CONTEXT AND RECEPTION
There can be little doubt that Spinoza felt a scientific moral philosophy was not only feasible, but urgently necessary. From the opening lines of the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* (TIE) to the closing remarks of the *Ethica* (*Ethics*) as well as the unfinished *Tractatus politicus* (TP), it is clear that he was mainly concerned with delivering a philosophy which enabled man to develop a certain way of life. The well-known opening lines of the TIE, arguably the earliest philosophical statement by Spinoza currently at our disposal, are perfectly straightforward:

> After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try 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 me the greatest joy, to eternity.1

At several junctures in the *Ethics*, Spinoza made sure his readers would not lose sight of its essentially practical purpose, first and most notably at the end of the second part, where he appears to acknowledge that it becomes high time to oblige his readers, who so far have only been presented with highly detailed analyses of the concepts of God and Mind. After having destroyed the notion of a ‘free will’, he addresses the issue of the ultimate aim of the *Ethics* and argues “how much knowledge of this doctrine is to our advantage in life” (2p49s). The

1 Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from Spinoza are taken from Curley (1985) (here TIE: 7), with the exception of the correspondence and the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, for which I have used Shirley (1995) and Shirley (1989). The Latin quotes derive from Gebhardt (1926). I have also profited from Barbarac (2007). On the opening lines of the TIE see Zweerman (1993) and Moreau (1994b).