

# Reply to Nadler: Spinoza's Free Person and Wise Person Reconsidered

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## Abstract

This article addresses Steven Nadler's response to my objections to his reading of Spinoza's free person (*homo liber*). Nadler argues that there are no clear and significant differences between the free person and the wise person (*vir sapiens*) in their character or in the role they play in Spinoza's moral philosophy; in fact, they are one and the same. I begin by critically examining three inferences which Nadler's reading in part relies on. I then address the differences between the contexts in which Spinoza explicitly invokes the free person and the wise person. I argue that even though there may not be significant differences between the free person and the wise person in terms of their character and comportment, there is still reason to think that the free person plays a particular role in Spinoza's moral philosophy—one which does not hinge on the attainment of the cognitive and affective excellence represented by the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*.

**Keywords:** Spinoza, free person, wise person, reason, intuitive knowledge, *acquiescentia animi*, intellectual love of God, blessedness

## 1 Introduction

After introducing the general features of his metaphysics of God in the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza informs his readers that he “pass[es] now to explaining those things which must necessarily follow from the essence of God...—not, indeed, all of them...but *only those* that can lead us, by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human mind and its highest *blessedness (beatitudo)*” (E2pref/G II 84, my italics). In thus providing a clear indication of the ultimately practical orientation of Spinoza's thought, this preface sets the agenda not only for the second part, but for the rest of his

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*magnum opus*.<sup>1</sup> By the time we reach the end of the final part, Spinoza has “finished all the things [he] wished to show concerning the mind’s power over the affects and its freedom” (E5p42s/G II 308), which culminates in his remarks about the wise person (*vir sapiens*). The “true peace of mind (*vera animi acquiescentia*)” (ibid.) and blessedness of the wise person, whom Spinoza describes as someone who is “conscious of himself, and of God, and of things” (ibid.), mark the zenith of Spinozistic freedom, which is excellent yet rare to attain. Spinoza’s remarks about the wise person are thus vital to understanding where the trajectory he announces in E2pref leads.

Interestingly, despite its importance, Spinoza does not give a detailed account of the wise person. He does not explicitly mention the wise person except on a few occasions and most of these instances are in part five of the *Ethics*, which houses in its second half some of the most puzzling elements of his philosophical system, including his doctrines of intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*), the eternity of the mind, and the intellectual love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*). By contrast, Spinoza portrays in detail a different ideal condition—or so I argue—represented by “the free person” (*homo liber*), which he describes as someone “who lives according to the dictate of reason alone” (E4p67d/G II 261) within the comparatively more accessible setting of E4. It is in this part that he introduces his accounts of collaborative morality and “dictates of reason” (*dictamina rationis*), which he presents as the foundation of the right way of living exemplified in the life of a free person. Whereas Spinoza’s account of the free person has been extensively studied by scholars, his remarks on the wise person and how they relate to his account of the free person have been mostly overlooked.<sup>2</sup>

Steven Nadler’s “Spinoza on the Wise and the Free” presents us with an insightful and intriguing reading of this underexamined, yet important, aspect of Spinoza’s thought. Nadler argues against the view that “there are clear and significant differences between the [free person and the wise person] in terms of their character and in the role they play in Spinoza’s moral philosophy.”<sup>3</sup> Contra the view that I defend in my 2019 article, “Two Ethical Ideals in Spinoza’s *Ethics*: The Free Man and the Wise Man,” Nadler argues that the wise person and the free person are in fact one and the same; they represent the peak of human freedom and “constitute a single ideal model that we can more or less closely approximate.”<sup>4</sup> Importantly, in suggesting that the peak of human freedom can be comprehended through the lens of a single ideal model, Nadler’s reading also contributes to a unified understanding of Spinoza’s moral philosophy in the *Ethics*—one which includes Spinoza’s views in the second half of Part V in the picture, rather than dismissing them as irrelevant to his ethics<sup>5</sup> or “worthless”<sup>6</sup> as some scholars have.

However, as I will show here, this very virtue of Nadler’s article may open it to some objections due to the differences of emphasis between E4 and E5. Since the free person appears *only* in E4 and

1 Henry Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 84.

2 In the last section of my 2019 article (“Two Ethical Ideals in Spinoza’s *Ethics*: The Free Man and the Wise Man,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 5 (2019): 357–70), I examine Spinoza’s remarks about the wise person. But since my main goal in that article was to show contra Nadler that the free person as he conceives of it is an unattainable ideal, the wise person was not the only focus of attention.

3 Steven Nadler, “Spinoza on the Wise and the Free,” *Journal of Spinoza Studies* 2, no. 2 (2023): 48.

4 Ibid., abstract.

5 C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Routledge, 1930), 15–6.

6 Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1984), 372.

most of what Spinoza says about the wise person is found in E5, it is important to consider the differences between the respective contexts in which Spinoza explicitly invokes these ideals—a task mostly overlooked by Nadler as he focuses on the points of convergence between the free person and the wise person. In this response, I will not consider all of the points Nadler brings to our attention—indeed, I concur with him on several, as I explain below. Instead, I will focus on the ones that enable him to make the following three inferences: (i) it is not the case that “in order to qualify as a wise person one must have achieved [intuitive knowledge],”<sup>7</sup> (ii) both the free person and the wise person can be said to possess *scientia intuitiva* and enjoy the attendant *animi acquiescentia* and *beatitudo*, and (iii) “the adequate ideas of *scientia intuitiva* generate the same rational prescriptions as the adequate ideas of *ratio*.”<sup>8</sup> After considering these inferences in turn in Sections 3, 4, and 5, I will conclude by addressing the differences between the respective contexts in which Spinoza explicitly invokes the free person and the wise person.

According to my reading, whereas Spinoza introduces the free person in relation to reason in Part IV to show what the “method of living rightly” consists of insofar as “the present life” (E5p20s) is concerned, his remarks about the wise person at the end of E5 “pertain to the mind’s duration without relation to the body” (ibid.). The wise person that Spinoza describes in E4p42s represents someone who has attained intuitive knowledge and, thereby, true peace of mind, which “involves the stillness of eternity.”<sup>9</sup> If my reading is correct, even though there may not be significant differences between the free person and the wise person in terms of their character and comportment, there is still reason to think that the free person plays a particular role in Spinoza’s moral philosophy—one which does not hinge on the attainment of the cognitive and affective excellence represented by the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*. I begin by presenting the main tenets of Nadler’s reading, some of his objections to the reading I offered in my 2019 article, and the points on which I agree with him.

## 2 The Main Tenets of Nadler’s Revised Reading

In my 2019 article I had two goals. The first one was to argue, contra Nadler’s former view, that the free person *qua* the model of exceptionless rational consistency cannot be taken to be an attainable ideal within our reach due to the impossibility of achieving absolute freedom from bondage to the passions in the Spinozistic universe. The second one was to show that in the *Ethics* Spinoza presents us with an ideal yet attainable condition, which is represented by the wise person. My second goal was inspired by Nadler’s point about the importance for a moral philosophy to present a human ideal that is within our reach.<sup>10</sup> Although I did not think that Nadler’s free person worked as an attainable ideal, I did assume—following Nadler—that “there must be *some* attainable ideal in Spinoza’s moral

7 Nadler, “The Wise,” 54.

8 Ibid., 55.

9 Clare Carlisle, “Spinoza’s *Acquiescentia*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55, no.2 (2017): 229.

10 In Nadler’s words, “If the true and ultimate condition of human well-being is in principle unattainable or even incoherent, that would seem both to represent a serious philosophical flaw in Spinoza’s theory and to detract from its interest as an account of the good life” (Steven Nadler, “On Spinoza’s ‘Free Man’,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1, (2015): 105).

philosophy that so functions to motivate us.”<sup>11</sup> Given that Spinoza describes the blessedness of the wise person as an attainable, albeit rare, achievement and clearly identifies blessedness as the ultimate condition of human well-being, the wise person seemed like a promising candidate to serve as an ideal yet perfectly human condition.

Nadler’s recent article suggests that we are now in agreement about the unattainability of the free person. Importantly, while Nadler acknowledges 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,”<sup>12</sup> he no longer thinks that the unattainability of this model “detract[s] from its interest as an account of the good life.”<sup>13</sup> In the concluding section of his recent article, he explicitly states that “There is nothing unreasonable about using a model of freedom...that is unattainable in itself to motivate oneself to be as free...as possible.”<sup>14</sup> However, Nadler does not think that the unattainability of the free person implies that the wise person and the free person are two distinct ideals. According to Nadler,

...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.<sup>15</sup>

After showing throughout his article that Spinoza does not distinguish the free person from the wise person, Nadler concludes that they are “just two different ways of describing one and the same ideal, aspirational, albeit unattainable, condition,”<sup>16</sup> which is basically a model of freedom and wisdom we can more or less closely approximate. In Nadler’s view, the condition of the wise person that I described in my 2019 article as “...someone who, though living by reason, durationally experiences with equanimity bondage to the passions...is a kind of derivative or secondary ideal, an attainable ideal, the best we can do.”<sup>17</sup> But he adds that “there is no reason to think that there is not a corresponding derivative condition of the free person.”<sup>18</sup>

I have no objection to Nadler’s revised view that the free person as an unattainable ideal can be aspirational. I too hold that for Spinoza both wisdom and freedom come in degrees. Furthermore, as Nadler points out, Spinoza clearly attributes wisdom to the free person: “The free person thinks least of all of death, and his wisdom [*sapientia*] is a meditation on life, not on death” (E4p67/G II 261). I also find it undeniable that Spinoza attributes “blessedness *or* freedom” to the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*. Importantly, however, Nadler goes beyond maintaining these relatively obvious points. He argues that the free person does not *just* have a certain kind of wisdom; but he is “*the* wise person.” In other words, he proposes that the person whom Spinoza describes as led by

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11 Nadler, “The Wise,” 52.

12 Ibid., 49.

13 Nadler, “On Spinoza’s ‘Free Man’,” 105.

14 Ibid., 57.

15 Ibid., 49.

16 Ibid., 57.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

reason alone in E4 is the same as the person whom he describes as “hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things...always possesses true peace of mind” (E5p42s) at the end of E5. Nadler’s proposal rests in part on the three inferences I noted in the introduction. I begin by considering the first one: that it is not the case that “in order to qualify as a wise person one must have achieved [intuitive knowledge].”<sup>19</sup>

### 3 The Wise Person and Intuitive Knowledge

Is achieving intuitive knowledge a necessary condition to qualify as a wise person? Since Spinoza describes the wise person as someone who is “conscious of himself, and of God, and of things” (E5p42s) after completing his account of intuitive knowledge and blessedness at the end of the *Ethics*, it had appeared to me plausible in my 2019 article to suggest that the wise person is someone who has attained intuitive knowledge and its attendant blessedness. As I stated earlier here, most of what Spinoza says explicitly about the wise person (which does not amount to much) is included in E5. However, Nadler is absolutely right to remind us that the wise person appears in E4 as well, where Spinoza has not yet explored the affective power of intuitive knowledge. Nadler is also right that I, myself, had considered the wise person to be the subject of article XXXII in the appendix to part four (E4app32) and acknowledged that the wise person appears in E4p45s. I thus concur with Nadler’s first claim that it is not the case that “in order to qualify as a wise person one must have achieved [intuitive knowledge].”<sup>20</sup>

In my view, however, we can still hold that in order to qualify as someone who is “conscious of himself, and of God, and of things,” and thus enjoys blessedness and true peace of mind, one must have achieved intuitive knowledge. E4p45s/G II 244-5 and the context within which Spinoza presents us with this passage suggest that the person who lives according to the guidance of reason qualifies as a wise person.<sup>21</sup> In Spinoza’s words, “it is the part of a wise man [*vir est sapientis*] ...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.” It is conceivable that both the person who lives in accordance to the guidance of reason and one who has attained intuitive knowledge would “use things ... and to take pleasure in them as far as possible” (E4p45s). But this still leaves open the possibility that *only* the person who has attained intuitive knowledge can be said to enjoy blessedness and true peace of mind, which, in my view, is the ideal condition represented by *the* wise person at the end of the *Ethics*.

What about the wise person, which I took to be the subject of E4app32 in my 2019 article? There I had argued that the wise person—unlike the free person—does not represent an ideal of exceptionless self-mastery. In other words, I had suggested that the wise person is not someone who

19 Ibid., 54.

20 Ibid.

21 As Nadler puts it “In the midst of his extended account of what it is to ‘live according to the guidance of reason’, which begins with IVp18s, Spinoza indicates that the life of such an individual is not an ascetic one. She enjoys the pleasures of the world, albeit in moderation” (ibid., 54).

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). In order to show how possessing true peace of mind could be compatible with being ineliminably in bondage to a certain degree, I had turned to E4app32; for even though Spinoza does not explicitly invoke the wise person in this passage, he does talk about *acquiescentia*, a variant of which he attributes to the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*. As I had put it in my 2019 article,

...here *acquiescentia*...does not arise from having achieved exceptionless self-mastery. Instead, it arises from an understanding of the reason as to why such an achievement is not attainable for us, given just how limited our power is as finite modes and that we do not have ‘an absolute power to adapt things outside us to our use’ (ibid.) ...that our ‘power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes’ (EIVAppXXXII) does not mean that we are thereby always necessarily troubled by external causes. It is possible for us to be ‘hardly troubled in spirit’ and experience, instead, a certain kind of peace of mind or *acquiescentia* if we manage to understand and come to terms with the fact that as parts of Nature we do not have absolute power in the face of the passions and, consequently, that we will necessarily undergo instances of bondage that we cannot avoid.<sup>22</sup>

I am quoting this paragraph at length, since my wording here has understandably led Nadler to infer that I identify the wise person as “someone who, though living by reason, durationally experiences with equanimity bondage to the passions,”<sup>23</sup> which he took to be “a derivative or secondary ideal, an attainable ideal, the best we can do.”<sup>24</sup> Whereas I agree with Nadler that such a conception of the wise person would constitute a secondary ideal, which is attainable, I do not think that it represents the best we can do. Thanks to Nadler’s description of my view, I realize that I was mistaken in my 2019 article in taking the respective occurrences of *acquiescentia* in E4app32 and E5p42s to correspond to the exact same affect and thus describe a single ideal of the wise person.

I would like to take this opportunity to revise my view and suggest that the respective occurrences of *acquiescentia* in E4app32 and E5p42s do not correspond to the same affect. More specifically, I hold that the *acquiescentia* in E4app32 is not the *acquiescentia* that arises from intuitive knowledge, which the wise person at the end of the *Ethics* experiences. It is the one that arises from reason, which Clare Carlisle calls “*acquiescentia* of the second kind.”<sup>25</sup> As Carlisle puts it, “the stillness experienced in *acquiescentia* of the second kind is a quality of stability and equanimity.”<sup>26</sup> In my view, a person who understands *via* reason that we are a part of the whole of Nature, whose order we follow necessarily, and thus obeys necessity and bears it calmly, would experience *acquiescentia* of the second kind and certainly count as a wise person. But if wisdom and freedom come in degrees as Nadler and I hold, then it seems to me that *acquiescentia* of the second kind does

22 Soyarslan, “Ethical Ideals,” 366.

23 Nadler, “The Wise,” 57.

24 Ibid.

25 Carlisle, “Spinoza’s *Acquiescentia*,” 222.

26 Ibid., 224.

not represent the highest level of wisdom and freedom, which brings us to the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*.

As I read Spinoza, the wise person at the end of the *Ethics* experiences something qualitatively different and more powerful than stability and equanimity; she experiences instead, what Carlisle calls “*acquiescentia* of the third kind,”<sup>27</sup> which indicates true peace of mind (*vera animi acquiescentia*) and rest. The wise person at the end of the *Ethics* is “hardly troubled in spirit” (E5p42s). But this is not because she manages to understand and come to terms with the fact that as parts of Nature we do not have absolute power in the face of the passions, as I had suggested in my 2019 article. This is not, in other words, because she is “someone who, though living by reason, durationally experiences with equanimity bondage to the passions,”<sup>28</sup> as Nadler describes my earlier view. “The wise [person], insofar as [s]he is considered as such, is hardly troubled in spirit” (E5p42s). This is because she is conscious of herself, and of God, and of things; she *sees* “in one glance” (E3p40s2) that “[she is] in God and [is] conceived through God” (E5p30), and *experiences* her being as a modal expression of God.<sup>29</sup> In thus having attained intuitive knowledge, this wise person is not only affected by the *acquiescentia* of the third kind, but she also experiences the intellectual love of God,<sup>30</sup> an active affect of joy, which constitutes blessedness, and is “phenomenologically... inseparable”<sup>31</sup> from the *acquiescentia* of the third kind.

In the beginning of one of his earlier works, the *Treatise of the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza, after expressing his frustration with the “empty and futile” goods of the ordinary life, states that his goal is to “find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected—whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give [him] the greatest joy, to eternity” (TIE/G II 5). From the way Spinoza describes the affective power of intuitive knowledge in the second half of E5, it seems that he has found out what that true good is: “a constant and eternal love of God...or blessedness..., [which] can rightly be called satisfaction of mind (*animi acquiescentia*)” (E5p36s/G II 303). According to Spinoza, “There is nothing in Nature which is contrary to this intellectual love, or which can take it away” (E5p37). This “follows necessarily from the nature of the mind insofar as it is considered as an *eternal truth*, through God’s nature (by P33 and P29)” (E5p37d, my italics). E5p37 concerns the mind “insofar as it is considered as an eternal truth, through God’s nature” (E5p37d), since intuitive knowledge (from which the intellectual love of God arises) depends on the mind’s conception of “its body’s essence under a species of eternity”

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27 Ibid., 226.

28 Nadler, “The Wise,” 57.

29 I give a detailed analysis of the affective power of intuitive knowledge and the intellectual love of God in Soyarslan (“From Ordinary Life to Blessedness: The Power of Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza’s *Ethics*,” in *Essays on Spinoza’s Ethical Theory*, eds. Matthew Kisner and Andrew Youpa (Oxford: Oxford University: Oxford, 2014), 236-257.

30 “From the third kind of knowledge, there necessarily arises an intellectual love of God. For from this kind of knowledge there arises (by P32) joy, accompanied by the idea of God as its cause, that is (by Def. Aff. VI), love of God, not insofar as we imagine him as present (by P29), but insofar as we understand God to be eternal. And this is what I call intellectual love of God.” (E5p32c)

31 Carlisle, “Spinoza’s *Acquiescentia*,” 228.

(E5p31d).<sup>32</sup> In Spinoza's words, "insofar as our mind knows itself and its body under a species of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God and knows that it is in God and is conceived through God" (E5p30). When the essence of the mind (and the body) is thus grasped from an eternal perspective, the mind conceives of itself as a power of understanding depending timelessly on God (E5p36s). In short, then, the mind conceives of its own eternity, and thereby is affected by both the intellectual love of God and *acquiescentia* of the third kind.

Importantly, right after his demonstration of how powerful the intellectual love of God is in E5p37, Spinoza adds that "IVA1 concerns singular things insofar as they are considered in relation to a certain time and place..." (E5p37s). E4a1 is the only axiom of E4 and reads as follows: "There is no singular thing in Nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed." This axiom grounds Spinoza's account of human bondage in E4, according to which we do not have absolute power in the face of the passions and that "power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes" (E4app32). In bringing up this only axiom of E4 in the context of E5 immediately after presenting the power of the intellectual love of God, Spinoza reminds us that what he had told us about the limited nature of our power in E4 concerns us *only* insofar as "we conceive [ourselves] to exist in relation to a certain time and place [—not,] insofar as we conceive ourselves to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature" (E5p29s).

It is, of course, very important to understand *via* reason that we are a part of Nature, our power is irreducibly limited insofar as our durational existence is concerned, and "whatever changes one experiences were absolutely necessary."<sup>33</sup> In fact, we cannot attain intuitive knowledge without gaining this rational insight and its resultant equanimity and stability. But, as I read Spinoza, the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*, in attaining intuitive knowledge, experiences something beyond this. She experiences the intellectual love of God and *acquiescentia* of the third kind, which, as Carlisle beautifully puts it, "involves the stillness of eternity,"<sup>34</sup> rather than "a stability of duration."<sup>35</sup> She enjoys blessedness by conceiving of "[our] very existence...insofar as [we] are in God" (E3p45s). The wise person, considered as such, represents an excellent, yet rare state of cognitive and affective excellence, which is the best we can achieve as finite minds. She represents someone who has achieved salvation in this life by "understand[ing] that [her] very being as an understanding mind is immutable."<sup>36</sup>

To take stock, I have shown in this section that even though achieving intuitive knowledge is not a necessary condition to qualify as *a* wise person (given that this term first appears in Part IV as Nadler rightly reminds), it is a necessary condition to qualify as *the* wise person Spinoza describes

32 This is because "the idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is a certain mode of thinking, which pertains to the essence of the mind, and which is necessarily eternal" (E5p23s).

33 Kristin Primus, "Part V of Spinoza's Ethics: Intuitive Knowledge, Contentment of Mind, and Intellectual Love of God." *Philosophy Compass* 17, no.6 (2022): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12838>.

34 Carlisle, "Spinoza's *Acquiescentia*," 229.

35 Ibid. According to Carlisle, *acquiescentia* of the second kind involves a stability of duration.

36 Primus, "Part V," 10. See also Primus ("*Scientia Intuitiva* in the *Ethics*," in *The Critical Guide to Spinoza's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) for an excellent analysis of *scientia intuitiva* in the *Ethics*. I agree with Primus that "*scientia intuitiva* and its attendant *beatitudo* are more achievable for finite minds than is sometimes supposed" (ibid., 185).



at the end of the *Ethics*. Whereas a wise person who lives according to the guidance of reason and thus experiences the equanimity and stability of *acquiescentia* of the second kind would count as a secondary ideal, the best we can do is represented by the ideal of the wise person Spinoza describes at the end of the *Ethics* as someone who experiences true peace of mind—that is, *acquiescentia* of the third kind. Having examined Nadler’s first inference about the connection between achieving intuitive knowledge and qualifying as a wise person, we can now turn to his second inference: Can the free person be said to possess *scientia intuitiva* as Nadler claims?

#### 4 The Free Person and Intuitive Knowledge

In order to show that the free person possesses *scientia intuitiva*, Nadler relies heavily on E4app4. According to Nadler, this passage shows that the free person has indeed reached intuitive knowledge and “enjoys true *acquiescentia animi*.”<sup>37</sup> Since “this intuitive knowledge, blessedness and satisfaction of mind are precisely what, in E5p42s, prominently characterize the wise person (now referred to only as *sapiens*),”<sup>38</sup> Nadler holds that what Spinoza says in E4app4 supports the view that the free person is the same as the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*. Furthermore, in Nadler’s view, even though Spinoza focuses on reason’s dictates in E4 and “there is in the [free person] propositions themselves no mention of *intuitus*, the third kind of knowledge, only *ratio*,”<sup>39</sup> these factors do not constitute a reason to conclude that the free person does not have the third kind of knowledge. In Nadler’s words,

...despite the emphasis in the propositions of Part Four on the *dictamina rationis*, 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? That it is not is confirmed by IV, Appendix IV, 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.”<sup>40</sup>

Even though E4app4/G II 267 is thus central to Nadler’s view, he has not examined this passage in detail. It is, nonetheless, important to take into account the entirety of what Spinoza conveys here:

In life, therefore, it is especially useful to perfect, as far as we can, our intellect, or reason (*ratio*). In this one thing consists man’s highest happiness (*felicitas*), or blessedness (*beatitudo*). Indeed, blessedness is nothing but that satisfaction of mind (*animi acquiescentia*) which stems from the intuitive knowledge of God [*ex Dei intuitiva*]

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37 Nadler, “The Wise,” 54.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 55.

40 Ibid., 55-56.

*cognitione*]. But perfecting the intellect is nothing but understanding God, his attributes, and his actions, which follow from the necessity of his nature. So the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, that is, his highest desire, by which he strives to moderate all the others, is that by which he is led to conceive adequately both himself and all things which can fall under his understanding.

Notably, when we consider the first sentence here, it is not clear that the first appearance of the term *ratio* corresponds to reason, considered strictly as the knowledge of the second kind. In saying “intellect, *or* reason,” Spinoza seems to use *ratio* more broadly to refer to intellect, which, he elsewhere defines as “the eternal part of the mind (by P23 and P29...), through which alone we are said to act (by IIP3)” by contrasting it to imagination. (E5p40c).<sup>41</sup> Since reason, *qua* knowledge of the second kind, and intuitive knowledge both constitute the intellect (E5p40c)<sup>42</sup> and lead to understanding,<sup>43</sup> we could read the first two sentences to mean that our blessedness consists in the perfection of our intellect, which culminates in our intuitive knowledge of God. What Spinoza says later on about what “perfecting the intellect” is—namely, that “perfecting the intellect is nothing but understanding God, his attributes, and his actions, which follow from the necessity of his nature”—supports this reading.

What about the second occurrence of reason, where Spinoza talks about the “the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason”? Here it seems that Spinoza is using reason in the strict sense to refer to knowledge of the second kind. Now it is true that reason, *qua* knowledge of the second kind, provides a motive or desire to understand things: “What we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding” (E4p26). Since the highest form of understanding is intuitive knowledge, reason also provides a motive or desire to know things *via* intuitive knowledge.<sup>44</sup> As Spinoza states in E5p28, “The striving, or desire, to know things by the third kind of knowledge cannot arise from the first kind of knowledge, but can indeed arise from the second.” Given these points, to go back to E4app4, “the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, that is, his highest desire” would be to pursue intuitive knowledge. But does this mean that such a person will actually possess intuitive knowledge? Nadler’s view seems to be that the person who is led by reason or, as he puts it, “the person who lives maximally under the guidance of reason” does not just desire to know *via* intuitive knowledge; she has indeed reached intuitive knowledge. As I see it, while it is possible that such a person has reached intuitive knowledge, we can also conceive of a person who lives maximally under the guidance of reason and desires to know things by the third kind of knowledge, without thereby actually possessing intuitive knowledge.

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41 As LeBuffé (*Spinoza on Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 190, n3) also notes, sometimes Spinoza uses *ratio* less strictly; see, for instance, E5pref where he uses reason interchangeably with mind (E5pref) or adequate ideas generally (E4p28d). According to E4p27d/G II 228, the mind has certainty of things “only insofar as it has adequate ideas or (*sive*) reasons.”

42 Spinoza defines the intellect as the “part of the mind that is eternal” (E5p40c).

43 For Spinoza, the power of the mind is defined by understanding (*intelligentiâ*). Since both sorts of adequate knowledge increase the power of the mind, they are coextensive with understanding.

44 See LeBuffé (*Spinoza on Reason*, 95) for the view that reason supplies a motive from which we seek more intuitive knowledge, even though reason itself falls short of intuitive knowledge.

I realize that my argument against Nadler's reading of E4app4 is not an exceptionally strong one, given that Spinoza's wording here can also be interpreted to support Nadler's reading.<sup>45</sup> But I hope to have shown, at least, that this passage is open to another interpretation. E4app4 is one of the numerous passages in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza focuses on the close connection between reason and intuitive knowledge, rather than their differences. It is correct that in Spinoza's taxonomy of knowledge, reason and intuitive knowledge are closer to one another than either is to the first kind,<sup>46</sup> since they are both 'necessarily true' (E2p41) and consist in adequate ideas.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, they both constitute the intellect (E5p40c) and lead to understanding, through which an individual can get better at moderating and restraining her passive affects, and thereby become free and virtuous. As Nadler also points out, for Spinoza, "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" (E5p38).

Despite the commonalities between reason and intuitive knowledge, however, it is clear that they are not the same. And their differences are reflected in the way Spinoza constructs his accounts of collaborative morality and dictates of reason based on reason in E4, and his accounts of the intellectual love of God and blessedness based on intuitive knowledge in E5. Even though Nadler himself acknowledges "the emphasis in the propositions of Part Four on the *dictamina rationis*,"<sup>48</sup> he does not consider this a "justification for excluding knowledge of the third kind from the free person."<sup>49</sup> In my view, in holding this, Nadler downplays the differences in emphasis between E4 and E5, which are directly relevant to the context in which Spinoza invokes the free person and the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*. Furthermore, in suggesting that the adequate ideas of *scientia intuitiva* generate the same rational prescriptions as the adequate ideas of *ratio*, Nadler also seems to downplay the differences between reason and intuitive knowledge. In the remaining part of my response, I will consider these two points starting with the latter.

## 5 Intuitive Knowledge and Rational Prescriptions

Can the adequate ideas of *scientia intuitiva* generate the same rational prescriptions as the adequate ideas of *ratio* as Nadler claims? The answer to this question depends on what one takes to be the differences between intuitive knowledge and reason.<sup>50</sup> For the purposes of this response, I will focus

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45 Thanks to Matthew Kisner for the reminder that Spinoza does not use *sive* or *seu* in a systematic way to communicate the "or" of equivalence. Thanks also to Tad Schmaltz for his helpful insights regarding how to read E4app4.

46 According to Spinoza, knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity (E2p41) and consists in inadequate and confused ideas on which the passions depend (E3p3).

47 Moreover, since only reason and intuition can provide adequate ideas, they alone teach us 'to distinguish true from false' (E2p42). For Spinoza, an adequate idea is one that has all the 'internal denominations' (notably, intellectual clarity and distinctness) of a 'true idea' (E2def4). A true idea, on the other hand, is one that fully agrees with what it represents (E1a6).

48 Nadler, "The Wise," 55.

49 Ibid.

50 This is, admittedly, a controversial topic in and of itself due to Spinoza's limited treatment of the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge in the *Ethics*. For the purposes of this response, I present a partial overview of my own account of this subject, which I defend in detail in Soyarslan ("The Distinction between Reason and Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 24, no.1 (2016): 27-54.). See Yovel ("The Third

on two differences, which I consider to be relevant: (i) whereas intuitive knowledge is “knowledge of singular things,” reason is universal knowledge, and (ii) due to the difference in their respective foundations, intuitive knowledge is not connected to imagination in the way reason is.

(i) In E5p36s, as Spinoza expresses how much “more powerful” intuitive knowledge is than reason, he describes them as “knowledge of singular things” and “universal knowledge” respectively. According to my reading, Spinoza describes reason as a ‘universal’ knowledge since, by its definition, it constitutes a way by which we can “perceive many things and form *universal* notions” (E2p40s2, my italics) based on our apprehension of common notions and adequate ideas of properties of things. Intuitive knowledge, on the other hand, is the “knowledge of singular things” since it relates to their essences. Attaining intuitive knowledge of singular things, namely understanding them by way of their essences, is radically different than conceiving of “singular things insofar as they are considered in relation to a certain time and place...” (E5p37s) *via* imagination. It is our intuitive grasp of the relation of God’s essence to their essences—that is, of “the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God” (E2p45s). The knowledge of singular things is thus directly correlated to the knowledge of God: “the more we understand singular things [via intuitive knowledge], the more we understand God (E5p24).

(ii) According to Spinoza, reason and intuitive knowledge differ in terms of their respective foundations. The foundation of intuitive knowledge is “the knowledge of God” (E5p20s), namely, adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence. By contrast, the foundation of reason is constituted by common notions (E2p40s1), which represent those properties that are “common to all things”<sup>51</sup> and of which we have adequate ideas. After stating in E2p47 that “the human mind has an adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence” and, thus, that the foundation of intuitive knowledge is already available to us, Spinoza explains in the scholium that follows why, despite the availability of this foundation, most people do not have true knowledge of God: “that men do not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions comes from the fact that they cannot imagine God, as they can bodies...” (E2p47s, my italics). This passage shows that intuitive knowledge is not connected to imagination in the way reason is. For, as seen here, the fact that we can imagine bodies helps to enhance the clarity of our knowledge of common notions, which represent properties *of* actually existing *bodies*, which we not only adequately cognize but also can vividly imagine. Although imagination can sometimes facilitate rather than obstruct common

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Kind of Knowledge as Alternative Salvation,” in *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, Vol. I: *The Marrano of Reason* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989)), Nadler (*Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)), Sandler (“Intuitus and Ratio in Spinoza’s Ethical Thought,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13, (2005): 73-90), Curley (“Experience in Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge,” in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 25-59), Carr (“Spinoza’s Distinction between Rational and Intuitive Knowledge,” *Philosophical Review* 87, (1978): 241-52), Garrett (“Spinoza’s Theory of *Scientia Intuitiva*,” in *Scientia in Early Modern Philosophy: Seventeenth Century Thinkers on Demonstrative Knowledge from First Principles*, eds. Tom Sorell, G.E. Rogers, and Jill Kraye (Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, and New York: Springer, 2010), 99-115), Wilson (“Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89-141), and Primus (“*Scientia Intuitiva*”) for other notable interpretations.

51 See E2p38, E2p38d and E2p38c for Spinoza’s account of common notions. Note that for Spinoza, the ideas of properties that are “common to, and peculiar to, the human body and certain external bodies by which the human body is usually affected” are also adequate in the mind (E2p39).

notions by adding to their intellectual evidence some sensible evidence,<sup>52</sup> “the knowledge of God,” which comprehends the essence of God, cannot be imagined in any way.<sup>53</sup> Since intuitive knowledge consists in inferring from this *unimaginable* foundation adequate knowledge of the essences of things, it deals with things “which we can apprehend *only* by the intellect and *not* by the imagination” (Ep12, Spinoza to Meyer, 20 April 1663 (G II 52-62), my italics).

Given these two important and interrelated differences between reason and intuitive knowledge, I disagree with Nadler that the adequate ideas of *scientia intuitiva* generate the *same* rational prescriptions as the adequate ideas of *ratio*. As I read Spinoza, rational prescriptions or dictates of reason are general guidelines for action, which means that they are instances of universal knowledge rather than knowledge of singular things. Furthermore, even though these prescriptions are grounded in reason to the extent that they are rules of reason, they would need to be applied to particular cases with the help of imagination,<sup>54</sup> which, as we have seen in the previous paragraph, is connected to reason rather than intuitive knowledge.<sup>55</sup>

In my view, that adequate ideas of intuitive knowledge do not generate rational prescriptions is not a weakness of intuitive knowledge. It is, rather, an indication of its peculiarity and difference from reason. Reason, to be sure, is at the heart of Spinoza’s moral philosophy: it not only generates rational prescriptions, but also enables us to understand ourselves and one another through our shared aspects. Reason constitutes the basis of his account of collaborative morality by leading to the comprehension that for a human being there is nothing more valuable than another human being, who lives according to the guidance of reason (E4p35c1), which, in turn, motivates us to do “only those things which are good for *human nature*” (E4p35d, my italics; see also E3p57s and E4p37s1). Importantly, however, even though human nature is not a concept of imagination *per se*, it is a species-bound notion which can be thought to relate to imagination in the way dictates of reason do.<sup>56</sup> It is notable that whereas in E4 Spinoza puts a lot of emphasis on the notion of ‘human nature’ in relation to his conception of collaborative morality, in E5, especially in the second half of it, we hardly see this notion in play. Instead, Spinoza uses the term ‘thing’ as we have just seen in his description of intuitive knowledge as “knowledge of singular things” (E5p24 and E5p36s), as well as in his description of the wise person as someone who is “conscious of himself, and of God, and of *things*” (E5p42s, my italics; see also E5p39s).

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52 Delahunty (*Spinoza* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 75) invokes this passage in order to support his view that there is an empirical element in common notions.

53 By thus distinguishing the knowledge of God from common notions, Spinoza makes use of a distinction between those things that can be imagined, like the bodies, and those that can never be imagined, like God. In a famous letter to Lodewijk Meyer, Spinoza makes a similar distinction as he warns against the failure to distinguish between “that which we can apprehend *only* by the intellect and not by the imagination,” and “that which can *also* be apprehended by imagination” (Ep 12, Spinoza to Meyer, 20 April 1663 (G II 52-62), my italics).

54 For an excellent account of Spinoza’s dictates of reason and how they relate to imagination see Steinberg (“Following a *Recta Ratio Vivendi*: The Practical Utility of Spinoza’s Dictates of Reason,” in *Essays on Spinoza’s Ethical Theory*, eds. Matthew J. Kisner and Andrew Youpa, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 178-96).

55 See E5p10s for instance.

56 It seems plausible to suggest that our perceptual/imaginative grasp of the likeness between ourselves and others and the resultant fellow-feeling can sometimes facilitate our rational cognition of the commonalities and affinities that we share with our fellow humans and allow us to reach agreement on ends.

According to my reading, the wise person at the end of the *Ethics* is someone who has attained intuitive knowledge and, thereby, gained a new insight—namely, insight into her modal expression of God as a singular thing—which is beyond the pursuit of external goods like honor, pleasure and wealth; beyond prescriptions of reason; beyond an identification with humanity; and beyond imagination. She is someone who has achieved blessedness and true peace of mind, which, as we have seen “involves the stillness of eternity,” rather than “a stability of duration.” If the free person can be said to possess *scientia intuitiva* as Nadler holds, then she would be said to have attained the affective and intellectual excellence of the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*, in addition to the exceptionless rational consistency Spinoza details in E4. While I do not reject this reading categorically, I do not think that it was Spinoza’s intention to attribute intuitive knowledge and its attendant affective power to the free person. In order to appreciate this point, we need to pay attention to the differences between the contexts in which Spinoza invokes the free person and the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*, which brings me to the last section.

## 6 The Differences in Emphasis between E4 and E5

Whereas Spinoza’s accounts of the dictates of reason and collaborative morality dominate E4, E5 focuses on the power of the intellect and the extent of its dominion over the passive affects, with a particular emphasis on intuitive knowledge and its affective power in the second half. As seen earlier, Spinoza defines the free person as someone “who lives according to the dictate of reason *alone*” (E4p67d, my italics), which has been generally thought to be the “model of human nature” mentioned in the preface to E4.<sup>57</sup> As a model of exceptionless rational consistency, the free person is a perfect and unattainable ideal, a “human construct that we may keep before our eyes to measure our advances *towards* this perfection.”<sup>58</sup> It is notable that *all* of the occurrences of the free person in the *Ethics* are found in E4 in relation to his account of the dictates of reason, tenacity, and nobility. Even though E5 is on human freedom as suggested by its title, Spinoza *never* explicitly mentions the free person in this part. This, in my view, is a deliberate choice on Spinoza’s part. Spinoza introduces the free person in relation to reason in E4 to show what the “method of living rightly” consists of insofar as “the present life” is concerned. He never explicitly describes the free person as someone who has attained intuitive knowledge and thus knows that their mind is eternal. This is because, in the context of E4, what he wants to provide is an account of moral excellence and freedom that would guide us as human beings who exist in relation to a certain time and place.<sup>59</sup>

After presenting us with his portrayal of the free person as an unattainable model of maximal rationality and right way of living in E4, Spinoza begins E5 as follows:

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57 Nadler, “On Spinoza’s ‘Free Man’,” 104.

58 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 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 185.

59 It is thus not surprising that the only axiom of E4 emphasizes our limited power insofar as our durational existence is concerned.

I pass, finally, to the remaining part of the *Ethics*, which concerns the means, or way, leading to freedom. Here, then, I shall treat of the power of reason,<sup>60</sup> showing what it can do against the affects, and what freedom of mind, or blessedness, is. From this we shall see how much more the *wise man* can do than the ignorant... Here, then, as I have said, I shall treat only of the power of the mind...and shall show, above all, how great its dominion over the affects is...For *we have already demonstrated above that it does not have an absolute dominion over them.* (my italics)

As I read this passage, in reminding us that our mind does not have absolute power over the passions, Spinoza wants us to realize that “how much more the wise person can do than the ignorant” cannot be expressed in terms of an absolute dominion over the passions or an exceptionless self-determination, which the free person represents.<sup>61</sup> Spinoza thus signals a change in emphasis in the beginning of E5, which takes yet another turn as we get to the second half of E5. In the Scholium to Proposition 20, Spinoza notifies us in a perplexing statement that having “completed everything which concerns this present life...it is time now to pass to those things which pertain to the mind’s duration without relation to the body.” He thus informs us that he is turning his attention to the eternal order of things rather than things that are determinate and imaginable.

After introducing his doctrines of the eternity of the mind and the intellectual love of God, and explaining the “excellence and utility”<sup>62</sup> of intuitive knowledge in the remainder of E5, Spinoza states in the penultimate proposition of his masterwork that “even if we did not know that our mind is eternal, we would still regard as of the first importance morality, religion, and absolutely all the things we have shown (in E4) to be related to tenacity and nobility.” He demonstrates this proposition as follows:

The first and only foundation of virtue, or of the method of living rightly (by IVP22C and P24) is the seeking of our own advantage. *But to determine what reason prescribes as useful, we took no account of the eternity of the mind,* which we only came to know in the Fifth Part. Therefore, though we did not know then that the mind is eternal, we still regarded as of the first importance the things we showed to be related to tenacity and nobility. And so, even if we also did not know this now, we would still regard as of the first importance the same rules of reason, q.e.d. (my italics).

E5p41 and its demonstration suggest that in order to appreciate Spinoza’s account of the free person in E4 and to determine what reason prescribes as useful, we do not need to take into account the eternity of the mind, which is closely connected to intuitive knowledge. It thus supports my thesis that Spinoza introduces the ideal of the free person in this part to show us what reason prescribes as useful insofar as “the present life” is concerned, without any reference to the eternity of the mind.

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60 As stated earlier, in this Preface Spinoza uses reason interchangeably with mind.

61 As I see it, to the extent that intuitive knowledge and its attendant *beautitudo* are attainable for finite minds, the wise person at the end of the *Ethics* represents an attainable ideal.

62 After explaining how we can form intuitive knowledge in E2p47s, Spinoza states that he will speak of “the excellence and utility” of this knowledge in E5.

By contrast, his remarks about the wise person at the end of the *Ethics* pertain essentially to the eternity of the mind and thus cannot be fully understood without taking it into account.

How does all this bear on the distinction (or lack thereof) between the wise person and the free person? In his article, Nadler suggests that even though there are no grounds on which we can plausibly insist on a distinction between the wise person and the free person, one may conceive of a difference between freedom and wisdom in that “freedom refers to the causal fount and nature of the individual’s comportment.... [whereas] wisdom...would refer to the free/wise individual’s cognitive and spiritual condition.”<sup>63</sup> To apply Nadler’s useful distinction between freedom and wisdom to my reading, I hold that the wise person at the end of the *Ethics* and the free person in E4 are inseparable in terms of their freedom. More specifically, I agree with Nadler that in terms of their comportment and character, there are not significant and clear differences between the free person and the wise person. It is entirely plausible to think that they would both act honestly not deceptively, repay the other’s hate with love and nobility, not fear death, and “use things ... and to take pleasure in them as far as possible” (E4p45s), among other things.

However, I disagree with Nadler when it comes to their cognitive and spiritual condition. In terms of their wisdom—that is, their cognitive and spiritual condition—there seems to be a difference between the free person of E4 and the wise person at the end of the *Ethics*, which, in turn, bears on the respective roles they play in Spinoza’s moral philosophy. Whereas the free person is an unattainable model of exceptionless rationality that is designed to guide human beings to act in accordance with the dictates of reason, the wise person at the end of the *Ethics* represents the excellent yet rare state of human perfection, which consists in achieving intuitive knowledge and salvation in this life by appreciating the eternity of our mind and, thus, experiencing the stillness of eternity.<sup>64</sup> Nadler concludes his article by saying that “There is no gap between the free person and the wise person in Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Where the one goes, so goes the other.” But since the role that the free person plays in Spinoza’s moral philosophy can be fully appreciated within the context of E4 and without having any recourse to the eternity of the mind or any of the other doctrines in the second half of E5, the free person does not have to go where the wise person goes at the end of the *Ethics*. And I am not sure that Spinoza intended her to.<sup>65</sup>

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63 Nadler, “The Wise,” 57.

64 Alquié (*Leçons sur Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions La Table Ronde, 2003), 326) expresses a similar point as follows: “...dans le livre V, l’homme libre sera considere en lui-meme, et dans sa vie interieure, dans sa vie eternelle. Dans le livre IV, il est considere en tant qu’il vit dans le temps, dans le monde, dans la cite.” Whereas I agree with the distinction he draws, I disagree with him that they are both the same ideal. For Spinoza never invokes the free person in E5.

65 I am indebted to Steven Nadler for his comments on an earlier version of this paper and for our many fruitful discussions of Spinoza’s free person and wise person. Thanks also to the editors of this journal for inviting me to write this response, as well as to Raj Ghoshal, Tad Schmaltz, and Matthew Kisner for their helpful comments and suggestions regarding specific parts of this response.



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