Books, like nations, have their histories. Such histories, when given expression, serve the purposes of their authors, who write them with an eye to their audiences. Histories are exercises in persuasion.

The origins of this book lie in two of its author’s concerns. The first is political. As someone sceptical about the pretensions of the modern state, I have long been troubled by its claims to control the movement of people, and even more bothered by the consequences of its exercise of the power to do so. The second is philosophical. As a political theorist, I have for some time been unsatisfied by the contributions of philosophers writing about immigration given their preoccupation with the question of whether states have the ‘right to exclude’, or with the obverse question of whether people have a ‘right to move’.1 The philosophical concern explains why this book addresses the question of immigration differently. The political concern accounts for the kind of answer it offers.

That answer is not an argument for ‘open borders’—sympathetic though I am to that ideal. There are plenty of works putting such a case, whether by arguing for the rights of people to move freely or against the claims of states to exclude them. I share with many of these authors an interest in free movement; but my purpose in this book is to address the question of freedom as a more fundamental concern.

It is often said that immigration is something of which we should be wary, particularly in the countries of the liberal democratic west, because the movement of peoples from other parts of the world threatens to transform our society and to undermine its fundamental values. Pre-eminent among these values are freedom and equality. The argument of this book is that the threat to freedom comes not from immigration but from immigration control. The logic here is not difficult to grasp. Immigration control is not merely about restricting border-crossing but as much, if not more, about constraining what outsiders might do once they have crossed the border into a society. But it is difficult to control outsiders without also controlling
insiders, since insiders are all too ready and willing to hire, teach, rent to, trade with, marry, and generally associate with outsiders. Moreover, insiders and outsiders are not readily distinguishable unless there are instruments of control in place to identify one or the other. Indeed, immigration control begins with the very process of distinguishing nationals from immigrants, natives from foreigners—insiders from outsiders. This means settling a philosophically unsettleable question: who, or what, is a native or a national—an insider or an outsider? In the end, the question tends to be answered not philosophically but politically, and the answer, almost invariably, is that the outsiders are those that political authorities wish to keep out—to define as (would-be or potential) immigrants. Immigration control is as much the means of determining who are nationals as it is a way of protecting them from those who are not. Immigration control is, in a more fundamental sense than is usually appreciated, entirely about identity politics.

Immigration control is usually defended by the proponents of the principle of nationality on the grounds that the interests of our fellow nationals should take precedence over the interests of foreigners. The trouble is, in reality, the politics of immigration control begins with the conflict over who are the nationals and who are the foreigners. And to the extent that political settlements are reached about whether and how many foreigners should be allowed to immigrate, they reveal nothing more than that some of the interests of some of our compatriots are served, despite the objections or reservations of others among them. The conflict over immigration, in the end, is a conflict not between the interests of insiders and outsiders—or nationals and foreigners—but between the various interests found within a society. This conflict has turned into a particularly destructive one because, as the immigration issue has been cast as an existential challenge to the integrity of states, so has the response been to develop solutions that threaten to do greater damage still to the institutions and values that make them hospitable places in which to live.

To show this requires a philosophical argument that builds both on a certain amount of necessary conceptual analysis, as well as a theoretical account of legal and political processes. This book differs from other studies of the political theory of immigration not only in its main line of argument but in another important respect. It approaches the immigration issue guided by a conviction that the philosophical question is best addressed on the basis of a deeper appreciation of the empirical reality of immigration—as a phenomenon to be understood in historical, institutional, and broadly legal and sociological terms. While there is an important place for purely
philosophical investigations, that is not enough if immigration is really the subject. A philosophical examination of, for example, the question of whether immigration restrictions are ‘coercive’, might, if done well, tell us a great deal about how to understand ‘coercion’, but not very much about immigration restrictions unless it includes some consideration of the institutions and practice of immigration control. While I have engaged with philosophers and political theorists, I have drawn more extensively on the work of historians, political scientists, anthropologists, lawyers, and sociologists. The moral and political questions related to immigration cannot be addressed adequately without an acknowledgement of immigration’s complexity and variability—and indeed of the difficulties that arise even when one tries to identify the phenomenon. Immigration is, after all, a concept we use to describe an aspect of the world of human affairs; but human beings do not always act with our concepts in mind. Sociologists and lawyers have grappled with this problem in work that has much to contribute to discussions of immigration in political theory, just as political scientists and historians have helped us understand what immigration, and immigration control, look like. Taking this approach, drawing more freely on empirical social science than is usual in a work of political theory, has made this book longer than I originally intended. My hope is that this decision has paid off.

My aim in this inquiry, ultimately, is not to advance a set of solutions to the immigration questions we confront but rather to invite the reader to think through the issue in the way I have presented it. In essence, it draws out the implications of immigration control for values many people say they cherish, and asks that we consider whether the price of control is worth paying. It does not describe a possible world in which immigration controls have become negligible or insignificant—much less tell us how to get there—and it is, on the whole, less than sanguine about the immediate prospects of freedom.

David Hume, before finally publishing his *Treatise of Human Nature*, was criticized by Francis Hutcheson for his work’s ‘want of warmth in the cause of virtue’. He responded by insisting that he was a moral ‘anatomist’ and not a moral ‘painter’. I have aimed in this work to be more of the former, though I hope the reader will also find in its pages some evidence of the latter. The epilogue to the book is a final effort to redress any imbalance.