Supporting Information

to

Unifying conceptual density functional and valence bond theory: The hardness-softness conundrum associated with protonation reactions and uncovering complementary reactivity modes

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S1. Comparison of the BOVB results with the DFVB results for a selected subset of considered systems 2
S2. Comparison of the DFVB results with the DFT results and experimental data
S3. Bond scanning profiles for the protonation reactions5
S4. Connection between the presented VB framework and the empirical factors previously identified as driving pKa values
S5. Comparison between the VB-analogue of the Fukui function and the conventional Fukui function9
S6. Spin densities of the ground-state and first excited state for [HSHNSH] ⁺ • in its optimal and twisted geometry
S7. Tuning the state ordering through captodative substitution16
S8. Utility to scan for a minimum electrostatic potential value17
S9. Geometries and Energies

S1. Comparison of the BOVB results with the DFVB results for a selected subset of considered systems

From Table S1 it is clear that the bonding situations are equally well described by BOVB and DFVB level-of-theory; the only quantity that differs significantly between both methods is the bonding energy. The latter finding is in line with expectations, since DFVB generally does a better job at recovering the full bonding energy than BOVB (see also Section S2; cf. Ref. 46 in the main text).

Table S1. The weights of the HL and the main ionic structures (w_{HL} and $w_{ion,1}$), the resonance energy (RE) and the spacing between the HL and main ionic state ($\Delta E_{HL-ion,1}$) at the optimal bonding distance and the adiabatic bonding energy obtained for [H₃N-H]⁺, [H₂S-H]⁺ and [H₂O-H]⁺ at respectively BOVB-d/6-311++G**//(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP and DFVB(LYP)/6-311++G**//(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

	W _{HL}	Wion,1	RE ^a	$\Delta E_{HL\text{-ion},1} \ ^a$	Bonding energy ^a
[H ₃ N-H] ⁺ - BOVB	0.61	0.33	39.0	58.7	130.6
[H ₃ N-H] ⁺ - DFVB	0.62	0.36	34.8	56.3	138.6
[H ₂ S-H] ⁺ - BOVB	0.68	0.26	21.1	101.8	85.9
[H ₂ S-H] ⁺ - DFVB	0.68	0.26	21.7	98.7	95.4
[H ₂ O-H] ⁺ - BOVB	0.55	0.41	70.7	11.8	132.8
[H ₂ O-H] ⁺ - DFVB	0.56	0.44	63.8	9.3	146.8
^a in kcal/mol					

S2. Comparison of the DFVB results with the DFT results and experimental data

Table S2. The bonding energy and $A_{H^+} - I_R$ (in kcal/mol) computed at respectively DFVB(LYP)/6-311++G**//(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP, (U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP(+ZPE) [DFT(a)], (U)B3LYP/6-311++G**//(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP(+ZPE) [DFT(b)] level-of-theory and (experimental) literature values for $A_{H^+} - I_R$ for each of the systems considered in the main text. Note the significant overestimation of the $A_{H^+} - I_R$ value calculated with the DFVB method.

	Bonding energy DFVB	A_{H} + – I_{R} DFVB	Bonding energy DFT(a)	A_{H} + – I_{R} DFT(a)	Bonding energy DFT(b)	A_{H} + – I_{R} DFT(b)	$A_H + - I_R$ literature
$[H_2S-H]^+$	95.4	83.9	95.1	73.6	93.7	73.1	72.5 ¹
[H ₂ O-H] ⁺	146.8	39.3	143.2	21.0	143.9	19.7	22.6 ¹
$[H_3N-H]^+$	138.6	80.0	140.0	62.7	140.6	62.7	66.8 ²
$[H_2NOH_2]^+$	97.6 ^a	106.0ª	98.3	70.1	98.5	68.7	/
[H ₃ NOH] ⁺	123.9ª	106.0ª	123.6	70.1	123.6	68.7	/
$\left[\mathrm{H_2NSH_2}\right]^+$	98.5	106.0	93.3	90.8	100.7	77.9	/
[H ₃ NSH] ⁺	117.3	106.0	105.8	90.8	119.8	77.9	/
[C ₆ H ₅ N-H] ⁺	135.8 ^b	120.6 ^b	125.5	97.1	125.5	96.8	100.21
$\left[C_{6}H_{6}N\right] ^{+}$ or tho	71.2 ^b	120.6 ^b	69.5	97.1	70.4	96.8	100.2^{1}

[C ₆ H ₆ N] ⁺ meta	82.5 ^b	120.6 ^b	76.2	97.1	77.0	96.8	100.2 ¹
$\left[C_{6}H_{6}N\right] ^{+}$ para	61.2 ^b	120.6 ^b	64.1	97.1	70.4	96.8	100.2 ¹

^a The geometry of dissociated H₃NOH was selected to evaluate the energetics in the asymptotic limit

^b The geometry of dissociated N-protonated pyridine was selected to evaluate the energetics in the asymptotic limit

S3. Bond scanning profiles for the protonation reactions



Figure S1. Evolution of the energy of Φ_{HL} , Φ_{ion1} and $\Psi_{adiabatic}$ as a function of the N-H bond distance in NH₄⁺, calculated at DFVB(LYP)/6-311++G**//(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.



Figure S2. Evolution of the energy of Φ_{HL} , Φ_{ion1} and $\Psi_{adiabatic}$ as a function of the S-H bond distance in H₃S⁺, calculated at DFVB(LYP)/6-311++G**//(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.



Figure S3. Evolution of the energy of Φ_{HL} , Φ_{ion1} and $\Psi_{adiabatic}$ as a function of the O-H bond distance in H₃O⁺, calculated at DFVB(LYP)/6-311++G**//(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

S4. Connection between the presented VB framework and the empirical factors previously identified as driving pKa values

In a set of recent papers, cf. Ref. 57 – 59 in the main text, Liu and co-workers connected a variety of electronic and reactivity descriptors emerging from a CDFT framework to the experimental acid strengths of a variety of structurally related sets of acidic compounds and complexes. Interestingly, the main factors probed/identified in these studies also emerge (in a modified version) in our own VB-based framework to describe protonation propensities:

- (a) The authors observed a (negatively sloped) linear correlation between the MEP value on the association site and the experimental pK_a values. As indicated in the main text, MEP values are good descriptors of the electrostatic part of the interaction energy. Hence, when a set of compounds with common structural features in close proximity of the protonation site (but varying substituents in more distant positions of the molecule or complex) are considered resulting in a more or less constant spin-pairing/ (frontier) orbital contribution across the series but a variable electrostatic (long-range) contribution then this descriptor can be expected to correlate well with the experimental pK_a values.
- (b) The authors observed a (positively sloped) linear correlation between the chemical potential of the reaction partner R ($\mu_R = \frac{1}{2}[I_R + A_R]$) and the experimental pK_a values. This finding can also be connected to our model through realization that μ_R acts as a probe for the spacing between the HL and ionic structure in our model, i.e. $I_H I_R$ (cf. Eq. 2 in the main text): since A_R is a rather small quantity in most (saturated) organic compounds (relative to I_R) and I_H is by definition a constant for all protonation processes, the magnitude of μ_R effectively acts as an indicator of the magnitude of I_R . Hence, this quantity tells us something about the magnitude of the

spin-pairing interaction when a single elemental type is considered for the association site within a set of structurally related acids. This realization is further corroborated by the finding in other studies that the pK_a correlates with $E_{HOMO,R}$ (another quantity connected to I_R), cf. Ref. 65.

S5. Comparison between the VB-analogue of the Fukui function and the conventional Fukui function

Throughout the main text, we focus on the VB-inspired analogue of the Fukui function, i.e. the spin density of the (positively) charged compound, as a descriptor of the spin-pairing/orbital interaction. In the literature, this descriptor is often referred to as a so-called "Parr function". As indicated in Ref. 61 and 62 in the main text, this descriptor corresponds – within reasonable bounds – to the traditional (CDFT) definition of the Fukui function (in its finite difference approximation), i.e. $f^{-}(\underline{\mathbf{r}}) = \rho_{N}(\underline{\mathbf{r}}) - \rho_{N-1}(\underline{\mathbf{r}})$. Below, this finding was verified for each of the systems considered in the present study. Note that while there are numerical shifts between the two spin-pairing/orbital interaction descriptors, the emerging trends are identical.

Table S3. Comparison between the atom-condensed conventional Fukui function and its VBinspired analogue for NH₃, derived from the ground-state wavefunctions calculated at (U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

	Conventional Fukui	VB-inspired analogue of the
	function (in au)	Fukui function (in au)
Ν	0.81261	1.04088
Н	0.06246	-0.01363
н	0.06246	-0.01363
Н	0.06246	-0.01363

Table S4. Comparison between the atom-condensed conventional Fukui function and its VBinspired analogue for H₂S, derived from the ground-state wavefunctions calculated at (U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

	Conventional Fukui	VB-inspired analogue of the
	function (in au)	Fukui function (in au)
S	0.92495	1.04124
Н	0.03752	-0.02062
н	0.03752	-0.02062

Table S5. Comparison between the atom-condensed conventional Fukui function and its VBinspired analogue for H₂O, derived from the ground-state wavefunctions calculated at (U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

	Conventional Fukui	VB-inspired analogue of the
	function (in au)	Fukui function (in au)
0	0.86881	1.04218
Н	0.06559	-0.0211
н	0.06559	-0.02109

Table S6. Comparison between the atom-condensed conventional Fukui function and its VBinspired analogue for H₂NOH, derived from the ground-state wavefunctions calculated at (U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

	Conventional Fukui	VB-inspired analogue of the
	function (in au)	Fukui function (in au)
Ν	0.54246	0.80068
Н	0.08287	-0.00691
Н	0.08287	-0.00691
0	0 21104	0 1071
U	0.21194	0.1971
Н	0.07987	0.01605

Table S7. Comparison between the atom-condensed conventional Fukui function and its VBinspired analogue for H₂NSH, derived from the ground-state wavefunctions calculated at (U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

	Conventional Fukui	VB-inspired analogue of the
	function (in au)	Fukui function (in au)
N	0.00073	-0.01005
Н	0.06973	0.02049
Н	0.06976	0.02051
S	0.82356	0.98757
Н	0.03622	-0.01852

Table S8. Comparison between the atom-condensed conventional Fukui function and its VBinspired analogue for HONHOH, derived from the ground-state wavefunctions calculated at (U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

	Conventional Fukui	VB-inspired analogue of the
	function (in au)	Fukui function (in au)
N	0.37779	0.59123
н	0.08587	-0.00746
0	0.2049	0.20265
н	0.06327	0.00547
0	0.20491	0.20266
Н	0.06327	0.00546

Table S9. Comparison between the atom-condensed conventional Fukui function and its VBinspired analogue for HSNHSH, derived from the ground-state wavefunctions calculated at (U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

	Conventional Fukui function (in au)	VB-inspired analogue of the Fukui function (in au)
	. ,	
Ν	-0.03732	-0.01738
Н	0.03542	-0.0018

S	0.46203	0.51894
Н	0.03894	-0.00933
S	0.462	0.51891
Н	0.03893	-0.00933

Table S10. Comparison between the atom-condensed conventional Fukui function and its VBinspired analogue for pyridine, derived from the ground-state wavefunctions calculated at (U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP level-of-theory.

	Conventional Fukui	VB-inspired analogue of the
	function (in au)	Fukui function (in au)
Cortho	-0.02148	-0.01812
C _{meta}	0.06172	0.078
C_{para}	0.08453	-0.02916
C _{meta}	0.06172	0.078
C_{ortho}	-0.02148	-0.01812
Ν	0.4744	0.82536
Н	0.05843	0.01419
Н	0.08826	0.02756

H 0.06283 0.00737	
H 0.08825 0.02756	

S6. Spin densities of the ground-state and first excited state for [HSHNSH]⁺• in its optimal and twisted geometry



Figure S4. The spin density associated with the ground-state and first excited state of $[\text{HSHNSH}]^{+\bullet}$ in its optimal geometry ($\Delta E_{\text{excitation}} = 11.7 \text{ kcal/mol}$) and the geometry in which the dihedral angle H-S-N-H has been twisted to maximize the overlap between the lone pairs ($\Delta E_{\text{excitation}} = 22.5 \text{ kcal/mol}$).

S7. Tuning the state ordering through captodative substitution



Figure S5. a) Spin density contour maps for the ground- and first excited state of [4-cyano pyridine]^{+•}; b) spin density maps for the ground- and first excited state of $[C_2B_2N_2H_4]^{+\bullet}$.

S8. Utility to scan for a minimum electrostatic potential value

As indicated in the main text, a small utility was written to scan for the minimum value of the electrostatic potential along a specific axis away from the atom center for pyridine. The utility takes a regular Gaussian .cube file as input. Because the pyridine molecule in our calculation was aligned with the xy-plane, the electrostatic potential for the C-sites could simply be scanned in the z-direction; the electrostatic potential for the in-plane lone pair associated with the N-site was scanned in the y-direction.

For the ortho-site, the minimum of the electrostatic potential (reached at a distance of 2.3 Å from the atomic center) amounted to -6.7 kcal/mol. For the meta-site, this quantity amounted to -5.1 kcal/mol and for the para-site to -3.9 kcal/mol (reached at 2.2 Å and 2.1 Å respectively). For the N-site, the minimum, amounting to -59.0 kcal/mol, was reached at a distance of 1.4 Å away from the atom center.

The full code is displayed below.

```
import math
def read cube file(filename, N1, N2, N3):
""" reads in the .cube file into a 3D-matrix object by iterating through the N1, N2 and N3 dimensions """
    matrix = []
    with open(filename, 'r') as f_obj:
    contents = f_obj.read()
         line_list = contents.split("\n")
         f_obj.close()
    for i in range(N1):
         matrix.append([])
         for j in range(N2):
             matrix[i].append([])
    full_value_list = []
    for line in line_list:
         temp_list = list(map(float, tuple(line.split())))
         for number in temp_list:
              full_value_list.append(number)
```

```
for i in range(N1):
         for j in range(N2):
             for k in range(N3):
                 matrix[i][j].append(full_value_list[i * N2 * N3 + j * N3 +
k])
    return matrix
def convert_point_to_matrix_element(pointx, pointy, pointz, incrementx,
incrementy, incrementz, startx, starty, startz):
element in the 3D-matrix
    i = (pointx - startx)/incrementx
    j = (pointy - starty) / incrementy
    k = (pointz - startz) / incrementz
    return int(i), int(j), int(k)
def determine_minimum_in_direction(matrix, x, y, z, dir):
    """" Scans the 3D-matrix from (x, y, z) along dir to find the minimum
    minimum = matrix[x][y][z]
    if dir == "z":
         for i in range(30):
             if minimum > matrix[x][y][z+i]:
                 minimum = matrix[x][y][z+i]
                  a, b, c = x, y, z+i
    elif dir == "y":
         for i in range(20):
             if minimum > matrix[x][y+i][z]:
                 minimum = matrix[x][y+i][z]
                  a, b, c = x, y+i, z
    return a, b, c, minimum
def determine_distance(i, j, k, a, b, c, incrementx, incrementy,
incrementz):
    distance = math.sqrt(((i-a) * incrementx)**2 + ((j-b) * incrementy)**2
+ ((k-c) * incrementz)**2)
    return distance
matrix = read cube file("pyridine potential.cube", 89, 87, 66)
#ortho
i, j, k = convert_point_to_matrix_element(-
2.152577, 1.359378, 0.000186, 0.200015, 0.200015, 0.200015, -8.767684, -9.118581, -
6.513126)
a, b, c, minimum = determine_minimum_in_direction(matrix, i, j, k, "z")
distance = determine_distance(i, j, k, a, b, c, 0.200015,0.200015,0.200015)
print("Minimum electrostatic potential for the ortho-position: ", minimum,
  au, reached at a distance of ", distance)
#meta
i, j, k = convert_point_to_matrix_element(-2.254932, -1.265736,
0.000396, 0.200015, 0.200015, 0.200015, -8.767684, -9.118581, -6.513126)
```

a, b, c, minimum = determine_minimum_in_direction(matrix, i, j, k, "z")
distance = determine_distance(i, j, k, a, b, c, 0.200015,0.200015,0.200015)
print("Minimum electrostatic potential for the meta-position: ", minimum, "
au, reached at a distance of ", distance)

#para

i, j, k = convert_point_to_matrix_element(0.000054,-2.605829,0.000171,0.200015,0.200015,0.200015,-8.767684,-9.118581,-6.513126) a, b, c, minimum = determine_minimum_in_direction(matrix, i, j, k, "z") distance = determine_distance(i, j, k, a, b, c, 0.200015,0.200015,0.200015) print("Minimum electrostatic potential for the para-position: ", minimum, " au, reached at a distance of ", distance)

#N-site

i, j, k = convert_point_to_matrix_element(-0.000055,2.669695,0.000173,0.200015,0.200015,0.200015,-8.767684,-9.118581,-6.513126)
a, b, c, minimum = determine_minimum_in_direction(matrix, i, j, k, "y")
distance = determine_distance(i, j, k, a, b, c, 0.200015,0.200015,0.200015)
print("Minimum electrostatic potential for the N-position: ", minimum, "
au, reached at a distance of ", distance)

S9. Geometries and Energies

Units:

- Coordinates are expressed in Å
- Energies are expressed in a.u.

H_2

Н	-0.481363	-3.249661	0.000000
Н	-1.225286	-3.249661	0.000000

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -1.1796489903919316

NaCl

Na	-2.129712	1.037992	0.000000
Cl	-4.493666	1.037992	0.000000

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -622.6050541289729

NH3

Ν	-0.871712	2.101449	0.000000
Н	-0.500437	1.158565	-0.000300
Н	-0.500420	2.572625	0.816708
Н	-0.500420	2.573144	-0.816408

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -56.585678339117926

[NH₄]⁺

Ν	-0.924598	2.092591	0.040711
Н	-0.570376	1.130921	0.018242
Н	-0.536419	2.580887	0.854135
Н	-0.644267	2.580092	-0.816353
Н	-1.947467	2.078469	0.106738

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -56.92385303636355

H_2O

0	-0.670391	2.177221	0.000000
Н	0.291742	2.212724	0.000000
Н	-0.958092	3.096019	0.000000

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -76.4629947772201

[H₃O]⁺

0	-0.715808	2.159692	0.075634
Н	0.252145	2.085289	-0.066701
Н	-1.059719	3.070170	-0.048750
Н	-1.234117	1.477966	-0.403304

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -76.7375601749838

H_2S

S	-0.725065	2.099859	0.000000
Н	0.602802	2.298244	0.000000
Н	-0.981309	3.417784	0.000000

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -399.425346346739

[H₃S]

Н	-1.280270	1.422995	-0.555014
S	-0.698741	2.173308	0.415581
Н	0.525855	2.168726	-0.170555
Н	-1.071175	3.358010	-0.133135

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -399.7048610444624

H₂NOH

Ν	-1.425905	0.298973	0.018383
Н	-1.005564	-0.626852	-0.003445
Н	-1.005663	0.780854	0.809270
0	-0.867789	0.964426	-1.134239
Н	-1.653340	1.243215	-1.617321

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -131.7778760266885

$[H_2NOH_2]^+$

Ν	-1.404324	0.350623	0.121598
Н	-1.268622	-0.646370	-0.053016
Н	-0.821605	0.652010	0.904759
0	-0.794855	0.959242	-1.082970
Н	0.160783	1.179337	-1.047443
Н	-1.347441	1.719700	-1.357735

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -132.058357824404

[H₃NOH]⁺

0	-0.958294	1.263720	-1.031207
Н	-1.361592	0.985847	-1.874734
Ν	-1.410813	0.383461	-0.037046
Н	-1.110965	-0.585680	-0.212278
Н	-0.964973	0.712276	0.828224
Н	-2.432259	0.427503	0.083554

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -132.10069622405916

H₂NSH

Ν	-1.341546	0.336401	-0.046362
Н	-1.059740	-0.634287	-0.021917
Н	-1.059694	0.800500	0.806526
S	-0.684085	1.130825	-1.422479
Н	-1.851968	1.467387	-2.005207

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -454.7852277958409

[H₃NSH]⁺

Н	-1.379070	0.966023	-2.128576
Ν	-1.390287	0.326412	0.102637
Н	-1.244690	-0.661754	-0.123912
Н	-0.943065	0.509403	1.006702
Н	-2.392324	0.511216	0.206383
S	-0.617351	1.425820	-1.116049

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -455.11232949317673

$[H_2NSH_2]^+$

Ν	-1.221359	0.256065	0.119855
Н	-1.423849	-0.734457	0.114531
Н	-0.939228	0.672977	0.996751
S	-0.809981	0.892049	-1.309651
Н	0.480498	1.314139	-1.194546
Н	-1.328975	2.143696	-1.241748

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -455.0888253933681

C5H5N

С	-3.974867	-1.498504	0.000012
С	-2.584665	-1.502016	-0.000065
С	-1.919469	-0.283680	-0.000276
С	-2.671675	0.882943	-0.000395
С	-4.057925	0.778139	-0.000284
N	-4.709300	-0.385463	-0.000094
Н	-0.837377	-0.244211	-0.000353

Н	-4.525251	-2.433730	0.000180
Н	-2.041940	-2.438254	0.000038
Н	-2.198629	1.856247	-0.000567
Н	-4.674998	1.670770	-0.000387

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -248.3789997769894

[C₅H₅N-H]⁺

С	-1.184942	-0.676531	0.128909
С	-1.206177	0.695067	0.006561
С	0.000255	1.387464	-0.055018
С	1.206422	0.694635	0.006894
С	1.184663	-0.676954	0.129236
Н	0.000461	2.465345	-0.151202
Н	-2.071880	-1.290851	0.183730
Н	-2.154870	1.209997	-0.039544
Н	2.155312	1.209227	-0.038948
Н	2.071367	-1.291591	0.184303
Ν	-0.000261	-1.314634	0.185987
Н	-0.000454	-2.324938	0.275543

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -248.74802257398377

$[C_5H_6N]^+$ ortho

С	-0.58305500	1.24064000	-0.00010700
С	0.79506200	1.19857800	0.00000100
С	1.38927500	-0.05577100	0.00007900
С	0.60233600	-1.25564100	-0.00005900
Ν	-0.68989500	-1.24698800	-0.00006000
Н	1.39188000	2.10079000	-0.00000600
Н	-1.12036100	2.18312500	-0.00023400
Н	2.47029900	-0.14505600	0.00012100
Н	1.10231400	-2.21892900	-0.00013700
С	-1.34781900	0.00385900	0.00003900
Н	-2.07530000	0.00945100	-0.83814000
Н	-2.07436900	0.00953600	0.83909500

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -248.6537621

[C5H6N]⁺para

С	-1.171007	-0.743170	-0.000215
С	-1.237101	0.632895	-0.000136
С	1.237334	0.632449	0.000206
С	1.170743	-0.743593	0.000110
Ν	-0.000250	-1.397709	-0.000094
Н	-2.063743	-1.356323	-0.000376
Н	-2.188234	1.151348	-0.000234

Н	2.188654	1.150559	0.000371
Н	2.063258	-1.357067	0.000193
С	0.000254	1.398478	0.000086
Н	0.000269	2.123196	0.841081
Н	0.000501	2.123321	-0.840800

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -248.6441624748297

[C5H6N]⁺meta

С	-1.144165	-0.716737	-0.000212
С	-1.225547	0.688811	-0.000131
С	-0.062006	1.398597	0.000084
С	1.120390	-0.781278	0.000102
Ν	-0.002933	-1.441143	-0.000101
Н	-0.057892	2.482277	0.000160
Н	-2.057259	-1.304723	-0.000370
Н	-2.193683	1.170537	-0.000236
Н	2.038154	-1.364318	0.000186
С	1.216755	0.684547	0.000216
Н	1.846864	1.009037	-0.849300
Н	1.846629	1.008926	0.849948

(U)B3LYP/def2-TZVP energy = -248.6639278746687