

## A Beautiful China

**24**

### My Beliefs

#### Born in a Spiritual Wilderness

I was born in a spiritual wilderness. The village I come from was a mixture of Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, atheism, and agnosticism, typical of China.

The Communist Party taught atheism and condemned religion as a spiritual opiate. The temple on the outskirts of our village had been destroyed. Statues of the Supreme Leader replaced the ancestral tablets. Fengshui and fortune-telling were dismissed as “feudal superstition.” One political campaign after another forged a man into a god. Soon after his death, he fell from the altar.

But ghosts and gods always remained part of people's spiritual world. Legends of the Kitchen God were passed down from generation to generation. People treated the graveyard as a scary place. It was said that the temple ruins were very dangerous. To build up my courage as a child, I went there one night, looked around in the dim light of the crescent moon, and ran away, the moon leaping through the treetops close behind me.

At the Spring Festival, every household placed a wooden beam across the entrance to keep away evil spirits. We set out bundles of dried sesame plants in our courtyard and wished for a life of ever-increasing prosperity. On New Year's Eve, the air would be thick with smoke from the burning incense around the only well in the village. On the third day of the first lunar month, people visited the graves of their ancestors to pay tribute. They always remain with us in the afterlife.

My parents were both agnostics. They had a sense of awe, but they were not sure whether the gods existed or not. My father believed in science but did not reject fengshui. My mother often said that the gods existed if you believed in them, but there was nothing wrong with not believing in them.

By the 1980s, the rural economy was recovering, and the seeds of belief were sprouting again. The Jade Emperor, the Kitchen God, and the Daoist gods began to return to people's homes. Temples were rebuilt. Christian churches also appeared in many villages. An ancient pagoda tree on the banks of the former Yellow River

channel became a sacred place where people prayed for healing.

The effects of decades of materialism are still being felt. After petitioning outside Zhongnanhai, a new indigenous religious movement known as Falun Gong was brutally suppressed. Christian churches were bombed, their crosses set ablaze. Buddhist temples were plagued by scandals, and monks were made to line up for national flag-raising ceremonies. What do the Chinese people believe in? Power? Money? Jesus? Lao Tzu? Allah? Buddha? This spiritual wilderness has become even more confusing.

Secondary school textbooks say that the world is material in nature and that consciousness is a reflection of matter. Where does the spiritual phenomenon of consciousness come from? Can wheat grow without a seed? What is the seed of life?

I've always felt confused, always searching. Whether it was a leaf, a colony of ants, or a ray of sunlight, it never ceased to fill me with a sense of wonder.

Many years later, I realized that He had planted the seeds of spiritual yearning deep in my soul.

And this yearning can be found in the soul of every human being.

## **My Spiritual Journey**

I first visited a Christian church during the summer break after my first year of university, in Minquan County, Henan. For many years after that, I went to church almost every Christmas Eve.

Together with my classmates from Peking University, I would go to Xiaonanzhuang Church near the west gate of Renmin University. I have many happy memories of the lunches we had afterwards. I also went to Shouwang Church, which for a time was in the same building as the Gongmeng office.

When Shouwang Church came under pressure from the authorities, we went with them to pray at the entrance to Haidian Park as heavy snow fell all around us.

I spent Christmas Eve in 2010 at Zion Church, which had a big party. The next time I went to Zion was July 2018, when churches were being persecuted everywhere. At the end of each service, my eyes would fill with tears as the music played: "Send me, Lord, I'll go."

I also believed in the resurrection. I used to think that there was a natural law governing the life and death of the body and that the irreversible physical and chemical processes affecting a dead body made resurrection impossible. Because of this belief in the natural logic of cause and effect, or so-called reason, I came up with various hypotheses: maybe Jesus' body had been moved, his disciples had mistaken him for someone else, or it had been an illusion.

It all became clear to me after a little girl at Zion said that God had to resurrect Jesus to show the disciples that all miracles are possible. God had to show them Jesus'

original body to support their faith in those difficult times.

The laws of nature are the code He has programmed for the world, and He can change the program at any time.

But I was still confused about the notion that “Jesus is God.” I believed that Jesus is the Son of God, a messenger, a divine manifestation — but not God Himself. How can three be one? How can the Son be the Father? How can a human being be God? If God limits Himself and becomes a human being, is He still God? God cannot die, so if Jesus is God, he cannot die either. If Jesus is God, or a manifestation of God, then everyone else is God. It’s just that they have different roles to play.

I don’t agree with those who say that the Bible is the literal word of God. There are obvious contradictions in the details of the four gospels. It is normal for different people’s memories to conflict. The compilation of the Bible is a historical fact. Errors can be introduced in any expression or translation of human language. The Bible is a revelation from God, but it was perceived by human beings, expressed in human language, and contains human errors.

I have visited many Buddhist temples and studied some Buddhist scriptures. Both the Buddha and Jesus have deeply influenced me. Buddhism does not try to explain the origin of the world. It doesn’t deal with the idea of ultimate reality. Impermanence and the chain of cause and effect are the end of everything. I don’t agree that life is suffering. Life has suffering as well as joy. There is aging and sickness, as well as youth and health. There is the hellish material world, and there is also brightness and light.

I have also visited some Daoist temples. I had long conversations with the hermits in the Zhongnan Mountains. I met some followers of the persecuted Zhong Gong qigong movement, after which I finally understood how deeply Daoism is rooted in Chinese society. The Jade Emperor, the Kitchen God, the Eight Immortals crossing the sea, and other supernatural beings are all firmly rooted in the Chinese spiritual world. But Daoism is too earthly. The Jade Emperor’s court is no different from an earthly court, and the Daoist quest for immortality is to become a superhuman in one’s physical body.

I have also worshipped in mosques. I have had Muslim friends since childhood, and I read the Quran carefully while in prison. It left me with many doubts. Much of the content is similar to the Old Testament. God is often angry and punishes humanity. Muhammad is a prophet and a messenger. But he is said to be the last, which would mean the end of civilization. Holy wars were waged against non-believers, sowing the seeds of terror and hatred.

One summer evening in 2001, I had a revelation: All religions believe in the same God. They just call Him by different names. I was so excited by this idea that I decided to write an essay called “Our Common God.”

I went to the library to find out if anyone else had come to the same realization. I found Sufism. I found the Baha'i Faith. I carefully read the Baha'i sacred texts and attended devotional meetings. Two of my college classmates, who fell in love and are

happily married, believe in Baha'i. The unity of humankind in the Baha'i Faith is exactly what I've pursued. However, the Baha'i conception of God is still vengeful, and their ways belong to the past.

The road to civilization is a long one. The Old and New Testaments of the Bible are two paths that humankind has taken to reach God. The human understanding of God is like a blind man trying to understand an elephant with his sense of touch: different times and prophets perceive different parts. In the Old Testament, the God of the Israelites was angry and inaccessible, which was a narrow understanding of God. In the New Testament, Jesus preached the gospel of love. Humanity developed a higher understanding of God. As civilizations progress, there will be new spiritual paths leading to the future.

I'm sorry if this offends a lot of people. But this is not pride. Before God, I am not proud, only humble.

There isn't a multitude of gods fighting with each other. We all worship and long to know the same God, the one and only God. The whole universe is just a tiny part of Him. Humanity is so tiny, dwelling on a speck of dust. Many of the world's conflicts, such as those between religions and those between religion and science, occur simply because we petty humans are limited in our creation and are ignorant and narrow-minded.

Civilization progresses as we gain a higher understanding of nature, of people, and of God.

Humans heard His call from the moment they looked up at the stars. The path to knowing God is as long as civilization itself. In different places, prophets have been inspired to found religions. Over millions of years, many religions have come and gone. What disappeared was not God, but the names they gave Him, as well as their stories and rituals.

God has always been there, guiding this group of His favored living creatures. As civilization has developed to the present day, history has left behind a multitude of religions. People in different places have followed different paths and have arrived at today's global village.

We live under one common roof, each coming from different spiritual worlds. We all want to know: "Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?" Our disagreements on these and other questions can sometimes destabilize our foundation for democracy. How can you have a constitutional government if one group of people does not believe in freedom and tolerance, but instead believes that heretics deserve to die?

In order to have a basis for a constitutional consensus, people need a mainstream consensus of belief.

We must recognize human limitations. We are not divine, and our understanding, language, and scriptures all have limitations. Knowledge comes from divine revelation, and as civilizations progress, knowledge is updated. One of our limitations

is to think that knowledge from 2,000 years ago is absolutely correct and perfect. To think that one's own beliefs are the only correct ones and that other beliefs are wrong is an example of human narrow-mindedness.

Religion is the path to God. Different peoples have followed many paths to the present day. The future demands that we walk new paths together.

I am not a strict Christian, if “strict” means rejecting other religions. I am a believer in Christ and follow in His footsteps to spread the love of God on earth. I also believe in many religions. I firmly believe in God and respect all historical beliefs.

One day in 2009, I was inspired by a word: “spirit atom,” meaning a spiritual particle derived from God. They are interwoven, level upon level, and condense into all things. They make up the soul and are also the smallest units of matter. So, spirit is the sole original source of the world.

While in prison, I serenely perceived the truth of the world. At the very smallest level, it is no longer the deadening dust of fixed laws, but a vibrant world of endless life. At the end of everything in the universe is God’s love.

I found God by following the path of science and reason to its limits. In the end, God alone is the ultimate cause of the endless web of cause and effect. From the vastness of the spiritual world, He directs this transient earthly existence filled with love, hate, joy, and sorrow.

I found my way to the difficult path of spiritual longing.

### **The One and Only God**

He is the creator of self-love, freedom, eternity, infinity, and perfection. He is the ultimate spiritual home, the giver of life and will, and the primary driving force behind the workings of all things. He is the original cause of all cause and effect; the original source of all miracles; and the starting point, purpose, and meaning of the existence and evolution of all things.

He is formless and shapeless. If He is the sea, our universe is but a tiny ripple.

He is always in the distance, infinite and boundless. The sprouting of a blade of grass is the result of a process that took place eons ago, a node in the web of meaning that encompasses all things. He is the weaver of that web of meaning. Looking up at God is like a bacterium looking up at the human body — it is hard to comprehend the immensity of the scale. In fact, this comparison is inadequate, for humans are much smaller in relation to God.

He is everywhere – in the mountains, in the sea, in the grass and the trees, in the tiles, in every microscopic particle, and in every soul. The little wooden desk in front of me, the air, even the “void” — His spirit atoms can be found in the smallest places. We are in His embrace, intimately connected. Every soul is a part of Him, like a drop of water in the ocean.

He is not ruthless and indifferent like the natural world. God is not synonymous with nature, as Spinoza or Einstein believed. He created the natural world, its laws, and the logic of how everything works, but He is not any one of those things. He made the laws, and only He can change them at any time.

He is the will to live. The evolution of all things is not random, but part of creation according to His will. This universe of ice and fire is a spiritual world, where death and rebirth are just processes that continue endlessly. Behind the illusion of birth and death is spirituality. There is warmth in the worldly concerns of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Love, hate, and the evolution of civilization are the plan of life.

He is justice, the measure of right and wrong, good and evil. Justice is eternal, and the strong and the weak exchange places between this life and the eternal one. Justice appears in this world, revealed in the moral law of humankind and defining the boundaries of rights and responsibilities on the path to salvation. He plants the seed of justice deep in every soul for the sake of this world, to make everything fit together perfectly.

He is love, the source of happiness in life. God loves the world and all His creations as if they were His own children. He has also planted the seed of love in every soul. Good and evil, strength and weakness, longing and abandonment are all contained in His loving embrace. For the fragile and small human race, boundless love serves as the steps leading to ever greater heights of civilization.

He is not narrow-minded, vengeful, or angry. Those are characteristics of the insignificant human race. He created humans in His own image. And humans created God in their own image — an image of what we grope for in the dark.

He emanates the spirit atoms that interweave level upon level to form all things, all life, all human beings. He governs the cycle of all things with heavenly laws and miracles, and He sends prophets and messengers to lead us toward civilization. His love is manifested in this imperfect world, and the perfect world, the experience of joy, is the meaning of life.

He planted the seed of spiritual longing in the depths of every soul. The seed sprouted the moment humanity looked up at the stars. Zeus, God, Allah, the Absolute, and countless other names throughout history all refer to the same God. The one and only God.

## **The Origin of the World is Spirit**

God emanates “spirit atoms,” and the division into these particles is the beginning of the universe. It is the origin of both spirit and matter, the starting point of motion, energy, time, and space. Unity is the end of the universe. Everything in the world can be described in terms of division and unity.

Spirit atoms are finite and differentiated spiritual entities emanated from God. With divine nature, they are instinctively self-loving, free, eternal, and infinite. Yet they are finite and ignorant of otherness. Each is different, just as each soul is different. Each electron, each atom, and each leaf is different.

The divine, finite, and differentiated nature of spirit atoms make up all aspects of the world. Having been separated, they seek unity and become interwoven and every level and coalesce as multi-layered particles — electrons, protons, and atoms. These coalesce as dust, galaxies, the Earth. They form life and humankind.

The origin of the world is spirit. Matter is just an illusion. The stones that seem so lifeless are also made up of spirit atoms. The universe is alive.

People once thought that stones were lifeless. They also observed mental phenomena and developed the idea of the “self.” From this, they divided the world into a duality of the material and the spiritual. Materialism and idealism only argue about the origin of the world, without rejecting this duality. If the ancient sages had seen atoms vibrating and electrons in perpetual motion, they would not have classified things that way.

Consciousness is the essence of life. If the origin of the world were inanimate matter, it could not gather together and cause the feeling of “self.” The feeling of a subjective “self” is not the result of interactions between neurons. There is interaction, but there is also the question of whose interaction and why.

Matter is a phenomenon of the interactions of spirit atoms woven together level upon level. Seeing a rainbow is the result of photons interacting with water molecules under certain conditions; their non-interaction cannot be seen. Everything is made of protons, neutrons, and electrons, which come in different combinations. Broken down even further, you get the more basic particles. If you peel away the layers, you eventually get spirit atoms.

Spirit can transform matter, but matter cannot be combined to produce spirit.

We come from God, soul and body alike. We experience the earthly realm of hell and the happiness of civilized progress, and ultimately we return to Him.

### The Essence of Life

A rock looks lifeless, but under a microscope, atoms vibrate and electrons fly around. Inside atoms, at the submicroscopic level, particles become even more active and have even more uncertain trajectories. It's not that they're not measurable, they're just uncertain.

One person can come and go freely. Three can walk together as a group. But it is difficult for huge crowds to agree on a direction. Likewise, one spirit atom can move freely. A small group of these tiny particles can also move together as a group. Billions of spirit atoms combine level upon level into atoms, molecules, and finally a rock. Because it is difficult for them to act collectively, we see no signs of life.

The uncertainty principle is a result of the individuality of consciousness, a manifestation of the very character of life itself.

Life (or living organisms) is no different from rocks in that both are made up of spirit

atoms. The only difference is that living organisms have a dominant spirit atom — the soul — that assembles and directs the organism.

Under the microscope, a gene molecule is a life. It has conscious direction and absorbs, excretes, divides, and grows what eventually becomes grass or a tree.

Both the blade of grass and the rock are made up of spirit atoms. The difference is that the spirit atoms that make up the blade of grass have a soul to guide them, whereas the spirit particles that make up the rock are just packed together without a soul to guide the whole. Living things are a large-scale manifestation of life itself.

Human beings are complex aggregates of life. Every amino acid, every cell, every organ — and the body as a whole — has its own spirit, its own consciousness, and its own desires. Cells even compete with each other for food.

The soul that we think of as the "self" is a guest in the body. The spiritual forces that direct the "self" and the body are interdependent and both conflict with and influence each other, without either exerting absolute dominance. The body does many things, such as mobilizing white blood cells to engulf invading bacteria, without the "self" being aware of it. The body's spirit cooperates with and benefits from the individual spirits of the organs and cells.

Amino acids, molecules, atoms — the more they are incomplete and seek to join together, the more easily they can be absorbed by the body. Cattle love young grass. The process of becoming complete and independent is the aging process of life. To become complete and independent, to say goodbye, to dissolve the aggregate — that is death.

The soul does not die. When the body disintegrates, the soul loses its means of perceiving the world and enters another world.

## **The World Constructed by the Spirit-Mind**

The Ming-dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming taught that "there is nothing outside the mind." The nature of the world is only conscious perception, which depends more on the soul than on the physical body.

Consider a star. Move closer, it becomes a sun. Closer still, it becomes a vast sea of fire. Is it a star or a sun? It all depends on the distance between me and it.

Neutrinos pass through the little wooden desk in front of me as if it were a vast emptiness. The Milky Way, the vast emptiness in which we live, would be just an atom in the eyes of some giant life form. Does the desk exist? It depends on the scale of its size in relation to mine.

The life of a bacterium is rich and colorful, but to our eyes it appears motionless. The world champion of the 100-meter dash may run fast, but in the eyes of a giant life form, the earth is just a speck of dust, and humans are even more insignificant than bacteria. We use our bodies as rulers to measure time and space. A frog in a well knows nothing about the world beyond. Everything in our world belongs only to us.

We say the sky is blue because a stream of photons hits the optic nerve and awakens a feeling in the soul that we call “blue.” Different perceivers with different souls see colors differently. In the eyes of a squirrel, the red leaves of a tree appear some other color.

Beautiful music comes from vibrations in the air that hit nerves in the ear and arouse a feeling in the soul. Different listeners with different souls hear sound differently. We are deaf to the music of bats.

Some things are visible but intangible, like a rainbow. Some things are invisible but tangible, like a table in the dark. What is visible, audible, or tangible is determined by fluctuations of photons or air or the atomic vibrations of your fingers. These are all interactions between tiny particles. Countless photons come at you, interact with the senses, and are perceived as light and color. Without that interaction, they are not perceived, and you remain in the dark.

In the dark, you can't see the tree in front of you. But does that make the existence of its material structure of carbohydrate chemical compounds somehow indeterminate? At the atomic level, the carbon atom is denser than the oxygen atom, which makes it distinct from the air. But it is all electrons, protons, neutrons, and even smaller particles. Broken down layer by layer, it is all emptiness. At the level of its smallest particles, the difference in structure between the tree and the air around it disappears. There are countless layers of structure, but we perceive only one of them when we see the tree. There are countless worlds in front of us, but we only see one of them. It is like a color-blind person not being able to see the numbers in the group of shaded disks. In the same space and time as this tree, there is a ghost with countless appearances that we cannot see. This tree exists because of us.

There is no such thing as an objective world. Everything that exists depends on conditions. From different positions, a mountain ridge looks like a peak, and a peak looks like a ridge. It is not that the tree in front of us is not part of the universe. It is that the tree's existence is conditional. It's there for me but not for a neutrino. It's both there and not there, depending on the conditions, the size of the perceiver, the distance, the instrument of perception, or the soul.

What we call objectivity is really only consensus. There's a consensus about colors and sounds, and the wondrous world we perceive around us comes from the common nature of our souls and the body's sensory tools. Since we are all at the bottom of the well, the sky looks the same to everyone.

What is the world really like? There's no such thing as what it's really like. The world is only what we believe it to be. The essence of all human knowledge is belief. God is a belief in something we cannot see. The desk in front of me is also a belief. We see it, but there are living beings that cannot see it. All existence is belief.

The crabapple tree outside my window is invisible at night. Is it still there? Maybe it is, or maybe it has turned to smoke. We believe it is there, and logic and the many stories we tell make us believe it is. Close your eyes, and you believe that the world is still there. In fact, the world is different every second, but it exists in a definite state in

our souls.

Everything in the world is just a reflection of the mind. Some of it I perceive, through sight and hearing, which awakens my soul and assembles the world as I experience it.

Part of how we experience the world comes from the perceptions of others. Distant worlds, long histories, other people's stories —once we believe them, they become part of our world.

Some people may believe stories different from ours, resulting in a variety of ideas and ideologies. All our arguments with them are not about the world being different; they are about the world being different in the soul of each individual.

In the vast spiritual world, thoughts and ideologies are living species. They feed on worldly phenomena, and each species chews and absorbs what it needs. Different souls, with their different thoughts and ideologies, proclaim different worlds.

## **Divine Law and Miracles**

He presides over all creation through divine law and miracles.

There is a divine natural order to the universe. God divides spirit into particles, and with that comes motion, energy, time, and space. These particles become interwoven level upon level, and with mass, gravity, distance, and speed they coalesce into all things. These particles combine and separate under certain conditions. The characteristics of life determine their division and combination, attraction and repulsion, and so-called chemical reactions.

Chemical reactions are not the cause of life, but its result.

When a ping-pong ball is hit with a certain force, direction, and mass, the point of impact on the table can be calculated. This is traditional physics. In fact, under the same conditions, the point of impact will be different every time. Atoms vibrate randomly. The result can only be considered stable because the degree of error is so infinitesimal that we don't calculate it.

What we call scientific laws are only what we believe. They are just fleeting phenomena in the eternity of time and space.

Behind the laws of physics and chemistry is a more fundamental divine natural law in which God has endowed spirit atoms with the characteristics of finiteness, variety, and motion.

He created the world and programmed its operations. Only He can change the program. Changes outside the natural order are miracles.

The universe is full of miracles. What many people think of as regular patterns, such as the cycle of day and night, are actually miracles from long ago.

A bolt of lightning can pass by in a flash, or it can be divided into an infinite number

of longer moments. The evolution of living things follows a pattern, but it is also miraculous. Evolution is the transformation of one form into another, and to humans, who are so small and insignificant, the changes seem enormous. But in the eyes of God, 10 billion years is but a moment. There is no time in eternity. The evolution of living things is also part of His creation.

Scientists have discovered the immediate level of causation behind change. Since microorganisms came before plants, scientists think they have found the truth and forget about the ultimate cause. In doing so, they deny God's creation. Theologians think that the seven days of creation in the Bible are the same as the seven days and nights of today. In this way, they use God's creation to deny evolution. There is a cause for all change. Neither the cause and effect of the evolution of life nor the laws discovered by science can disprove the ultimate cause behind the eternity of time and space. The ultimate cause of all things is God.

Both science and religion have their origins in divine revelation.

### **Divine Light and God's Messengers**

He has guided civilization with divine light and messengers.

All science and human knowledge is revealed by God. Every flash of inspiration comes from the soul opening a window to let in the wisdom contained in the twinkling starlight. Human creativity is His inspiration. If it weren't for the wisdom in those stars, apes would still be apes despite millions of years of labor.

As they looked up at the stars, these animals became human. They heard a distant call. God told humans that, behind all the phenomena in the world, there is an ultimate creator and ruler. Since then, people have been trying to discover what He is like.

He has sent messengers to spread new knowledge and guide humanity on the path of righteousness and happiness. Different peoples and different times have had different messengers.

These messengers are human. They come to the earthly realm in human form and experience happiness and joy, pain and despair, and all the reality of being human.

These messengers are the children of God, His manifestations. In fact, everyone is a child of God, each with his or her own destiny and role to play. All are part of the story of the quest for happiness. People use the word "messenger" to describe the lives of those who have had a great impact — the ones who have inspired civilizations.

Scientists impart scientific knowledge — a different kind of faith. They follow a different path, but the paths converge in the end. Sometimes people may stray from God, just as there are times when the beacon of the summit cannot be seen when one is climbing a high peak. But the path is prepared by Him, and life leads us all in the same direction.

Darkness also plays a necessary role in this world created by God, because it reveals

the light. The ultimate victory of light over darkness is the hope of humankind, the source of happiness, the theme of art, and the long road of civilization.

Civilizations progress when people come to understand nature, themselves, and God from a higher perspective.

## **Freedom and Inevitability**

If there are chance or random phenomena that occur outside of the divine natural order, it is His will. In all the laws governing creation, He is the only variable.

Every effect has a cause. People call it a “car accident” when in fact the driver was momentarily distracted. So, that is one cause. And the victim was crossing the road at the same moment, that is another cause. Every flash of thought has a cause. There is no such thing as an effect without a cause.

That moment when the driver and pedestrian meet is a node in time and space, behind which is an endless causal web. If we knew all the information, all the causes, we would see that the two people set off separately that morning and that their meeting at that moment was inevitable.

That boundless causal web is what we call destiny.

What we think of as chance is really just the unexpected. Because our knowledge and information are limited, people often encounter things that are unexpected. When we discover that events follow a logic of cause-and-effect, we call them inevitable. In reality, we know only a tiny part of the infinite web of cause and effect.

Whatever you had for lunch today may seem like a spontaneous, random decision. But there were causes for that decision. Your tastes, your income, your habits from childhood, all the different thoughts in your mental world, the desires of some of the cells in your body, an advertisement you passed on the street, a novel you read last night — all these determined that you would go to that restaurant at that moment.

The choices at every crossroads in life are predetermined. There are innumerable causes and effects. The stream that “sings” as it flows through a canyon doesn’t represent any kind of freedom. It is following its destiny, and it would be unpleasant and painful if it didn’t. The Bible says: “The truth shall set you free.”

We are endowed with free will. We share in the divine yearning for self-love, freedom, eternity, infinity, and perfection. In the ultimate sense, before God, there is no true free will in any of His creations. The only freedom in the universe, the only variable, is the Creator.

In this world, there is free will in relation to other people. Each person has a corresponding responsibility for his or her own choices. This comes with our role in the earthly world. People experience joys and sorrows in their roles.

If we could transcend these roles, we would smile as we look back on our earthly selves.

## **Everything is Interdependent and Mutually Reinforcing**

Why does God create suffering? I have asked this before. The Devil is to blame. Can't God defeat the Devil? The angels fall. Why does God let them fall?

All existence presupposes difference. Without distinctions, there would be no existence. We see a rainbow because its colors are different from that of the surrounding air. In the dark, the colors are the same, but we cannot see them.

People can only perceive change, not constancy. A room filled with orchids will not smell fragrant after a while. All suffering and happiness must be compared to something. Without darkness, there would be no light; without hunger, no delicacies; without restraint, no freedom; without flaws, no perfection. If we were born perfect, we wouldn't even need to eat or breathe, so where would happiness come from? If the world were born perfect, it would not exist.

The  *tells a great truth: It is through ugliness that one can recognize beauty. Existence and non-existence, difficulty and effortless, long and short, high and low – opposites give rise to each other, sounds blend in harmony, and one thing follows another.*

Only because there is darkness in the world do we know what light is. Only because there are disasters do we appreciate the beauty of life. Only because there is suffering do we perceive happiness. The happiness we experience now must be based on someone's suffering – either the suffering of others or our own past suffering.

Without the sea of suffering, there can be no happiness on the other side. Suffering is inevitable. God created this world, and for mere humans such as ourselves, the very fact of our solitary existence involves suffering. That is the only way to freedom and happiness.

The misfortunes of others are the source of our good fortune. Poverty is the source of wealth, illness the source of health, and disability the source of ability. Therefore, the fortunate should help the unfortunate and be grateful.

Everything is interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Catastrophes are an inherent part of the inner logic of the world God created. The moment the spirit atoms separated from Him, their finiteness predetermined misunderstanding, conflict, and suffering. There is destruction, suffering, and death to manifest reconstruction, happiness and rebirth. He created this imperfect world and leads human beings to perfect it, so that they can experience happiness in a perfect world.

## **The Fundamental Goodness of Human Nature**

There is no Devil. Evil comes from ignorance. The divinity, limitations, and differences within individuals is the source of all conflict and disagreement.

God is self-loving, free, eternal, infinite, and perfect. Humans share God's attributes and strive for freedom, eternity (life), infinity (wealth and power), and perfection.

However, individuals are limited, and people are ignorant and narrow-minded. They misunderstand each other, harbor animosity toward each other, and demonize each other. They enslave in pursuit of freedom, plunder in pursuit of wealth, and act tyrannically in pursuit of power. Such is the complex nature of human history.

Human nature has two sides: the divine side, with great love, and the animal side, with selfishness, ignorance, fear, and hostility. The more civilization progresses, the less animal nature there is and the more divine nature there is.

Mencius said that human nature is fundamentally good. Family love, friendship, loyalty, kindness — we like beautiful things and are moved by beautiful things. We yearn for beauty. That is the true self.

There are only evil actions, not evil people. People do not act for evil purposes. Robbers and police officers who persecute prisoners of conscience think: “I have to feed my family, too.” They may lack an understanding of the world, or they may even have a conscious conscience that has been awakened, but their actions are driven by a different set of values that say “this is just how society is.”

Wang Yangming wrote of the unity of knowledge and action. It’s not that knowledge and action should be unified or that action follows from knowledge. Rather, knowledge and action are inherently one. If you know, you can do. If you can’t, it’s because you don’t know. Jesus said: “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

There is justice in the world. It is necessary for the law to punish evil. But the goal is not revenge, but redemption. Love and justice never forsake each other.

A democratic system with rule of law sets limits to freedom, restrains animal nature, exalts the divine, and places fairness and justice above individual freedom.

Religion is the knowledge, the rituals, the beautiful beliefs, and the boundless love that guides life.

## **The Meaning of Life**

He created this imperfect world and led us to perfect it. Humans have always worked, from the time of picking fruit and splitting rocks up until the present. We would be lost if we ever stopped. If there were nothing to do, people would be bored to death.

Humans have learned to understand nature and to use it to satisfy their material needs. We have moved from the hunger and cold of primitive times to the abundance of today. Humans also came to know themselves, developed scientific systems, and founded nations in pursuit of happy and beautiful societies. From slavery to freedom, from fear to love, from the suffering of isolation to the happiness of unity, civilization has come a long way. In a perfect world, everyone feels their own self-worth and happiness.

We are all equal before God. The earth is but a speck of dust, so what is the point of the differences between people in terms of height and weight? But the differences in our roles in the world do matter. These differences are not about division or hate.

They are about perfection, about our experiences and our feelings. We are striving for a better future, with more and more freedom, more and more justice, and more and more love.

Hell is not located in the abyss, but here on earth. Heaven is not off in the distance, but here on earth. We are born free and unfettered. We were born into a crowded world, to coexist with others, and so there are obstacles everywhere. This is true to the extent that we have grown accustomed to thinking that any movement requires energy — an extra force.

These obstacles in the earthly world are obstacles of nature and other people. Removing barriers in nature is called science. Adhering to the laws and patterns of human society is the purpose of institutions and beliefs, and the happiness of unity. We come from the primordial chaos and travel the long road of civilization to create paradise on earth.

This path leads from tyranny, injustice, and fear to a civilization of freedom, justice, love, and unity. Life is the continuous pursuit of happiness. In a perfect world, happiness is continuous. A perfect world in which we can experience this happiness is the meaning of life.

### **“I Want to Live like You”**

On a cold summer day in 2013, I used a small piece of gravel to write the following on the wall of my cell:

*For freedom, justice, and love, for the happiness of all beings, and for Your glory, Lord, I want to live like You in this world.*

*Thank You, Lord. I have come to You before. I have loved You before. I have met You before in a distant cosmic homeland. How should I love You in order to melt the barriers of the human heart and awaken this lonely world?*

*In the fall of 2018, I was still hesitant. The street below Qinghe Bridge bustled with pedestrians and vehicles as I silently prayed for freedom, justice, and love. . . . How can I overcome the hatred and hostility of these times and love everyone? Please give this nation new hope!*

*I know you exist in every blade of grass and every tree, in every grain of sand and every stone. There is endless life in the universe, and civilizations are endless as well. In these times, I look to You for guidance.*

*I know my destiny. People are born with a role to play. I was born in this autocratic country, this vast spiritual wilderness. I have a special mission to fulfill.*

*We must keep up with the pace of human civilization. We must bid farewell to tyranny and welcome a beautiful China of freedom, justice, and love. What was once a jungle full of suffering will someday become a model of happiness.*

*Give humanity the new knowledge we need. Enable us to know and revere you at a higher level. Enable us to disperse the gloom in the spiritual world and achieve the basic consensus needed to establish constitutional democracy. A new civilization shall emerge from this ancient wilderness and spread to all humanity. In Your glory.*

*How shall I love You? We live in this earthly realm between heaven and hell. We humans wish to create a more perfect world to experience joy.*

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