To claim that Spinoza has a problem with religion would be somewhat of an understatement. His excommunication from the Jewish community at the age of 24, stated in the harshest possible words in the Herem of 1656 is well known, as are the numerous accusations of atheism (against which Spinoza, however, would repeatedly defend himself) made by both his contemporaries and his later readers. As one of Spinoza’s only two books published during his lifetime, the *Theologico-Political Treatise* would be received as a scandalous work undermining the Holy text itself; the *Ethics*, with its claim that God be understood as Nature and as submitted to necessity—thus denying both God’s transcendence and his free will—would not be met more favourably. Indeed, for Spinoza who, in what appears to be a rare outburst of frustration, considers the notion of God’s will to be “the sanctuary of ignorance” and devotes all his efforts to dismantling the affectivity underlying any religious fervour as sadness and ignorance, religion as such appears to be nothing but an illustration of man’s tendency to fight “as bravely for slavery as for safety.” Nevertheless, these observations, however

2 See for instance the exchange with Oldenburg in letters 73–78.
4 *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, 5.
accurate, do not suffice to clarify the philosophical point of religion being a problem to Spinoza. If, on the one hand, religion, both understood as vulgar superstition and as a more enlightened form of piety is indeed, throughout the work of Spinoza, submitted to a devastating analysis showing its profound anchorage in inadequacy, religion is on the other hand not only considered as an inevitable part of social, thus political, life, but furthermore, must even be used as a tool enforcing the possibilities of a sustainable political society—the same political society in which Spinoza wishes to abolish any religious authority as a structure of political power. How are we then to understand this apparent contradiction? It appears that we are dealing with a problem that can be understood on at least two levels: one related to the epistemological question of adequate knowledge, the other related to the larger context of the political, where religiosity, understood as an inevitable passion, not only has to be dealt with but furthermore will prove to play a crucial role, be it of a negative or positive kind.

This problem, however, also seems analogous to the one expressed in one of Spinoza’s predecessors—Hobbes—main works. Like Spinoza, Hobbes—also accused of atheism—, in Leviathan, understands religion chiefly as the result of human ignorance, while, at the same time, he claims its necessity in a functioning political science. Both argue, in a similar way, concerning the position of religion in regard to the political context: Hobbes, by claiming that it is necessary that religious authority in practice be subordinated to the political authority; Spinoza asking that there be a radical line of separation between the two, but furthermore, that it is crucial to disarm the religious authority as a structure of political power—that is, in short, advocating a political control over religion. But where Hobbes in fact ends up reducing the role of religion to issues of dominion, Spinoza appears to leave open a space for profound reflection concerning not only how religiosit y plays a role in the political, but also its possible potential regarding knowledge. In both, we thus find a substantial ambiguity concerning the status, the signification and the implication of religion—in relation to the political, but also in a wider sense—that requires further exploration. This is why an investigation where the different levels—the
epistemological, the affective and the political, but also the ontological and anthropological—are interrelated and interwoven, is called for.\(^5\)

**Religion and anthropology: origin and occurrence in Hobbes and Spinoza**

In both Hobbes and Spinoza, we find two fundamental theses concerning religion as a phenomenon, and concerning the connection between politics and religion. The first one is that religion—and religiosity, no matter in what form—is a human phenomenon and nothing else, that is, has fundamentally nothing to do with any transcendent reality. The second one is that religion has an exclusively political function, and that this function may be of a positive or negative kind—that is beneficial for the state, or harmful.

To start, let us see how the first one of these theses is formulated in Hobbes. A schematic analysis of Hobbes’ basic anthropology starts out from a certain materialism: there are, in Hobbes’ understanding, nothing but bodies, to the degree that the very concept of an immaterial substance is in itself a contradiction.\(^6\) Even God, as it were, must be understood as corporeal. The human being is a body among others, and, like any other body, is primarily motivated by self-preservation.\(^7\) However what distinguishes the human being from other beings, animals in particular, is that she possesses an ability of language (in itself, a mechanical phenomenon): she emits and makes use of certain sounds and signs that are deeply

\(^5\) The relation between Hobbes and Spinoza on a level bringing together not only their political philosophies as such, but on one that would confront them also from an ontological, anthropological, epistemological and affective perspective, remains yet, in contemporary philosophy, largely to be examined. Such an analysis, parting from on the one hand, their joint terminology and themes—the theologico-political analysis, corporeality, materiality and the notion of self-preservation—; and on the other hand, from their constitutive divergencies concerning key concepts such as *conatus*, *potentia* and *potestas*, natural and civil rights and forms of government, would prove to be fruitful not only for situating Hobbes and Spinoza with and against each other in a philosophical-historical manner. More importantly, it also appears that such an analysis would open towards the possibility of thinking the Spinozian political philosophy as a forceful alternative to the Hobbesian legacy in contemporary political philosophy and theory.


\(^7\) Ibid. ch. 6, 118–119.
transforming or making evolve her being. By associating certain things with specific sounds and signs, and by remembering them she thus enters a temporality that does not only involve the present but also the past and the future; rather, she acquires the capacity of projecting the past towards a future time. To Hobbes, it is precisely the capacity of projection towards an indefinite future that characterizes human identity.\(^8\) However it is also thereby that human being’s great tragic event occurs: by projecting herself into the future, she becomes aware of her own finitude, whereby death becomes her main focus. Thus, it is from the experience of a radical uncertainty—or lack of security—and awaiting an always untimely and threatening death that the human being realizes her need of controlling and rendering as secure as possible her future life. The human being will thus from now on, in all possible ways, accumulate and capitalize all she can in order to guarantee her future life, that is, in clear, obtaining sufficient power, while all at the same time, she realizes that ultimately, no power will be sufficient in order to keep death away forever.\(^9\) In other words, we find ourselves in a vicious circle, where the accumulation of capital in order to render life safe must itself be protected, which demands yet further accumulation that must be protected and so on, all this with the result that the fundamental anguish will never diminish or disappear.\(^10\) To Hobbes, it is from here on obvious how religion originates, deeply anchoring itself in human’s psyche: in fact, religion has the same origin as science, since it is the fear of the future that motivates us to seek for the reason and causes of things and events.\(^11\) The knowledge of causes actually constitutes a very forceful means of power, since this knowledge makes it possible for us not only to explain how things have appeared, but more importantly, how they are likely to appear and occur in the future, thus giving us the possibility of preventive actions. In order to deal with our fear of death we thus need to

\(^8\) Ibid, ch. 11–12, 160–172.

\(^9\) “So that man, which looks too far before him, in the care of future time, hath his heart all day long, gnawed on by feare of death, poverty, or other calamity, and has no repose, nor pause of his anxiety, but in sleep.” (Ibid. ch. 12, 169.)

\(^10\) “So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more.” (Ibid, ch. 11, 161.)

\(^11\) Ibid., 164–165.
find the causes of things, in order to, in turn, be able to act ourselves upon these causes.

This state of affairs may have two consequences: either we manage to have knowledge of causality in general, thus being able at least in part to act upon them; or we do not manage to acquire any knowledge. Interestingly enough, for Hobbes, both these possibilities will lead to religious belief.

In the first case, which is rather rare and concerns only a small number of persons, as philosophers or true scientists, we manage to find causes, and regress indefinitely in causality to the point where we must, necessarily, stipulate a first cause or force. In fact, we will find no other ontological proof of God in Hobbes, and there is also very little that we can know of God as a first cause. What we can know is that he exists and that he is omnipotent (since he produces all things); possibly also that he must be corporeal since only bodies exist. However we know strictly nothing of his nature other than the above mentioned facts: in other words, this lack of knowledge results in the fact that there is nothing in principle that would contradict the possibility of God performing miracles, or communicating with specific and chosen persons, such as prophets, ordering them to perform certain acts, and so forth. Contrary to Spinoza, as we will see, it is thus completely possible for Hobbes that God manifest himself in accordance with the different ways described in the Bible, precisely because we cannot have more than a minimal knowledge of him in the first place. And if that were the case—that is God wanting, desiring or ordering us to do one thing or another, we cannot do anything but obey his will: this is a completely reasonable conclusion since there is absolutely no way in which we could resist an omnipotent will. So God exists, and he is omnipotent: we must obey him: this is the origin and result of religion in the first case.

In the second case, which is far more common, we actually do not succeed in figuring out causality in a satisfying way. In order to conjure our fear of death, we will thus imagine invisible powers that we will call god or gods, that we will try to render favourable to us in order to protect and preserve us. In this case, we will act accordingly to how we would act towards very powerful humans: we will worship them, we will sacrifice to

\[12\] Ibid., ch. 12, 170.
\[13\] Ibid., 170–171.
them, perform certain cults and rites according to what we believe would cause them joy and contentment.\footnote{Ibid., 170.}

To summarize and conclude: the origins of religion must thus be understood from the point of view of human’s fundamental conditions as finite and self-preserving. Religion may have a rational ground, that is, be founded in real knowledge of causality, or it may have an irrational ground; however the main question will still, to Hobbes, be what effects it will have in society rather than what origin it actually has. To Hobbes, there is certainly a difference between false and true religion, that is, whether it is a product of imagination or succeeding from true revelation; however, as soon as it gets into the circuits of transmission, its consequences will be altogether human. In fact, no matter what its origins, there are in reality no absolute proofs for true religion as such: since faith in any case is fundamentally grounded in the combination of the instinct of self-preservation and the fear of death—\textit{timor mortis}—this means that it is in itself a forceful vector of conflicts that the state must deal with and regulate. Thus, for Hobbes, the main question concerning religion will be how it is put to use in human interactivity. And the answer to this is: dominion, since, as previously established, all human quest is for power—which in turn necessarily calls for a political regulation.

Spinoza’s point of departure appears to be quite similar to Hobbes’. Like his predecessor, Spinoza claims that human being strives to persevere in her being—\textit{in suo esse perseverare}.\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, III, pr 6.} However, and this is crucial, Spinoza’s notion of \textit{conatus} does not mean that human beings strive in order to maintain her biological existence at all costs, but rather that it is about actualizing the consequences of her individual essence,\footnote{Ibid., pr 7.} that is, doing absolutely all that her nature determines her to do. The nuance is decisive: naturally, Spinoza’s conatus also implies a self-preservation in the classical sense, that is resisting death, however this is rather a consequence of her effort to develop and increase her power than a primary motivation, which also means that the main focus, in an individual, will not in the same way as in Hobbes be on accumulating the largest possible amount of preserving and protective things, but rather on the things or contexts that in various ways have a favourable effect on our vital power. In accordance with the
analysis in the *Ethics*, this also leads to a multiple variety concerning human interaction: human has a natural inclination to wish to rejoice in the same things that her fellow humans rejoice in, but this can be done in many different ways. Either, she can do so by diminishing anything that is hurtful or bad to the other, or she can strive to give something to the other that, to him, is associated with joy. Yet again, she can do so by trying to make the other cherish the same things she cherishes herself, or even taking away that which only benefits the other and not herself.\(^{17}\) It is thus clear that the interhuman relationship, for Spinoza just as for Hobbes, *can* indeed result in the need of dominion, however this is not primarily what characterizes it: interhuman relationship or coexistence is highly dependent on a large number of conditions and circumstances, which is why we can see at a very early stage why the political context is going to be so decisive. Having outlined these preliminary conditions, Spinoza sets up two possible scenarii. In the first one, we would have sufficiently good knowledge of ourselves as well as of our fellow humans in order to act accordingly to this knowledge. In the second scenario, we would have little or no knowledge neither of ourselves nor of our fellow humans, and would thus to a very large extent be determined by external causes that we do not understand. In the first case, it is impossible for religion, in a traditional sense to occur at all, since the adequate knowledge of ourselves and of the world excludes any desire for or need for any transcendent notions of God, and instead implies a comprehension of God as the substance, *natura naturans* producing all things with the same necessity that it produces itself.\(^{18}\) Knowledge, in the Spinozist sense, is nothing but the knowledge of this fact, which makes us see and understand things either in their respective and necessary relation to each other (knowledge of the second degree, through common notions), or in relationship to how their singular essence expresses a specific degree of power within the substance or God (knowledge of the third degree or intuitive knowledge). The second case—where we would largely or entirely lack this knowledge, will necessarily give rise to one form or another of religious belief. We can talk of these two scenarii in other words: in the first case, most of our actions would be active, explained by our own capacity of thinking and acting—we would thus act accordingly to reasonable ideas; in

\(^{17}\) See ibid., pr 27–32 et sq.

\(^{18}\) See the whole of *Ethics*, I. For a summary, see *Ethics*, I, app.
the other case, we would mostly be determined by our passions and inadequate ideas.

However, discussing these two possible scenarii is, in truth, for the sake of formality. In reality, Spinoza notes that it is very unusual for humans to be led by adequate knowledge and reasonable ideas: the fact is that most of us, to the largest extent, have inadequate knowledge both of ourselves and the world, that we are thrown between different passions, and are ignorant both of what really benefits our conatus and what is harmful to it. In other terms, we do experience and feel joy and sorrow in different ways, and we are also conscious of doing so, however we cannot, mostly, explain what happens to and in us other than in a defective, truncated way. For religion to appear is therefore for Spinoza inevitable, and he gives a detailed explanation of this process in the appendix of the first book of the *Ethics*. As Hobbes, Spinoza notes that humans seek to find causes for things and events—however not primarily in order to ascertain her future, but because she is characterized by a will to know in order to obtain favourable affects. But since she is primarily conscious of her affects without having any real knowledge of where they come from, she naturally makes the mistake of reading nature as such—all things—exclusively from her own perspective. Being conscious of doing things herself in order to obtain a certain result, she thereby concludes that nature acts in the same way: as she also mistakenly thinks she has a freedom of willing, desiring, thinking and acting, she thereby concludes that it is the same for nature. The result of this is a dramatic confusion between cause and final cause, where the question “why?” or “how come?” is immediately transformed into “to what end?”; a confusion that increases exponentially when she systematically includes the whole of nature—and its supposed creator—into her own inadequate understanding of herself. From an inadequate knowledge of ourselves, we are thus led to an anthropomorphic view on nature, and further yet to an anthropomorphic projection concerning the notion of God: since all in nature appear as being at the service of humans, she concludes that nature must have been created to this end, and that it must have been created by a will that can only belong to one or several anthropomorphic divinities. In turn, these divinities are ascribed further human characters since we immediately assume that they, in order to continue being friendly towards us, should be honoured, worshipped and obeyed. This is how religious belief occurs and is anchored within human mind: the linking between passion, that is external determination, inadequate ideas, that is ignorance,
and religious belief is given from the very start, as an inverted mirror of nature where, in a most mistaken way, human figures herself to be the measure of everything.  

This however constitutes only the first step in Spinoza’s analysis of religion, where, like Hobbes, he concludes that it is indeed an altogether human affair, but where Spinoza appears to be more radical than his predecessor since he expressly points out how religion is anchored within inadequacy—the basic and altogether natural phenomenon of ignorance, leading to a contorted view of self and other, nature and God, and, furthermore, to a life ruled by passion more than by action. But this far, religion has only been analysed in terms of inaccurate epistemology, which as such does not necessarily imply any anomalies on the social or political level. Basic religiosity can in fact be limited to an anonymous relation, to divinities whose aims are unknown to us, but that, in return, do not necessarily appear to demand too much of us in terms of worship or sacrifices: as long as no catastrophic events occur and as long as we find ourselves in a functioning society, there are no particular reasons for an exaggerated religiosity. But things take another turn in times of need or crisis. When socio-economic circumstances suddenly are such that we live in insecurity, oppression or misery, our uncertainty and ignorance regarding the future makes us desperately look for something within the order of things to grab a hold of. From an uncomplicated notion of God, that we so far have been contented to love and respect, we come to the idea that this hitherto uninterested God is now communicating with us through signs and signals that we must interpret in order to be assured of further benevolence and protection. Spinoza’s image of human is perhaps more nuanced than Hobbes’: where the latter saw fear as the primary motivation also in religious belief, Spinoza on the contrary sees human as continuously inclined to alter between fear and hope according to how external circumstances present themselves and to how she is influenced by them.  

Nonetheless, a difficult situation, that may have arisen both by natural causes and bad politics, will lead to the feeling of impotence and despair: in desperation, we seek signs to interpret and obey—and since we, in ac-

19 An important contribution to the analysis of the relation between religion and the particular aspect of inadequate ideas produced by imagination is made by Henri Laux in Imagination et religion chez Spinoza (Paris: Vrin, 1993).
20 A Theologico-Political Treatise, preface.
cordance with the theory of affects as presented in the Ethics, are always inclined to interpret nature according to our own preferences, the risk of interhuman conflicts is very big, just as is the risk of various authorities and structures of power trying to use our vulnerability to their own ends. This analysis, undertaken by Spinoza in the foreword of the Theologico-Political Treatise, shows the real danger of a natural religiosity that in times of need and hardship develops into superstitions; superstitions that in turn lead to intolerance, conflict and possibly in the end, to the devastation of the state.

Here we also see how the real question concerning religion to Spinoza is necessarily connected to the political: if on the one hand it is obvious that the occurrence of superstition, with its associated forms of oppression and insecurity, is intimately linked to historical and social circumstances, it is on the other hand just as obvious that it is only possible to prevent superstition and ignorance by acting upon the social and political context.

Religion and politics: distribution, links and structures of power in Hobbes and Spinoza

How are we then to understand the political function of religion in Hobbes and Spinoza?

To Hobbes, the question of religion is in a certain sense logical, and at least theoretically quite uncomplicated. Since religion appears inevitable—and it can have many shapes, but is always grounded in the idea of self-preservation at any cost on the one hand, and an inevitable fear of death and the future on the other—religion, understood as human belief and creation of sense, becomes a forceful social vector that can give rise to a strong community just as it can create strong dissension within it. Without going into the details of the analysis conducted in Leviathan, we can note that it appears as literally necessary that the sovereign, in order to maintain a durable and peaceful state, take control over whatever religion there happens to be—religion that by the way must also be one and not several. Since religion expresses what is good and evil, what is desirable and what is not, its commandments must be the same as the state’s in order not to generate conflicts. There can thus be no freedom of religion, for the same reasons that there is no real freedom of
opinion in Hobbes ideal state. In the name of the covenant, where the citizen has handed over all his natural right to the sovereign in order to acquire civil right, the sovereign has an unlimited right and duty to rule, perhaps not in fact regarding the actual belief or faith of the subject (since this is quite impossible) but over his actions. Subsequently the sovereign rules in an absolute sense over what opinions and doctrines that may be divulged in the public. If religion both in practice and in theory appears as inevitable, it is also necessarily subordinated to the political—in the positive sense, when used for the sake of society and contributing to obedience to the law and, thereby, to security; in the negative sense when perverted and having acquired an authority that opposes or is in concurrence with the sovereign, and thereby as an alternative political structure threatens the state peace. It appears thus permitted to conclude that Hobbes’ stand on religion is mainly pragmatic, with religion as a necessary political tool aiming at obedience. Philosophically speaking however, the question is more problematic: while on the one hand, religion, as in there existing a true religion, is taken for granted, it appears on the other hand that Hobbes is unable to state what epistemological foundation this truth—the true revelation—may hold. In the end, what counts is nothing but the conviction—that is opinion—of the sovereign.

Spinoza, in turn, agrees completely with Hobbes concerning the view on religion as a strong social force, and goes even further concerning the extensive analysis of its different ways of expression. Also like Hobbes, he claims that political authority necessarily must use this ideological material for its own benefit, that is of course in order to create good conditions for a peaceful and durable state of which the ultimate aim is nothing but the freedom of the citizens—a freedom, thus for Spinoza, that is synonymous to the possibility of adequate knowledge. This is also why the political authority must rule over the religious insofar as the latter must not be allowed to define any fundamental values concerning good or evil, permitted or forbidden, in concurrence with civil law. But Spinoza’s

21 Hobbes, Leviathan, ch. 18.
22 Matheron rightly claims that Hobbes, in this respect, can be seen as a pedagogical utopist: the conditions of realization of the optimal state rests upon the sovereign’s full knowledge not only of his own absolute rights but also of the citizen’s rights and duties—that is, complete knowledge of all that is included in the covenant (Alexandre Matheron, Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza (Paris: Aubier, 1971), 136).
23 Hobbes, Leviathan, ch. 32.
24 Spinoza, A Theologico-Political Treatise, preface.
analysis here is yet more complex. Against Hobbes, he claims that it is, in fact, impossible for the state to rule over opinions and convictions: since fear of death (or punishment) does not necessarily constitute the strongest motive or affect, and since affectivity is a play between hope and fear, joy and sorrow it is useless or even contra-productive to legislate over opinion.\textsuperscript{25} Also, the legitimacy of any government for Spinoza is valid only for as long as it can actually be enforced—in short, any legislation countering with too much violence the desires of the multitude will be overthrown and thus invalidated.\textsuperscript{26} Consequently, any acceptable and durable political regime always implies a handling of, as well as a forming of the desires (or conatus) of the multitude, that is favouring positive affects. Social balance is thus always about a putting together of, or an equilibration of, common denominators: hence, the political authority must determine, and endow responsibility for, which religious conviction or convictions that are the most consistent with the fundamental aims of the state, and that serve them.

What, then, is to be found in the Bible—the text, according to Spinoza, by far the most influential in any modern western society, thereby highly important to anyone trying to understand the desires of the multitude, to this end? The critical exegetic reading of the Old and New Testament undertaken in Spinoza’s \textit{Theologico-Political Treatise} shows that in fact, once all contextual, linguistic and historic circumstances have been brought to light—and its internal contradictions have been eliminated\textsuperscript{27}—their teachings can be reduced to two fundamental commands: justice (that is obedience to the law) and charity (that is the creating of a positive affectivity).\textsuperscript{28} In these commands, the objectives of both the political and the religious would be achieved: for both, law-abiding is the corner stone of peace; for both, so is also a good social context. In short, justice and charity would serve the joint function of maintaining both emotional and juridical order, with no harm done either to the multitude’s inevitable penchant for religious belief or the necessity of it being controlled. And the conditions, for these commands to be followed, are, according to Spinoza, happily few: a total of seven principles, simple and universal enough to find acceptance by any sensible religious—and political—authority that would admit to

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., ch. 18.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., ch. 17
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., ch. 2.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., ch. 13.
them expressing the core of the Holy Text. Totalling the number of seven, these principles—or basic credos, common denominators for all, are outlined in the *Theologico-Political Treatise’s* chapter 14: God exists, He is unique, omnipresent, omnipotent, He is honoured through the practice of justice and charity, He saves those who follow this rule of life, and He forgives those who repent. As *minima* and *maxima* at the same time, it is clear how these seven basic credos conform to Spinoza’s vision of society, both from a philosophical and a political point of view: a close reading of the *Ethics* will see no contradiction to Spinoza’s ontological and epistemological claims—at least as long as no further question concerning the meaning of the notion of God is asked; a joint comprehension of Spinoza’s theory of affectivity and his claims of a peaceful society where the quest for knowledge—that is philosophy—can be pursued undisturbed is in perfect coherence with the credos as well. Whether they would satisfy representatives of official religiosity—in Spinoza’s time or any other—is, of course, a different question. What, in fact, are we left with, concerning the position—and the value—of religion in the political?

A close analysis reveals that Spinoza entwines three questions in a complex way; questions of which the two first may be seen as purely practical and concern the actual relationship—that is distribution of power—between religion and politics. The point of departure is in fact that of the common ground: both the religious and the political are grounded in human’s inevitable, and natural passionality, that is a) her being as desiring; in other terms, her essence being conatus; b) her being necessarily determined to a large extent by external factors and c) her being mainly ignorant of her own nature as well as of others. As we can see, there appears to be, between the religious and the political, a curious double bind where not only both originate from the same state of nature, but also, where both are necessary as institutions co-determining each other. The first practical

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29 The two last credos, given their highly anthropomorphic formulation, are obviously the two most difficult to conciliate with Spinoza’s philosophy. For an enlightening discussion of this, see Matheron, op. cit.

30 In the same way thus, that there would actually be no need for any political government in a society that would altogether be led by reasonable ideas (that is, where the multitude would acquire a constant adequate knowledge), there would not either be any religiosity at all in that kind of society: however, it is evident that this is not the case, nor can it be, in reality: this is why all political reflection must start in the knowledge of the passions of the multitude.
question—to which the analysis in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* constitutes the answer—thus concerns the necessary hierarchy of the religious and the political, where despite their codetermination, the political must have precedence. If on the one hand, it appears impossible to abolish religiosity, but moreover, the maintenance of a certain number of beliefs prove to be necessary for the upholding of the state, it is on the other hand only within the political that the possibility of pursuing rational research can be guaranteed. However, needless to say, this guarantee is itself wholly dependent on what kind of political regime we have in mind—this question would be more closely developed by Spinoza in the *Political Treatise*.

Unfolding itself from the double-bind and the necessary hierarchy between the religious and the political, the second question has a both essential and a speculative aspect: what particular ends are aimed by the political, that religion can contribute to? The essential aspect here is largely also given in the *Treatise*: religion—as far as by this, we understand it solely as expressed in the seven common denominators—has a favourable effect on social obedience, thus on peace; just as it enhances the notion of mutual respect and generosity, thus favouring a social climate where differences can coexist. The speculative aspect is about how to organize religiosity in order for it to contain and favour as much joyful passions as possible: that is, politically speaking, how to avoid superstition by what could be called social engineering. The status of religion, here, would appear to have a larger potential—that of actually actively contributing to creating joyous passions—than in the previous, utterly pragmatic lines of reasoning, but still remains linked to inadequate thinking as such. However useful, religion still appears to be seen by Spinoza as a crutch, a palliative against the lack of real adequate knowledge, necessary simply because all, according to Spinoza, do not have the same capacity for real knowledge. And yet, at no point in Spinoza’s texts, the practical analysis is separated from the all-encompassing question concerning the possibility of adequate knowledge, the theory of which the *Ethics* is entirely devoted, but that clearly is what is ultimately at

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31 For two interesting discussions concerning Spinoza’s resolute preference of the notion of “generosity” over that (far more common) of “tolerance” as a social virtue, see Alain Billecoq, *Spinoza: Questions politiques* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009) and Zeev Levy, *From Spinoza to Levinas* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2009).


stake also in the theologico-political analyses. Indeed, the political challenge is and remains how to create a peaceful society where the citizens have the largest possible freedom, that is, where there are a maximum of conditions for adequate knowledge. But this cannot be separated from what is also at stake in religion, if at least it has the potential, under good political supervision, to contribute in developing joyful passions—those precisely, that in the *Ethics* constitute the very possibility of the second degree of knowledge, which in turn can, however not always do, lead to the third degree of knowledge—would it not thus be possible to speak, in Spinoza, of religion as emancipatory in the strong sense? Such an opening appears to be sketched out by Spinoza himself in the fourth chapter of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, where he argues for the compatibility of reason and what he calls “real” or true religion—this question obviously being at stake since the preface. If, on the one hand, it is clear that adequate knowledge, that is reasonable ideas, as much as true religion embrace the two principles of justice and charity, it is also clear, on the other hand, that things also work the other way. The very large definition of religion given in the *Ethics* indeed connects it to “whatever we desire and do […] insofar as we have the idea of God”:34 insofar as this idea is adequately constituted, this means that our essence, adequately understood, implies a desire for knowledge;35 that our inclination to concur with others, adequately understood, implies a desire to share this knowledge—the knowledge in question being that of the identity of God and Nature and its implications.36 In order for this knowledge to spread, a well-functioning society is necessary: reason commands us thus to contribute to this by endorsing the principles of justice and charity grounded in the love for God,37 by which the further propagation of adequate knowledge is made possible. Indeed, thus, the link between adequation and religion exists—but only insofar as we understand that to Spinoza, religion in this sense is radically different to what is commonly called so.38 Steering clear of any notion of faith, Spinoza’s notion of real religion points to a renewed investigation of the different notions of

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34 *Ethics*, IV, pr 37, schol.1, 134.
36 Ibid., pr 28; V, pr 24.
38 This fact is painfully obvious to Spinoza’s readers also in his own time: see the exchange with Oldenburg in letters 73–75.
truth in the three different degrees of knowledge: as such, this investigation is what constitutes philosophy—or spinozism—as such.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{39} For a very thorough discussion of this last point, see Alexandre Matheron, "Politique et religion chez Hobbes et Spinoza" in Anthropologie et politique au XVIIe siècle (Paris: Vrin, 1986).