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## ■ PREFACE ■

This book is an introduction, both philosophical and elementary, to ancient Chinese thought. Because my approach is philosophical, I devote a considerable amount of space to explaining the basic vocabulary of contemporary philosophy. My hope is that readers will be inspired to pursue Chinese thought in more depth but will also be able to cross over easily to the study of Western philosophy, should they wish to do so. There are, of course, alternative ways of studying Chinese thought and culture that are equally valuable, but I hope no scholars will begrudge me this methodology simply because it is not their own.

Because this is an elementary introduction, I have greatly simplified many aspects of both Chinese and Western history and culture. Understanding any tradition is daunting. As one Confucian put it, “The more I look up at it the higher it seems; the more I delve into it, the harder it becomes. Catching a glimpse of it before me, I then find it suddenly at my back” (*Analects* 9.11). Consequently, introducing too many nuances and scholarly controversies might overwhelm the beginner. By simplifying some points that are not central to my narrative, I hope to enable the reader to understand and grapple with other complex and profound issues. Cognoscenti should bear this in mind when they notice that I have typically not done justice to the multifaceted nature of the Western philosophers whom I cite as subjects of comparison nor to the complexities and controversies regarding Chinese history and philology.

In order to make this book as readable as possible, bibliographical information is exclusively in the endnotes (which are marked with Roman numerals). There is no need for the student to interrupt the flow of her reading by looking up an endnote unless she needs to know the source of a quotation. I have also tried to keep footnotes (which are marked with Arabic numerals) to a minimum, using them mainly for cross-references.

Translations are usually taken from Ivanhoe and Van Norden’s *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd ed. An asterisk after a quotation indicates either that the passage is not found in *Readings* or that I have significantly modified the translation in that work. For passages from the *Analects* and *Mengzi* not found in *Readings*, I often quote Edward Slingerland’s complete translation-with-commentary *Confucius: Analects with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* or my own *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. I do not note if I make a slight change from the translations given in one of these texts.

Following many contemporary academic works, years are identified as either BCE (before the Common Era) or CE (Common Era), meaning the era common to Christianity and the other great world religions. These designations are used in place of BC and AD, not to downplay or denigrate the significance of Christianity, but merely to provide a usage comfortable to those with other beliefs.

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For those who wish to continue their study of this fascinating topic, the translations and secondary works listed below are just a fraction of the best work available.

Bryan W. Van Norden