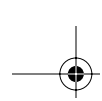


## PREFACE

**W**hen the core of this book was given as a series of public lectures, it received a lively reaction. Most of it was very enthusiastic—which was disappointing, as I'd set out to make trouble. Some aspects of the encouragement were, however, truly . . . encouraging. During a coffee break, for example, a Hungarian, a Nigerian and an Indian all separately volunteered that they recognized clearly the political and social attitudes of their own countries in my description of premodern and non-Western societies. The most outrage was expressed by a Briton who espoused the Western ideology of human rights and insisted that, among non-Westerners, only “extremists” thought otherwise. This was the kind of blinkered, imperialist mindset I had intended to question and annoy. How far I have succeeded in the expanded edition of the lectures that this present book enshrines must be left to the reader's blood pressure to judge.

I have been helped in the long, slow process of writing this book by friends who have talked with me about many of the issues that it raises. Some of those discussions have been played out over years, and others only more recently. Peter Heslam offered healthy encouragement, pushed some useful material in my direction and asked one or two really hard questions. Though I have probably failed to give adequate answers to the latter—thank you! Anna Robbins helpfully punched a hole in my trial run at chapter five, saving me from at least one piece of embarrassment at the publication stage. Peter Riddell challenged me to explain myself more clearly about “Western self-loathing”—though I doubt whether what I say would satisfy him even now. But you tried, Peter! Some of the folks at Houghton College, New York, were a real blessing





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and encouragement, among whom Cate and Jon Beardsley and Cameron Airhart have to get a special mention. Luiza Chandy's enthusiasm helped me think through the implications of Wendy Shalit's amazing book. Others contributed as much or more—though only they (and perhaps not even they) know quite how much. If I live to be ninety, I shall still be telling them the same thing.

