”⁷ The several mid-region beings are re-understood as instances interrelated — and subsumed — by the mode of interconnection governing and harmonizing them. That is, they are and are understood to the extent of their participation in a simple nature. Their complex interactions (as competing wholes in opposition) are thus far false — or else they are subject to more inclusive simplicities as yet unrecognized. Complexity may be omitted accordingly.

It should now be apparent that the definitive passage only obliquely defines a *part* that could be diversified from antagonists in a whole increasingly complex. Spinoza was cautious in his phrase, “I consider

⁵ *Ethics*, Book II, Proposition 15. Regarded in this way, Spinoza’s little dramatization of the reflections of the worm is a morality play showing the dependence of ethical resolution on the improvement of the intellect. There is thus great poignancy in using ourselves and the worm as examples. —

⁶ It is this mistake that Spinoza criticizes in commenting on the errors in forming “universals” in the mind.

⁷ Letter 32, p. 210 — immediately preceding the defining quotation.

things as parts of some whole.” The phrase *parts in a whole* refers to things “which adapt themselves to the laws or nature, of another part in such a way as to produce least possible opposition.” They are neither opposed to companion parts nor component in some whole. Rather, they are reconciled to the extent of the simple nature in which all share. In accordance with this simplicity, reason traces laws, harmonies, and natures among mid-region beings. It is only such simple things “which are common to *everything* and which are equally in the part and in the whole.”⁸ Any middle items are taken to be parts in some whole, when understood by reason. From that standpoint, they are neither wholes (compiled from parts) nor parts opposed, that is, discrete within an unknown whole.

Spinoza calls discursive knowledge by reason the “second kind of knowledge.” But this reasoning neither compounds nor divides, as we might expect from other seventeenth-century dispositions of method.⁹ Rather, it resurveys many things — mid-region things, at least — according to a novel simplicity that shows agreements among parts in some whole, that is, it cites the more simple nature, the common notions, shared by both. Thus reason eliminates the mistakes that arise when wholes are set against other wholes or when parts are isolated from each other or from lesser parts within. Reason offers a new mode of intellect according to a prior simplicity discursively articulated. It is neither analysis nor synthesis in an order locating simpler parts within increasingly complex wholes.

In consequence of Spinoza’s formulation of this higher way of knowing, it is possible to grasp simplicity in yet a further way that is non-discursive. That grasp is no doubt analogous to the way a painting may be seen as one or a symphony may be heard as one. The objects may be encountered as *wholes without partition* or as *parts merged into such a whole*. Understanding of this sort is presumably Spinoza’s “third kind of knowledge.” The object of intuition in this sense is always simple. It is never complex, however much our discussion of it may complicate or arrange our expressions. But terminology citing *part* and *whole* becomes increas-

⁸ Note, following *Ethics*, Book II, Proposition 38.

⁹ For all the importance of whole and part in Spinoza’s philosophy, he nowhere makes extensive use of those pairs of methodological terms that we usually think most appropriate for moving among such units, namely *analysis/synthesis*, *composition/resolution*, and the like. The scale I propose suggests a serial order of operations in inverse directions, just as there are questions of a most or a least unit in these orders: yet, either set of terms distorts when we apply them to Spinoza, as we are inclined to do. We neither arrive at parts by subdividing wholes, nor at wholes by compiling parts. In this, he diverges from Hobbes, unlike many other important respects in which their views are similar.

ingly attenuated in discussing it, as is indicated by the awkward phrases I have just employed. Finally, the distinction between part and whole absconds entirely.

Both reason and intuition, the two higher ways of knowing in Spinoza, accomplish the same goal. Each eliminates the apparent complexity of mid-region beings and each abridges their severance from each other by a prior simplicity. Reasoned knowledge discloses unity among multiple things. Intuition accomplishes these simplifying integrations all at once, without discursive articulation. Accordingly, it severely modifies any understanding shaped according to any orders of *part* and *whole*, if it does not displace them entirely. The explanation for this turn away from part and whole is that the highest kind of knowledge, being non-discursive, dispenses alike with complexity and multiplicity. It neither divides nor compiles. It can be called neither analysis nor synthesis. It undertakes neither operations nor intellectual processes in any order whatsoever. We so understand, or we do not.

Conversely, all rational discourse, and indeed any articulation, undertakes movement within some order, if only verbal-logical manipulations. By such transformations, it may discriminate parts and connect them into wholes. Reason, not intuition, is the mode of knowing that moves among parts and wholes. But such passage among them is blocked, when reason attempts discourse about many objects discrepant among themselves and together in one whole by complication only. Reasoning is possible to the extent that oppositions and multiplicities are removed so that objects are shown to be single and in agreement. Partition occurs only in conformity to simple natures or laws. In that sense, each summary whole is also a more simple thing. Complexity arises only from diversification and conflicts that ignore agreement and mutual conformity. In that sense, likewise, each diversified part is also a more complex thing.

Before I offer conclusions concerning limiting principles, I wish to summarize these central arguments in the sheerest of logistic terms. In doing so, I set aside for the time substantive and even methodological considerations about Spinoza's categories, in order to show merely verbal correlations and formal manipulations.¹⁰ Another inquiry is omitted here,

¹⁰ There is no logic in this purely formal sense in the philosophy of Spinoza. There could be none, for any inferential move in such a scheme is intricately connected with substantive matters, and its expression is dependent on his expository preference for the *more geometrico*. That explains why the *Improvement of the Understanding* is so perplexing — and also, perhaps, why it is unfinishable in the envisaged format.

namely, showing the alterations in the logistic disposition so presented as they are applicable to separate fields or diverse human concerns in Spinoza's philosophy — political, scientific, metaphysical, epistemic, moral, etc.¹¹

Beings somewhere short of extremes on the relevant scales may be conceived, and may conceive themselves, either as one among many parts or as single wholes. But neither conception reduces the term conceived to a simple unity. The unit is illusory when complex interdependences between discrete items are ignored. It is sound, when simple adaptations among agreeing parts are postulated. The paradoxes of mid-region beings may be enlightened by a move, in one direction, turning toward lesser parts. However, no viable unit can be found in a least part that is also simple. Rather, any further partition introduces complexity by adding relevant parts. For it multiplies the number of units to be reconciled and the connections in which they may be found. Any addition must be permuted by its interactions both with every remaining part and also with whatever reconciling notion is required to explicate them all. For each further division — to be understood — entails also introducing new ruling comprehensions to accommodate the increment. Further division into lesser parts is indeed conceivable. But the resulting unit is a thing of reason instigated by our own mode of consideration. Its connections with others are intelligible only according to some single principle of discrimination and according to some more inclusive formulation correlating their diversity.

Hence a further step of analysis in search of a least part more simple may always be undertaken. But there is no limit to the series thus begun. And its advance increases complexity. No lesser part is simply what it is. Rather, proper conception of it must be supplemented with notice of connections with other parts, with possible further subdivisions, and with whatever more simple conception makes both intelligible. Neither one isolated part nor any set of parts can ever be least. As division proceeds, members are increasingly complex, both in aspects internal to themselves and in mingling with others. No least part in this sense can ever work in independence. For it itself is never simple.

In consequence, no least part (to the extent that it is thought as simple and among many others) can ever serve as a limiting principle. Such simplicity as parts possess lies in the rational concept or intuitive insight that comprehends them. That unity is only complicated when moves toward lesser parts are undertaken, even sound ones. And there is no stop to pro-

¹¹ Diverse applications of the logistic considerations I isolate here are explicated in Sacksteder, "Least Part and Greatest Whole: Variations on a Theme in Spinoza" [in preparation].

cedures advancing in that direction. No simple least part is possible, nor can one serve as beginning or principle for any reflection.

By an inferential progression in the opposite direction, we find also that no viable logistic unit can be found in a greatest whole that is also complex. Rather, any further compilation requires also comprehension by wholes more simple. For it alone integrates and arranges whatever conflict, division, and multiplicity adding such ingredients entails. Any greater organization must also invoke more basic simplification in order to provide adaptive interconnection of its members and to adjudicate disputed places within it. Any further unity, taken as composite, introduces internal oppositions and misapprehensions resultant on multiplied interconnections or perspectives. Further inclusion within greater wholes is indeed conceivable. But that rational transformation must also reorder otherwise greater complexity by more simple ruling concepts. Its results are intelligible only to the extent that diversity and conflict are mitigated to attain it. Any differences, internal tensions, and dependences on alien remainders must be eliminated.

Hence a further step of synthesis in search of a greater whole more complex may always be undertaken. But there is no limit to the series thus begun. And its advance complicates. Any greater whole exhausts by comprehending further discrete items. Proper conception of it so transforms ingredients that division among its parts cites laws and natures governing their adjustment and mutual causation. No organic whole or set of seeming atoms can ever be greatest. Its unity is rather increasingly simple, both in being what it is and in conceiving interdependence in regulated ways. Any greatest whole in this sense depends on some prior unity. For in itself it is always complex.

In consequence, a limiting principle may be found in a greatest whole only to the extent that it is thought to be one and simple. Such complexity as that principle explains is understood by transformations according to rational concepts or by intuitive insight. A limit to procedures advancing in that direction is found only in that thing that is one by being determined through no other things outside itself. We may think of it as having internal complexities, ourselves among them. But these always must exist in and must be conceived through it, in order to be referred to a principle determining them. That principle is the greatest whole or the whole of nature in which we lesser beings thus find location. To be such, however, that whole must be simple.

Parts, considered in isolation or in conflict, are always complex and posterior. They contain internal divisions, they depend on other and alien parts, and they mistake such laws as adapt them to others or to a prior

simplicity. But they may be reconsidered, or they may reconsider themselves, in accordance with the notion of a simple whole. To that extent, their spurious integrities and antagonistic discrepancies are superceded by sound comprehensions that simplify. Internal perturbations and external oppositions may thereby be reinterpreted and felt as figments of complex and unsound imagination.

For this reorientation, Spinoza's system appeals to an exacting priority in something we are able to consider the whole and that he calls prominently "the whole of nature" with which our minds find unity. But that whole is never a complex composed of divided or dividing internal parts. Nor is it ever limited by something other than itself. It must, rather, be simple. By this redisposition, the philosophy of Spinoza finds its principle in a simple whole. Any advancing enlightenment, moral, scientific, or both, turns toward it. Mid-region beings so progress by recognizing that they are complex parts — except to the extent that their minds are united in agreement with that whole.