

Spinoza on the Wise and the Free

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Abstract

This paper is a response to Sanem Soyarslan's objections to my reading of Spinoza's free person (*homo liber*). She argues that on my interpretation the free person, unlike the wise person (*vir sapiens*), while subject to passive affects, does not experience bondage to the passions; and so only the latter, but not the former, can serve as a viable "model of human nature." I argue in this paper that, in fact, the free person and the wise person are, for Spinoza, one and the same individual, and thus constitute a single ideal model that we can more or less closely approximate.

Keywords: Spinoza, free person, wise person, reason, passions, third kind of knowledge, *acquiescentia animi*

1 Another Puzzle From *Ethics* 5

Part Five of Spinoza's *Ethics* is the gift that keeps on giving. It contains quite a few propositions that continue to perplex commentators. In Part Five, "On the Power of the Intellect, or on Human Freedom," Spinoza presents his doctrine of the eternity of the mind, refers to human "blessedness" and "salvation," and cites the "intellectual love of God" as our highest good—all of which must strike the reader as strange, coming from a philosopher who rejects any kind of providential deity, not to mention inconsistent with a lot of what has been demonstrated in the work's previous parts. The difficulties of Part Five have led one prominent scholar famously to declare much of it to be "an unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster."¹

Among the puzzling and contentious notions of Part Five is "the wise man" (in Latin: *vir sapiens*, or sometimes just *sapiens*). Though this character, recalling the sage of the ancient Stoics, also makes an appearance elsewhere in the text, his principal role is in the final propositions of the

1 Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1984), 357.

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work, especially the scholium to Part Five, proposition 42.² Part of the dispute among scholars concerns whether or not the wise person should be identified with “the free person [*homo liber*]” of Part Four,³ that is, with the “model of human nature [*naturae humanae exemplar*]” also introduced in Part Four (Preface; G II 208), in relation to which things are to be judged truly good or bad according to whether they facilitate or hinder our *conatus* (striving to persevere) and our approach to that more perfect condition.⁴ Some, including myself, have assumed (without much argument) that the free person and the wise person are one and the same;⁵ others have argued that they are not, and that there are clear and significant differences between the two both in terms of their character and in the role they play in Spinoza’s moral philosophy.⁶

In an insightful paper, “Two Ethical Ideals in Spinoza’s *Ethics*: The Free Man and the Wise Man,”⁷ Sanem Soyarslan uses the wise person to make the case against the reading of Spinoza’s free person that I defend in “On Spinoza’s ‘Free Man.’” I had argued that the free person is a real possibility for actual, durationally existing human beings, and thus the model or exemplar of human nature which we can and should strive to attain, however rare and difficult such an achievement might be. Soyarslan claims that, in fact, it is the wise person, not the free person, who represents the real possibility for us and, thus, a different, more attainable ideal. This, she says, is because the wise person, despite being governed by reason, is not only still subject to passive affects/passions brought about through interaction with things in the world (as I had argued was the case with the free person), but sometimes even “in bondage” to them (which I had argued is never the case with the model free person). In other words, what in her view distinguishes the wise person from the free person and makes the former, but not the latter, more like us and therefore an attainable moral ideal for actual human beings is that in the former, but not in the latter, the power of the passions is on occasion

2 The translations (occasionally corrected by me) are from Benedictus Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

3 Among the puzzles is why Spinoza uses ‘*vir*’ with ‘*sapiens*’ rather than ‘*homo*’ (as he does with ‘*liber*’). ‘*Vir*’ is exclusively a masculine Latin noun, while ‘*homo*’ can serve as a non-gendered noun (such as ‘human’). But surely Spinoza would not say that only men can be wise, while any human being can be free.

4 I argue elsewhere that the free person and the model of human nature are one and the same; see Steven Nadler, “On Spinoza’s ‘Free Man,’” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1, no.1 (2015): 103-120 (where I also review the arguments of those who deny that claim).

5 Ferdinand Alquié, *Leçons sur Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions La Table Ronde, 2003), 326; Alexandre Matheron, “Le Moment stoïcien de l’*Éthique* de Spinoza,” in *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophes de l’âge classique* (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2011); Steven Nadler, *Think Least of Death: Spinoza on How to Live and How to Die* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); and, if I read them correctly, Firmin DeBrabander, *Spinoza and the Stoics: Power, Politics and the Passions* (London: Continuum, 2007), 80; and Andrew Youpa, *The Ethics of Joy: Spinoza on the Empowered Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 47–8.

6 See, for example, Karolina Hübner, “Spinoza on Being Human and Human Perfection,” in *Essays on Spinoza’s Ethical Theory*, eds. Matthew J. Kisner and Andrew Youpa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 137n45; Philippe Danino, *Le Meilleur ou le vrai: Spinoza et l’idée de philosophie* (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2014), chapter 4; and Sanem Soyarslan, “Two Ethical Ideals in Spinoza’s *Ethics*: The Free Man and the Wise Man,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 5, (2019): 357–370. Also in this camp, if I read them correctly, are Jon Miller, *Spinoza and the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 130; and Clare Carlisle, *Spinoza’s Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 144.

7 Soyarslan, “Ethical Ideals.”

stronger than the power of rational ideas, though the wise person is well equipped to deal with this unavoidable fact of human existence.

My aim in this response to Soyarslan is limited. I will not reply to all of her points. In fact, I will concede that one of her central claims is correct—namely, that a condition of absolute freedom from *bondage* to the passions is not possible for durational human beings, and thus the free person as the model of human nature is not something we can actually attain. However, it does not follow from this that the wise person represents a distinct ideal from the free person. Indeed, I would like to turn the tables on Soyarslan and show that Spinoza does *not* distinguish the free person from the wise person. Thus, if one is conceived in such a way that, while it is the model of human nature, it is not something actually attainable but only a kind of aspirational asymptote, then likewise so is the other; and if one is conceived in such a way that it is an attainable ideal of human nature, then so must the other. More precisely, if the wise person is understood as Soyarslan understands it, as an individual causally embedded in the world and occasionally overcome by her passions (but generally in control of herself), and for that reason an attainable ideal for existing human beings, then so too is the free person. On the other hand, if the free person *qua* model of human nature is understood to be an unattainable, asymptotic ideal because, though subject to passions, he is *never* in bondage to them, then such is the case with the wise person as well. The key, as I show, is in understanding that both wisdom and freedom come in degrees.

2 The Free Person

There is a popular reading of Spinoza's free person—what Matthew Kisner calls “the standard reading”⁸—according to which the free person is absolutely free in Spinoza's sense of freedom. Possessing *only* adequate or clear and distinct intellectual ideas, and thus incapable of acting otherwise than from his own nature alone, it is not just that the free person is guided exclusively by reason and adequate ideas in his behavior, with passions/inadequate ideas having, relative to adequate ideas, insufficient affective power and efficacy upon his desire and thus his action. Rather, on this standard reading, the free person *does not have any passions or inadequate ideas whatsoever*. The free person so interpreted is not just active, and not just always active; he is purely and solely active, “perfectly active,”⁹ experiencing no passivity whatsoever. His *conatus* or striving to persevere is not ever affected, positively or negatively, by external things. By Spinoza's standards, on this reading the free person is not a part of nature; he stands outside the causal nexus of the world and is essentially a finite simulacrum of God (or Nature) itself. But in that case, the free person cannot really be a model or an achievable ideal for actually existing human beings, since, as Spinoza never tires of reminding us, “[i]t is impossible that a man should not be a part of nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone and of which he is the adequate cause” (E4p4). The condition of the free person so understood would be incommensurable with the human condition and thus in principle unrealizable by finite creatures

8 Matthew Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy and the Good Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chapter 8.

9 The phrase also comes from Kisner, *ibid.* 166.

embedded in the world, such as ourselves. Indeed, as so many critics of Spinoza have proclaimed, the free person would be an incoherent notion: a free human being that is not a human being at all. How could such an unrealistic and confused notion serve as a model for our lives?¹⁰

In my 2015 article, I argue that this “standard” reading of the free person, to which such objections are directed, is wrong—that Spinoza’s free person, far from being impossible or incoherent, is indeed the “model of human nature” that we can and should strive to realize in our durational lives, even if—to quote the final lines of the *Ethics*—the task is “difficult” and its achievement “rare” (E5p42s).

The free person does not explicitly appear as such in the *Ethics* until E4p66s. And the way the notion is first introduced makes it evident that the free person is identical to the person who lives according to the dictates of reason. That is, while the terms ‘*liberum*’ and ‘*homo liber*’ do not appear until E4p66s and E4p67, respectively, the concept of the free person has already been at work throughout Part Four in the propositions devoted to the person living under the guidance of reason. This is especially clear if we consider precisely what Spinoza says in that scholium. Having just demonstrated that “[f]rom the guidance of reason we want a greater future good in preference to a lesser present one, and a lesser present evil in preference to a greater future one” (E4p66), Spinoza goes on to say that

[i]f these things are compared with those we have shown in this Part up to proposition 18, concerning the powers of the affects, we shall easily see what the difference is between a man who is led only by an affect, or by opinion, and one who is led by reason. For the former, whether he will or no, does those things he is most ignorant of, whereas the latter complies with no one’s wishes but his own, and does only those things he knows to be the most important in life, and therefore desires very greatly.

The subject here is still the person guided by reason. But then Spinoza immediately notes that “I call the former a slave [*servum*], but the latter a free man [*liberum*]” (G II 260). So, the free person is identical with the person who in her life is led consistently by reason—that is, the individual who has been the subject of the previous forty-seven propositions.

Moreover, Spinoza ends this scholium—and thereby introduces the next seven propositions, all devoted explicitly to the free person and their behavior—by saying that “I wish now to note *a few more things* concerning the free man’s temperament and manner of living” (my emphasis). This, of course, means that what Spinoza has already been discussing in the previous propositions, a life engaged in this world under the guidance of reason, is continued in the subsequent discussion of the

10 See, for example, the different versions of the argument against the attainability of the free person in Daniel Garber, “Dr. Fischelson’s Dilemma: Spinoza on Freedom and Sociability,” in *Ethica 4: Spinoza on Reason and the “Free Man,”* eds. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal, 183-208 (New York: Little Room Press, 2004); Michael LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Kisner, *Human Freedom*; and Piet Steenbakkens, “Living Well, Dying Well: Life and Death in Spinoza’s Philosophy and Biography,” in *Life and Death in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Susan James, 181-196 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). For a contrary view, in addition to Nadler, “On Spinoza’s ‘Free Man,’” see Herman de Dijn, *Spinoza: The Way to Wisdom* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996), 250–3.

free person. Thus, I see no reason to doubt that the free person and the person living under the guidance of reason are one and the same.

Now, freedom for Spinoza does come in degrees. An individual can be more or less free, can approximate more or less the ideal free person that is the model of human nature. That ideal is someone who always, unfailingly, does what reason dictates, while still undergoing passive affects caused by interaction with other people and things in the world (although probably fewer such affects than less free individuals). Even the ideal or model free person will stub his toe, experience the pleasure of a fine meal, and feel sadness at the death of a loved one.¹¹ As I argued in my earlier article, the free person is, like any human being (whether living under the guidance of reason or not), “a part of nature.” However, the externally caused affections will never determine what the ideal free person does. His behavior is *always* directed by reason, *never* by passions; he is led by the intellect and what he *knows* is truly good, never merely by how something happens to make him feel. As E4p66s states, the free person, the person who is “led by reason,” “complies with *no one’s wishes but his own*, and does *only* those things he knows to be the most important in life” (my emphasis).

3 “An ideal yet perfectly human condition”

In her article, Soyarslan takes issue not so much with this reading of the constitution and character of Spinoza’s model or exemplary free person, but with its suitability for serving as the ideal for which we as actual human beings can and should strive. She grants, for the sake of argument, that my understanding of the free person is correct, but then argues that, even still, it is not an attainable goal, that it remains (like the free person on the standard reading) beyond our reach. This is because the free person as I present it in my article, while subject to passions, is never in bondage to them. My free person, she correctly notes, will never undergo *akrasia*, or engage in action that he knows is contrary to his better judgment. On my account, the rational ideas in the free person are always affectively stronger than his passive or inadequate ideas. This is what guarantees the rationality of everything he does and that he “complies with no one’s wishes but his own.”

Soyarslan says that there is “a very thin line between being subject to passions and being in bondage to them.”¹² In fact, there is quite a clear and significant line between them.¹³ A person who experiences passions but is led by reason is in control of himself. By contrast, a person in bondage is controlled by those affects caused by external things, and so is not in control of himself. This can happen only on rare occasions, or it can dominate one’s life. Be that as it may, Soyarslan is correct to point out that there will in this life always be passions that are affectively stronger than our rational ideas, and thus that determine our actions. She cites E4p3 (“The force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes”) and notes that “because it is possible for the power of external causes to be greater than the power of any one

11 As Alquié puts it, “l’homme libre . . . vit dans le temps, dans le monde, dans la cité” (*Leçons sur Spinoza*, 326). The same is true, he says, of “le sage.”

12 Soyarslan, “Ethical Ideals,” 361.

13 My thanks to Ariel Suhamy for his thoughts on this point.

individual by an indefinite degree, passions often end up being more powerful than rational ideas and determining our action.” She puts the question as follows:

Is it then possible for us to become a free man—that is, someone whose adequate ideas are always affectively stronger than their inadequate ideas? In other words, is it possible for us to attain a state of exceptionless self-determination or a condition wherein “desire always takes its lead from adequate ideas” as Nadler (2015:116) suggests? I submit that it is not. Notably, on Nadler’s account, ‘self-determining’ means that an individual “is not ‘determined to do what the common constitution of external things demands’ but rather ‘what his own nature, considered in itself, demands’ (IVp37s1).” As I see it, achieving exceptionless self-determination in this sense is not an available outcome for us—not even for the most rational ones amongst us . . . [E]ven our most powerful adequate ideas cannot promise absolute freedom from bondage to the passions.¹⁴

Given the ineliminability of bondage to the passions in a human life, she concludes that the free person, being an unattainable model, cannot be the ideal toward which we as actual human beings strive and that grounds true judgments of good and bad. But—working on the assumption that there must be *some* attainable ideal in Spinoza’s moral philosophy that so functions to motivate us—she argues that that “ideal yet perfectly human condition” is represented by the wise person.

The difference between the wise person and the free person, Soyarslan claims, is that the wise person does not achieve exceptionless rationality in her actions and thereby fully surmount human bondage. What makes the wise person wise is not that her passions never guide her actions, but that mostly they do not *and* she knows this fact and deals properly with it. The wise person is not unflinchingly active, but as active as a real human being can be. Moreover, the fact that sometimes the wise person *is* overcome by passions does not trouble her. She enjoys the peace of mind and tranquility—the *acquiescentia animi*—that comes with intuition or the third kind of knowledge. This is the highest form of knowledge in Spinoza’s system, and consists in an immediate understanding of how the essences of things follow from the essence of God or Nature. The wise person understands that “we do not have an absolute power to adapt things outside us to our use.” Therefore, knowing that she has “done [her] duty” and that the things that adversely affect her could not have been avoided, she shall “bear calmly those things which happen to [her] contrary to what the principle of [her] advantage demands” (E4app32). According to Soyarslan, then,

the wise man has a mind whose *greatest* part is eternal—that is, his “adequate ideas constitute the greatest part of [his] mind” (*Ethics* Vp20s). His mind thus “acts most” (ibid) and can “bring about that [the passions] constitute the *smallest* part of the mind . . .” (ibid, my italics). Furthermore, having attained intuitive knowledge and, thereby, achieved an affective transformation by assuming an eternal perspective of himself, the wise man lives his life in a special way. More specifically, rather than live an ordinary life, which Spinoza describes as a life dominated by the pursuit of transitory goods like honor, sensual pleasure and wealth (*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, 3); the wise

14 Soyarslan, “Ethical Ideals,” 361–362.

man lives a life according to the order of the intellect. However, despite the fact that he thus lives a life focused on the pursuit of the eternal good of understanding, he does so while living in time.¹⁵

I will return to Spinoza's account of the wise person below. Soyarslan's point is that the wise person does do what reason dictates, for the most part. But with her understanding of God, of nature and of herself, she also recognizes that there will inevitably be exceptions to such rational action and that on occasion the passions she suffers will be more powerful than her rational ideas. She understands why this is the case and accepts it with equanimity. As Soyarslan nicely puts it, "the wise man is not someone who has completely overcome human bondage, even though he is someone who "is hardly troubled in spirit and always possesses true peace of mind [*vera animi acquiescentia*]" (E5p42s/G II 308).¹⁶

4 The Wise and the Free

I have nothing to say against Soyarslan's account of the wise person, at least in its general contours. She does a beautiful job of illuminating the virtues of this ideal individual. I think she also brings out well a shortcoming of my own reading of the free person by showing that there must always be some bondage to the passions in the life of a human being; this was not something that I adequately acknowledged in my article. Though it is not a text which Soyarslan cites, I would have done well to take more seriously Spinoza's claim in the *Political Treatise* that "it is not in anyone's power to always to use reason and to be at the highest peak of human freedom" (II.8).

What I want to insist on, however, is that there is still no reason to distinguish the wise person (*vir sapiens*) from the free person (*homo liber*), and that in fact there are good reasons to see them as one and the same condition of freedom, rationality and virtue (although I will suggest below that 'free' and 'wise' might refer to different aspects of the individual's constitution). The free person, guided unfailingly by reason, subject to passive affects in the world but never dominated by them, is the *naturae humanae exemplar* for our very human lives. But the free person and the wise person, I shall argue, are the same. Therefore, the wise person must also be that model of human nature. We may not be able to attain such a condition of exemplary and exceptionless rationality and wisdom in this durational life, given (as Soyarslan shows) the inevitability of bondage to the passions. But that does not mean that it cannot serve as an ideal toward which we strive to come as close as is humanly possible.

There is a suggestion that the free person is the wise person in E4p67/G II 261: "The free man [*Homo liber*] thinks least of all of death, and his wisdom [*sapientia*] is a meditation on life, not on death." In the demonstration to this proposition, Spinoza not only identifies the free person with "one who lives according to the dictate of reason alone" (without excluding passive affects from his psyche), but refers to his wisdom in not obsessing over death and what it might bring (since the free and rational person knows there is no personal afterlife, and so nothing to hope for or fear after

¹⁵ Ibid., 367–368.

¹⁶ Ibid., 365.

death). This is fairly inconclusive, however, since attributing *some* kind of wisdom to the free person does not by itself make that individual “*the* wise person.”

A more telling text is the scholium to E4p45. In the midst of his extended account of what it is to “live according to the guidance of reason”, which begins with E4p18s, Spinoza indicates that the life of such an individual is not an ascetic one. She enjoys the pleasures of the world, albeit in moderation. Without any indication that we have moved away from “the person who lives according to the guidance of reason [*qui ex ductu rationis vivit*]” (G II 233, 245), Spinoza notes that

To use things ... and to take pleasure in them as far as possible—not, of course, to the point where we are disgusted with them, for there is no pleasure in that—this is the part of a wise man [*viri est sapientis*]. It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another. (G II 244)

This, he adds, is “the best” way of living. The life led consistently by the dictates of reason, which (as I mention above and argue in my original article) is the life of the free person (even though it is not labeled that until E4p66s), is here explicitly identified with the life of the wise person. The wise and the free live and comport themselves in the world in the same manner and for the same reasons.

This passage, as well, should forestall any objection to my claim about the identity of the free person and the wise person based on the idea that the wise person does not make an appearance in the *Ethics* until Part Five. Here she is in Part Four, in all her wise, free and rational glory, presented as a dimension of the free person. (Soyarslan herself, as we have seen, regards the wise person as the subject of E4app32) Moreover, the wise person’s presence in E4p45s, where intuition or the third kind of knowledge is apparently not yet in play, should also forestall the objection that in order to qualify as a wise person one must have achieved that highest level of knowing.

In the Appendix to Part Four, which sums up the substance of its propositions and scholia without all the demonstrations, Spinoza notes that “to perfect, as far as we can, our intellect, or reason”—that is, given the prominence of the free person from E4p66s onwards, to become as free as possible—is the human being’s “highest happiness [*felicitas*], or blessedness [*beatitudo*].”¹⁷ He then identifies this blessedness with “that satisfaction of mind that stems from the intuitive knowledge of God [*ex Dei intuitiva cognitione*].” That is, “the man who is led by reason,” the free person, enjoys true *acquiescentia animi* (E4app4/G II 267). The third kind of knowledge and its psychological affect is now explicitly part of the picture. But this intuitive knowledge, blessedness and satisfaction of mind are precisely what, in E5p42s, prominently characterize the wise person (now referred to only as *sapiens*). In this, the very last paragraph of the *Ethics*, Spinoza says that

With this I have finished all the things I wished to show concerning the mind’s power over the affects and its freedom. From what has been shown, it is clear how much the

17 Though the “as far as we can [*quantum possumus*]” indicates that what is in question here may be not so much the unattainable model of human nature itself but our humanly possible approximation of it, this does not affect my main point concerning the identification of the free person and the wise person.

wise man [*Sapiens*] is capable of, and how much more powerful he is than one who is ignorant [*ignaro*] and driven only by lust. For not only is the ignorant man [*Ignarus*] troubled in many ways by external causes, and unable ever to possess true peace of mind [*animi acquiescentia*], but he also lives as if he knew neither himself, nor God, nor things; and as soon as he ceases to be acted on, he ceases to be. (G II 308)

On the other hand, Spinoza, continues,

the wise man, insofar as he is considered as such, is hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be, but always possesses true peace of mind.

There are two things to note about this scholium, aside from the fact that by this point both the free person and the wise person have been described as enjoying *animi acquiescentia*.

I. First, the knowledge of the third kind that the wise person is here said to possess—which generates a consciousness of himself, of God and of things and constitutes his blessedness and “the greatest satisfaction of Mind [*summa mentis acquiescentia*]” (E5p27/G II 297)—must be the same knowledge, consciousness and blessedness (“the greatest virtue of the mind,” according to E5p25) possessed (in E4app4) by the free person. For the third kind of knowledge is, affectively, the most powerful state of mind, and thus it explains the model free person’s ability to consistently counter the passive affects and act (always) according to reason. As Spinoza concludes in E5p42dem, “the power to restrain lusts arises from blessedness itself.”

But wait, one might object, the free person does not have the third kind of knowledge! In the propositions of Part Four, does not the freedom of the free person have its source in “reason,” that is, the second kind of knowledge? There is in the propositions themselves no mention of *intuitus*, the third kind of knowledge, only *ratio*. Therefore, the objection would run, the free person does not yet have the full strength of character, and thus the *beatitudo*, that the wise person, endowed with the third kind of knowledge, has, and so this must constitute a significant difference between the free person and the wise person.

There are two responses one could make to this objection. First, as E5p38 indicates, knowledge of the second kind, while not as affectively powerful as knowledge of the third kind, could still be sufficient to ground the free person’s exceptionless mastery over her passions. As Spinoza notes there, “the more the mind understands things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the less it is acted on by affects which are evil, and the less it fears death.” And it seems from both E4p45s and E4p67 that knowledge of the second kind, if that is indeed all that is in play in Part Four, is sufficient as well to constitute her wisdom. As we have seen, the wise person is as present in Part Four as the free person. Once again, the cognitive condition of the free person and the cognitive condition of the wise person are the same, with the power of their ideas—their strength of mind (*fortitudo*)—increasing as they move from the second kind of knowledge to the third kind of knowledge, and thus from *fortitudo* to *beatitudo*.

Moreover, despite the emphasis in the propositions of Part Four on the *rationis dictamina* (E4p18s/G II 222), I do not see in that part of the *Ethics*, or elsewhere in the work, any justification for excluding knowledge of the third kind from the free person. The adequate ideas of *scientia intuitiva* generate the same rational prescriptions as the adequate ideas of *ratio*, so why should we

think that the free person's comportment is explained only by the latter? This is confirmed by E4app4, which, as we have just seen, states that the person who lives maximally under the guidance of reason has indeed reached "intuitive knowledge of God."

II. The second thing to note about E5p42s/G II 308 is that the wise person is there "considered as such [*quatenus ut talis consideratur*]." This suggests that Spinoza is referring to the wise person strictly as wise—to the wisdom that constitutes the wise person—in abstraction from what must be her actual lived experiences in the world. He thereby allows that the ideal wise person must have passions, and that she knows both that those passions can occasionally overpower her rational ideas and that she will deal equanimously with such experiences; without any of this we could not understand what her wisdom consists in. But the wise person "considered as such"—considered purely with respect to her wisdom—does not actually experience having those rational ideas overpowered by those passions, does not actually experience being in bondage. Once again, the wise person looks very much like the free person, with both serving as the model of human nature.

5 Conclusions

I have argued that Spinoza does not distinguish the free person, the model of human nature, from the wise person. This brings me to Soyarslan's claim that the free person is never in bondage, and that this represents the difference from the wise person and the reason why the free person cannot possibly serve as the attainable model of living for any actual human being but the wise person can.

It is important to bear in mind, though, that, as I mentioned above, freedom for Spinoza comes in degrees. At one end of the spectrum is the true *homo liber*. As an ideal and a model of human nature, he is absolutely free. He *always* does what reason dictates. Though he is still subject to passive affects, just because he is a human being and a part of nature, those affects never determine his action. Individuals, then, are more or less free depending upon how closely they come to this ideal—that is, how often or deeply they fall into bondage to passions. The following passage from E5p20s is apt, and applies to both the free person and the wise person:

The power of the mind is defined by knowledge alone, whereas lack of power, or passion, is judged solely by the privation of knowledge, i.e., by that through which ideas are called inadequate. From this it follows that the mind is most acted on, of which inadequate ideas constitute the greatest part, so that it is distinguished more by what it undergoes than by what it does. On the other hand, that mind acts most, of which adequate ideas constitute the greatest part, so that though it may have as many inadequate ideas as the other, it is still distinguished more by those which are attributed to human virtue than by those which betray man's lack of power.¹⁸

The model free/wise person enjoys the peak degree of activity, and the spectrum moves down from there.

¹⁸ My thanks to Pascal Séverac for pointing out the relevance of this passage.

Now Soyarslan is, I believe, correct to say that no actually living human being can be absolutely free of some bondage to the passions; and so no actually living human being can fully instantiate the true *homo liber*, the free person “considered as such.” This is the lesson of the passage from the *Political Treatise* cited above, and something I did not sufficiently acknowledge in my original article. Thus, I gratefully concede this point. However, even if “it is not in anyone’s power to always use reason” and consistently be at the peak of human freedom, I suggest that does not make it any less of an ideal on which to model one’s life. We are to strive to be as rationally virtuous as possible, to be as much like the exemplary free person as we can, even as we remain aware of—and accept with equanimity—the fact that acting from the passions on occasion is inevitable.

All of this applies, equally, to the *vir sapiens*. One can be more or less wise, just as one can be more or less free. In fact, one is as wise as one is free. At the ideal end of the spectrum—at the exact same spot as the true *homo liber*—is the *vir sapiens*. The truly wise person, the true sage (to use the Stoic term), unfailingly does what reason dictates, and is never in bondage to the passions she experiences while living in the world. This would be the wise person “considered as such”—that is, the wise person who, though experiencing passions, always acts from and with wisdom. Actually existing human beings are more or less wise depending upon how close they come to this ideal, a model which (like the free person “considered as such”) no actually living human being who is “a part of nature” can fully instantiate.

In sum, the free person and the wise person “considered as such” are just two different ways of describing one and the same ideal, aspirational, albeit unattainable, condition. Durational human beings strive to be as much like this model as they can, even if they must ultimately face some bondage to passions. There is nothing unreasonable about using a model of freedom and wisdom that is unattainable in itself to motivate oneself to be as free and wise—as virtuous—as possible. (This, I presume, is the role that saints play in Christian morality. Those who have no chance of actually living as the saints did can still take those lives as models and aspire to live as saintly as they can.) As for the condition of the wise person that Soyarslan describes—someone who, though living by reason, durationally experiences with equanimity bondage to the passions—this is a kind of derivative or secondary ideal, an attainable ideal, the best we can do. But, again, there is no reason to think that there is not a corresponding derivative condition of the free person, a durational and attainable approximation of the model that brings us as close to that model as living human beings can come.

If one wants to insist on a difference between freedom and wisdom, it might be that freedom refers to the causal fount and nature of the individual’s comportment—that it is a matter of acting autonomously, by adequate ideas and according to the dictates of reason rather than by the passions. Wisdom, on the other hand, would refer to the free/wise individual’s cognitive and spiritual condition—having achieved the third kind of knowledge, and thus “consciousness of God, of himself and of things”, and especially how the essences of the latter two follow from the essence of God, the free/wise person enjoys *acquiescentia animi* and knows that she would, and is prepared to, handle bondage to the passions with equanimity. The wisdom of the free person consists in just that disposition, a disposition that arises from her exceptional rationality. If I might crassly borrow Spinoza’s own conceptual vocabulary, from when he is describing the fundamental identity of mind and body in E2p7, we could say that the free person and the wise person are one and the same thing, conceived now under this attribute, freedom, and now under that attribute, wisdom.

There is no reason, then, to distinguish the wise person and the free person—whether we are talking about each “considered as such” and thus as the model of human nature, or (allowing for that attainable derivative condition) each insofar as it constitutes the lived condition of a durational human being. Bear in mind that Spinoza contrasts the *homo liber* with the *homo servus*; he also refers to the latter as *ignarus* (E4p66s). He then, in both the Preface to Part Five and its final paragraph, as Piet Steenbakkers has shown, adopts the Stoic opposition between the *sapiens* and the *ignarus*.¹⁹ If the *ignarus* is the opposite of both the free person and the wise person, then I think it safe to assume that the free person and the wise person are the same.

If, as Soyarslan maintains, the wise person can serve as the attainable ideal which actual human beings can and should strive to emulate, just because she experiences and deals appropriately with the occasional bout of bondage to the passions, then *ipso facto* so can the free person. On the other hand, if the true *homo liber*, the free person “considered as such,” can be only an unattainable but nonetheless inspiring model of human nature, because though subject to passions she is never in bondage to them, then the true *vir sapiens*, the wise person “considered as such,” must function in the same way. There is no gap between the free person and the wise person in Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Where the one goes, so goes the other.²⁰

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19 Steenbakkers, “Living Well, Dying Well,” 182–3.

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