

This book describes an ideal way of life in which we modify our behavior with artistic skills, scientific discoveries, and religious experiences. We can test that ideal in our daily lives and see whether it is the key to a science of the art of living.

# **Creating Beautiful Lives:**

## **The Ideal Way of Life A Reunion of Art, Science, and Religion**

by Tom Lovett

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# Creating Beautiful Lives

*The Ideal Way of Life*



A REUNION OF  
ART, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION

Tom Lovett

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## PREFACE

### WHO ARE WE?

The primary biological and social reality of human life is that everyone belongs to one species: the animal species *Homo sapiens*. That is our essential human identity. This book proposes a scientific story of the human species: how we can refine our basic animal behavior to release our highest human potential. Here are two of the countless people who say we need a new story.

In *The Dream of the Earth*, Dr. Thomas Berry, a priest and a historian of the world's cultures and religions, wrote, "We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story" (123). He also wrote, "The deepest crises experienced by any society are those moments of change when the story becomes inadequate for meeting the survival demands of a present situation" (*The Dream*, xi).

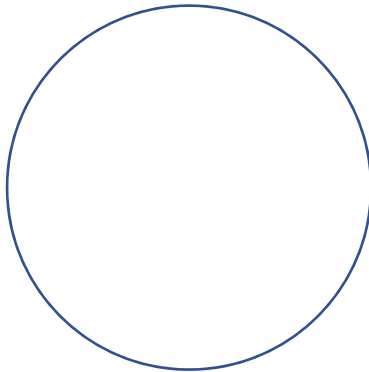
What sort of story do we need? Dr. Berry repeatedly stresses our need for a scientific story that reconciles science and religion, especially in the chapter titled "The New Story." He calls for ending the "deeply felt antipathies between the sciences and the humanities" (*The Dream*, 108).

In *Change the Story, Change the Future*, Dr. David Korten, an economist and an educator, wrote, "[When] I read Thomas Berry's *Dream of the Earth*, I sensed a profound truth in his argument that our future depends on finding a story that gives us a powerful reason to live—a story that answers the basic question: Why?" (3). He also wrote, "An authentic Sacred Life and Living Earth story is emerging.

It has ancient roots in indigenous wisdom. If embraced, it changes everything” (*Change*, 1).

Scientists identify parts of things and show how they fit together. In doing so, scientists solve puzzles. Scientists also tell stories that reveal more about what happens over time. Biologist and Nobel Prize–winner Sir Peter Medawar wrote, “Scientists are building explanatory structures, *telling stories* which are scrupulously tested to see if they are stories about real life” (quoted in Judson, *The Search for Solutions*, 3).

This preface describes the puzzle of human life and the human story. Our most basic animal behavior is a part of the puzzle and the story. Let’s consider the puzzle first. We and other animals engage in the same basic behavior. For example, we obtain and protect the living space we need. Let’s see how these various types of behavior can fit together in a model based on a circular symbol; imagine a center point with arrows pointing away from it toward the edge.



Now visualize a circular model of physical space for your home and everyday behavior. The circle’s edge symbolizes the boundary. The center stands for rest and sleep, and arrows pointing away from the center signify behavior. Think about your various physical spaces. How secure are their boundaries? How peaceful are their centers?

Also imagine a circular model of mental space for your mental life. The circle's edge symbolizes the boundary. The center stands for peace of mind, and arrows pointing away from the center signify mental activity. Think about your various mental spaces. How secure are their boundaries? How peaceful are their centers?

With these two images in mind, I created a model of our highest human potential. The parts are art, science, mysticism, and religion (or, more specifically, artistic skills, scientific discoveries, mystical states of mind, and religious devotion and wisdom). This model has mystical peace at the center and arrows pointing away from the center signifying arts and sciences of daily life. The circle's edge represents ideal physical and mental boundaries. Religious devotion and wisdom fill the circle by helping us release our highest potential.

Now we can consider the proposed scientific story of the human species. In this story, we refine our basic animal behavior with artistic skills, scientific discoveries, mystical states of mind, and religion. We become artists in our daily lives and create beautiful lives with help from science, mysticism, and religion. We release our highest potential and solve our social and ecological crises. Our physical and mental lives fit together ideally, and so do our individual and social lives. The human species becomes one human family.

To create the preceding story (and the models that compose it), I merely simplified and linked existing knowledge about our animal behavior and highest potential. Let's test the model and the story in our daily lives. If our tests verify them, the model will become a *scientific* model that shows how aspects of our highest potential fit together. The story will become a *scientific* story that reveals more about what happens over time.

The proposed story of the human species is part of the scientific story of life on earth and in nature. One way to tell the larger story begins with the fact that long, long ago, our distant ancestors separated

from one another and from other species and nature. Those ancestors lost the natural social and ecological relationships that had evolved over vast periods of time. Ever since then, our species has benefitted from that separation in some ways and suffered in other ways. The earlier social and ecological relationships are gone forever. The story in this book shows how we can create the best possible relationships for our future.

The proposed story is also part of the still larger scientific story of the universe. To Dr. Berry, “One of the more remarkable achievements of the twentieth century is our ability to tell the story of the universe from empirical observation and with amazing insight into the sequence of transformations that has brought into being the earth, the living world, and the human community” (*The Dream*, xi). He added that “the scientific account of the universe is the greatest religious, moral, and spiritual event that has taken place in these centuries. It is the supreme humanistic and spiritual as well as the supreme scientific event” (*The Dream*, 98). Dr. Berry emphasized the importance of that event:

For peoples, generally, their story of the universe and the human role in the universe is their primary source of intelligibility and value. Only through this story of how the universe came to be in the beginning and how it came to be as it is does a person come to appreciate the meaning of life or to derive the psychic energy needed to deal effectively with those crisis moments that occur in the life of the individual and in the life of the society. (*The Dream*, xi)

Dr. Berry called for new language to tell the new story. In his essay in *Thomas Berry, Dreamer of the Earth*, priest and prolific



author Dr. Matthew Fox wrote, “The language of beauty permeates his work . . . his hungry curiosity and undying search for beauty burned in his heart and mind” (19).

The earth and the universe are beautiful places; we feel at home when we create beautiful lives. Let’s fall in love with the world. Let’s return home.

# INTRODUCTION

## WHERE ARE WE GOING?

### **On Writing This Book**

I did not set out to write a book about beautiful lives or about a theory of the ideal way of life. I had not heard of the old goal of reuniting art, science, and religion. Yet here we are, years later, with a book on these very subjects. What led to this surprising outcome?

I began innocently enough, studying politics and religion in college. Then, pursuing a career in government, I didn't understand why people labeled *conservative* or *liberal* argued so often about such a wide range of diverse issues. The question intrigued me because some of those issues seemed unrelated. Did some underlying difference exist between these two groups of people? Many researchers had studied the two categories and had reached varied conclusions. Some scholars said conservatives believe human nature is inherently bad, while liberals believe it is good. Others thought contrasting personality traits explained the difference. Still others suggested that people's political beliefs stemmed from social or economic conditions. All those conclusions might have contained some truth or even much truth, but no single explanation satisfied everyone.

Today most researchers are professionals working in academia on highly specialized topics. In contrast, I am an amateur, an independent researcher, and a generalist. I did not begin by studying the literature on political beliefs or by conducting field research that surveyed people about what they believe. Consequently, I wandered in the dark for a long time, and I asked many other types of questions. I found satisfying answers only much later in the context of devising a theory about how to create beautiful lives.

Due to my lifelong interest in words, I examined definitions of *conservative* and *liberal* and found that the primary meanings concern readiness for change. In the context of creating beautiful lives, we are conservative or liberal depending on how slowly or quickly we want to embrace change. Outside of that context, we are conservative or liberal depending on how slowly or quickly we want to make other changes in our lives. We will return to the conservatism-liberalism issue in the section on “Political Science” in Chapter 1.

In writing this book, I also identified key meanings of other important words and incorporated them into the same theory of beautiful lives. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language” (*The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 15). He said we need “to fasten words again to visible things” (*Essential Writings*, 16). William Blake exclaimed, “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern” (*Essential Blake*, 77). We can “cleanse the doors of perception” by identifying essential word meanings and fitting them together into a conceptual framework that enables us to see through words to the underlying patterns in life and nature.

For some people, as with me, being a generalist can become our specialty. I began as a generalist with wide interests in the sciences and the humanities and then became a specialist in interdisciplinary studies linking knowledge from those disciplines. I kept an open mind as I connected ideas about our animal origins and our highest potential. My inclination to seek answers to philosophical questions by examining definitions in the context of our animal nature began with my father’s love of word meanings and my mother’s love of animals.

For many years, I have lived next to the University of Wisconsin Arboretum, site of the world’s first *formal* prairie restoration and of

pioneering research in the science of *restoration ecology*. It is a stimulating place to take nature walks, to contemplate prairie plants as they grow and bloom, to let ideas come and go, and to enjoy peace of mind. Walk with me through the pages of this book and imagine the possibilities. Poet William Wordsworth wrote, “Nature never did betray the heart that loved her” (“Tintern Abbey,” 132).

The old saying “Don’t talk about politics or religion at the dinner table” misleads us. We can talk about them cordially anywhere and anytime we listen well enough, seeking to understand the sources of our own and one another’s beliefs.

Other basic questions about life could have led someone else to the same theory I offer here. For example, this other person might have asked, “How can we best resolve our needs for individual freedom and social responsibility?” or “How can we best reconcile our animal origins with our highest potential?” My question about conservatives and liberals just happened to be the one I asked.

### **On Theories about the Ideal Way of Life**

Something in human nature longs for the ideal, and philosophers have speculated about ideals and utopian possibilities for thousands of years. Many people have tried to create utopias during the course of human history, but none succeeded as expected and some ended in disaster. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *utopia* in two ways: “1. Any condition, place, or situation of social or political perfection. 2. Any idealistic goal or concept for social and political reform.” That first definition pertains to a final destination, an unchanging state of perfection. The second concerns a journey toward ideals. The way of life I describe as ideal is utopian only in that second sense. Seeking ideals can help us do as well as we need to, without wasting time and energy trying to reach the unattainable goal of perfection.

Anti-utopianism prevailed during the twentieth century, but the tide seems to be turning. An article in the October 3, 2016, issue of the *New Yorker* is titled “The Return of the Utopians.” Recent books on U.S. utopias include Chris Jennings’s *Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism*, Erik Reese’s *Utopia Drive*, and J. C. Hallman’s *In Utopia: Six Kinds of Eden and the Search for a Better Paradise*. Political scientist Lyman Tower Sargent provided an overview of books on utopia in *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*. More background is readily available from the Society for Utopian Studies, the Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies, and online.

Why do I offer an idealistic philosophy in the midst of widespread cynicism? Charles Dickens called the French Revolution the “best of times” and the “worst of times” (*A Tale of Two Cities*, 3). Now, once again, we have grand possibilities and huge problems. We seem to be at a turning point in history. Jacques Barzun forecast “global unity or global chaos” (“What Man Has Built,” 7). We obviously need new ideas, or, more precisely, new thoughts about old ideas.

Einstein said, “A new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move toward higher levels” (“Atomic Education Urged by Einstein,” 13). E. O. Wilson called for “a new kind of self-understanding, self-reflection, and self-imagining” (“The Human Factor,” 47). New ideas can help us release our highest potential and solve our social and ecological crises.

In *Biophilia*, E. O. Wilson “suggested that the urge to affiliate with other forms of life is to some degree innate, hence deserves to be called biophilia” (85). At no time in history has it been more important to manifest that urge and live in peace and harmony with one another and with other species.

People around the world admire the *reverence for life* philosophy of physician and theologian Albert Schweitzer. Only when we revere all forms of life, as part of life on earth can we fully love another

person or humanity in general. Only then will the human species become, once again, the human family.

In a speech in 1932, Einstein told of “his consciousness of belonging to the invisible community of those who strive for truth, beauty, and justice” (“My Credo,” in *Einstein: A Life in Science*, 262). We can all join the community Einstein spoke of and help make it visible. He also wrote, “If only there were somewhere an island for the benevolent and the prudent!” (*The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, 47). We can all help make the planet Earth the island he imagined.

In *The Alpine Path*, Lucy Maud Montgomery, the author of *Anne of Green Gables*, wrote, “It has always seemed to me, ever since early childhood, amid all the commonplaces of life, I was very near to a kingdom of ideal beauty. Between it and me hung only a thin veil. I could never draw it quite aside, but sometimes a wind fluttered it and I caught a glimpse of the enchanting realms beyond—only a glimpse—but those glimpses have always made life worth while” (47–48). We can all draw that veil aside.

### **A New Theory about the Ideal Way of Life**

In the ideal way of life described in this book, we seek the ancient ideals—beauty, truth, and good—as we engage in our basic animal behavior. We seek those ideals with art, science, and religion. Artistic skills are our most developed skills; scientific knowledge is our most reliable knowledge; and religious experiences are our highest forms of devotion and inspiration. Art provides a path toward beauty, science a path toward truth, and religion a path toward good, and each path can eventually lead toward all three ideals. As we create beautiful lives, the three paths ultimately merge. On each path, we experience mystical states of mind (see Chapter 3 and Appendix G), and those mental states are essential in our efforts to live beautiful lives.

In this book, you will find unrestrained utopian idealism paired with unrelenting pragmatic realism. I combine high excitement about our greatest human potential with a realistic view of our animal nature. Thoreau wrote, “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them” (*Walden*, 288). In this book, I do both.

Creating beautiful lives is inherently a deeply moral way of life. Einstein wrote, “The great moral teachers of humanity were, in a way, artistic geniuses in the art of living” (*Ideas and Opinions*, 51). By releasing our best potential through art, science, and religion, we serve ourselves and others as well as we can. That reconciles our tendencies toward selfishness and unselfishness and transcends the differences between our individual and social goals. Appendix C contains quotations from eminent thinkers who link beauty, truth, and good.

In the ideal way of life, we become everyday artists seeking beauty in our daily lives, and we become everyday scientists seeking truth in our daily lives. We seek beauty and truth with religious devotion and inspiration. Our daily lives become in essence artists’ studios, scientists’ laboratories, and religious sanctuaries for practicing our creativity. We seek beauty at home, at work, and at play. Inner beauty grows in our minds and bodies, becoming evident in our individual and social lives and in our relationships with other species and nature. We appreciate the beauty in the fine arts and participate in them to the extent that we have time and energy and that they fulfill our interests. Some people refine an everyday art into a fine art. As we link everyday forms of art, science, and religion in our daily lives, we more easily connect their specialized forms: the fine arts, the natural and social sciences, and organized religion. We gain the full benefits of art, science, religion, and mysticism when we bring them together to create beautiful lives.

One of the great unresolved issues of modern times is the proper relationship between religion and science. Wisdom from the world's religions comes down through the ages and nourishes billions of us. Religions contain wisdom about devotion, love, compassion, morality, peace, transcendence, and mysticism. Scientific discoveries during the last few centuries have radically changed how we see the world and how we live. Religion and science come together easily and naturally when they support our effort to create beautiful lives. Both help us become civilized, and both further the progress of civilization. Albert Einstein wrote, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind" (*Ideas and Opinions*, 46). We need both to see where we are going and how to get there.

Beautiful lives are not uniform. The simple underlying patterns in the ideal way of life can be expressed in unlimited ways in our individual and social lives and in diverse cultures. How those patterns become manifest depends on the socio-cultural environments that influence us; on our time, energy, and interests; and on choices we make.

Beautiful lives are not perfect. Imperfections, incompleteness, and impermanence exist in all lives. Our physical, mental, and other challenges do not limit the beauty that is possible in our lives. In fact, how we deal with those challenges and with the circumstances we find ourselves in is essential to our beauty. The trials of life provide opportunities for us to respond in beautiful ways.

We have many incentives to test this theory about the ideal way of life. Beauty, truth, and good are among our highest ideals, if not our highest, and our ancestors have honored them for thousands of years. Many respected people have encouraged us to become artists in daily life. Others have advocated bringing art, science, and religion together. In addition, almost everyone enjoys beauty and creates at least some beauty in daily life. And most people experience at least some aspects



of the ideal way of life. We can create more beautiful lives simply by expanding what we already do.

### **Inspired by Beauty**

Many people have appreciated the profound significance of beauty in our lives:

- “Everybody, to some extent, and more or less consciously, has since childhood been a seeker of beauty.” Piero Ferrucci (psychotherapist), *Beauty and the Soul*, 175.
- “Art has been and still is the essential instrument in the development of human consciousness.” Sir Herbert Read (art historian and poet), *Icon and Idea*, 17.
- “At the magic touch of the beautiful the sacred chords of our being are awakened, we vibrate and thrill in response to its call.” Okakura Kakuzo (cultural historian), *The Book of Tea*, 74.
- “The whole body seems to feel beauty when exposed to it as it feels the campfire or sunshine, entering, not by the eyes alone, but equally through all one’s flesh like radiant heat, making a passionate ecstatic pleasure-glow not explainable.” John Muir (naturalist), *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*, 65.
- “The best way to know the Truth or Beauty is to try to express it. And what is the purpose of existence Here or Yonder but to discover truth and beauty and express it, i.e., share it with others?” Brenda Ueland (author and teacher), *If You Want to Write*, 179.
- “If you beautify your own life, you beautify the life of everybody around you.” Frank Lloyd Wright (architect), quoted in *Frank Lloyd Wright: On Architecture, Nature, and the Human Spirit*, edited by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, 61.

- “From so simple a beginning endless forms [of life] most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.” Charles Darwin (biologist), *The Origin of Species*, 513.

The first section in Appendix A offers more quotations praising experiences of beauty, and the second section provides quotations on artistic creativity in a wide range of daily activities. Those quotations inspire us to seek beauty in all aspects of our lives.

### **Inspired by Nature’s Beauty**

We are part of nature, and the beauty in our lives is part of nature’s beauty. Therefore, let us reflect on the lives of three revered naturalists and their ideas about beauty in nature:

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was a naturalist, a philosopher, a historian, and a writer who contributed much to nineteenth-century transcendentalist thought. At age twenty-seven, he built a cabin in the woods that surround Walden Pond, and he lived there for two years and two months. In *Walden*, his book of wisdom about the art of living simply and close to nature, he wrote, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (83). He also wrote, “Before we can adorn our houses with beautiful objects the walls must be stripped, and our lives must be stripped, and beautiful housekeeping and beautiful living be laid for a foundation: now, a taste for the beautiful is most cultivated out of doors, where there is no house and no housekeeper” (*Walden*, 36). To Thoreau, “The perception of beauty is a moral test” (*Journal*, vol. 5, 120).

John Muir (1838–1914) was a naturalist, a long-distance hiker, a climber, an environmental philosopher, and a writer. Raised by a strict, devoutly religious father and having memorized long passages from

the Bible, Muir worshiped the spiritual in nature all his life. He celebrated nature in *The Yosemite* when he wrote, “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike” (192). Muir believed in beauty’s redemptive power, saying, “Heaven knows that John [the] Baptist was not more eager to get all his fellow sinners into the Jordan than I to baptize all of mine in the beauty of God’s mountains” (*John of the Mountains*, 86).

We know Muir today as the “father of the national park system” and for his role in establishing the Yosemite and Sequoia national parks. His heroic efforts to prompt the U.S. government to create national parks arose from a deeply moral impulse. He wanted to make public lands available so everyone could share in nature’s inspiration. The Sierra Club website quotes John Muir, saying, “Between every two pine trees there is a door leading to a new way of life” (“The John Muir Exhibit”). In *John of the Mountains*, we find this Muir quotation: “The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness” (313). Many of his reflections have mystical overtones; take, for example, his statement “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe” (*My First Summer in the Sierra*, 110).

Aldo Leopold (1887–1948) was a scientist, an ecologist, a writer, and a philosopher. He helped establish the science of wildlife management, the Wilderness Society, and the University of Wisconsin Arboretum. Each year people gather at the Arboretum and at other sites in Wisconsin and beyond to read aloud Leopold’s classic book *Sand County Almanac* and savor his insights into animal and plant life. He is honored widely for his *land ethic* and for how he and his family restored land around their cabin on the Wisconsin River. This ethic states: “Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing

is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (*Sand County Almanac*, 224–25). Leopold wrote, “All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. . . . The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (*Almanac*, 203–4). His *land ethic* is also a *life ethic*. He said, “There are two things that interest me: the relation of people to each other and the relation of people to the land” (Leopold Papers, 10-6, 16). The land ethic makes beauty a guiding star we can follow as we deal with moral issues.

We can appreciate nature’s beauty in our yards, gardens, parks, arboretums, reserves, conservancies, land trusts, wilderness areas, and ecological restoration projects. Moreover, we can enjoy the beauty of nature in our bodies and in our lives. Poet T. S. Eliot wrote:

“We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time”  
—“Four Quartets,” 39

In this book, we explore many sources of knowledge and return to our animal nature and our place in nature. Poet Walt Whitman wrote, “We are Nature—long have we been absent, but now we will return” (“Children of Adam,” 264). Upon returning, we will feel more at home in the world. In *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, renowned biologist E. O. Wilson wrote, “The human mind and body are precisely adapted to this world, notwithstanding its trials and dangers, and that is why we think it is beautiful. . . . We are consequently unlikely ever to find any other place or conceive of any other home as

beautiful as this blue planet was before we began to change it” (278). Let us seek a home on this planet, at peace in both the natural and supernatural realms.

### **Beauty and Interdisciplinary Studies**

The goal in interdisciplinary studies combines various types of knowledge from the sciences and the humanities. The natural sciences reveal patterns in the universe, in nature, and in life on earth. The social sciences reveal patterns in human life. The humanities concern art, religion, philosophy, language, literature, and many other subjects.

The social sciences are specialized and fragmented, and distinguished social scientists complain bitterly about lack of progress in their disciplines (see Appendix D). The humanities are still more specialized and fragmented, and English professor Louis Menand recently wrote, “What true interdisciplinarity might look like no one really knows” (*The Marketplace of Ideas*, 87).

E. O. Wilson wrote, “Most of the issues that vex humanity daily—ethnic conflict, arms escalation, over-population, abortion, environment, endemic poverty, to cite several most persistently before us—cannot be solved without integrating knowledge from the natural sciences with that of the social sciences and humanities. Only fluency across the boundaries will provide a clear view of the world as it is . . . .” (*Consilience*, 13). He wrote, “If the natural sciences can be successfully united with the social sciences and humanities, the liberal arts in higher education will be revitalized” (*Consilience*, 269).

Two distinguished educators have said beauty is the key to success in interdisciplinary studies. In *The Grace of Great Things*, English professor Robert Grudin wrote, “Scientists and humanists alike should remember to elaborate not only the truth of their discoveries but the beauty of what has been discovered. Of all the elements of learning, the perception of beauty is at once the most delightful and the most

suggestive of an underlying principle that unites the disciplines. Beauty is the lingua franca of all learning and therefore must be at the core of successful pedagogy” (163). He also said “Recurrent references to ‘beauty’ across the sciences suggest a new interest in this abstract idea as a link between the disciplines. As a unifying abstraction, the sense of beauty may conceivably spread to the social sciences and beyond, unfolding new topics of discourse and an aesthetic dimension in fields previously considered value free” (*Grace of Great Things*, 195).

In *The Culture of Hope*, poet and professor of humanities Frederick Turner wrote, “Given an infinite number of theories that will logically explain the facts, scientists will sensibly always choose the most beautiful theory. For good reason: this is the way the world works. Beauty in this view is the highest integrative level of understanding and the most comprehensive capacity for effective action. It enables us to go with, rather than against, the deepest tendency or theme of the universe” (218). In *Rebirth of Value*, he wrote, “The capacity to recognize beauty, the esthetic sense, is the primary cognitive skill of the historian or sociologist” (149).

In this book, I propose a new social science, relying on ideas from the humanities and natural science:

- Chapter 1 shows how key ideas from each social science come together around the premise that creating beautiful lives is the ideal way of life. The capacity to recognize beauty can become the “primary cognitive skill” of all social scientists.
- Chapter 2 describes artistic skills we can learn as we engage in our basic animal behavior: acquiring living space, obtaining food, eating, courting, having sex, parenting, grooming, playing, building, resting, and sleeping.
- Chapter 3 contains ideas from the humanities on art, science, mysticism, and religion.

- Chapter 4 features concepts from the humanities on beauty, truth, and good.
- Chapter 5 summarizes our body of knowledge from ethology about animal behavior, in order to provide context for understanding basic human behavior as animal behavior.
- Chapter 6 summarizes our body of knowledge from biology about life on earth and our body of knowledge from physics about nature. This chapter provides additional context within natural science for the proposed social science.

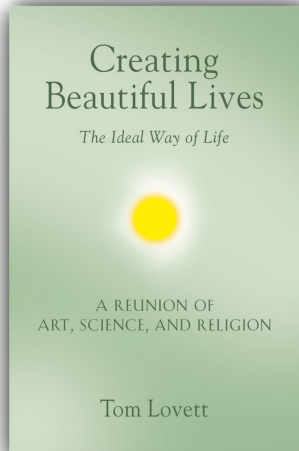
If validated, this theory of the ideal way of life will provide the focus needed for more successful interdisciplinary studies. Ideas from the sciences and the humanities will form a foundation for the social sciences based on the ideal of creating beautiful lives. That foundation will be like those in each natural science, consisting of a body of adequately reliable basic knowledge of a subject. This foundation for the social sciences will unite them into a science of the human species. The scientific story of human life will become one chapter in the scientific story of nature. Research in the social sciences and the humanities will focus on our growth toward or away from the ideal way of life.

Adequate interdisciplinary studies would end the old nature-nurture debate over which influences us more: our animal nature or the nurturing we receive. A consensus exists that nature and nurture interact as we learn and grow, yet the debate continues over *how* they interact. The natural sciences pertain to our animal nature; the social sciences and the humanities describe our nurturing. Thus, adequate interdisciplinary studies would determine the proper relationship between the sciences and the humanities. The theory in this book could finally resolve the nature-nurture debate with its new blend of nature—our basic animal behavior—and nurture, the nurturing of the ideal way of life. One point of contention in this debate is how our human

genetic heritage affects us. If validated as scientific knowledge, the theory in this book would enable us to choose how those genetic influences become manifest in the beautiful lives we create.

Many people will object that no way of life can be ideal for everyone and that any proposed ideal life would force an unwanted uniformity on us. Yet almost everyone already creates a beautiful life, to some extent. I provide a vocabulary and conceptual framework for understanding what we already do and for imagining what we might do. The ideal I present is an invitation to express the underlying patterns in beautiful lives in an unlimited variety of individual, social, and cultural ways. We can better appreciate the complexities and ambiguities of that variety in light of the ideal.





This book describes an ideal way of life in which we modify our behavior with artistic skills, scientific discoveries, and religious experiences. We can test that ideal in our daily lives and see whether it is the key to a science of the art of living.

# **Creating Beautiful Lives:**

## **The Ideal Way of Life A Reunion of Art, Science, and Religion**

by Tom Lovett

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