

Long Summary

## **Creating Beautiful Lives: The Ideal Way of Life**

by Tom Lovett

We call the human species *Homo sapiens* (“wise human”), but how wise are we? We have the ability to expand our knowledge more than any other species, but how wisely do we use our great mental ability? It seems we live at a turning point in history. Tremendous opportunities beckon us into the future, but our social and ecological crises could worsen until they overwhelm us.

Our social crises range from hunger, homelessness, and poverty to drug abuse, poor health care, inadequate access to education, and so many others. Our ecological crises include unsustainable lifestyles; depletion of natural resources; pollution of the air, the water, and the land; and many more. Our worst ecological crisis is the loss of biodiversity. Biologists say we live in an age of mass extinctions due to the large number of species now going extinct. All our social and ecological crises are interrelated; we have not learned to live in harmony with one another and with other species and nature.

If we do live at a turning point in history, what shall we do? We live in the information age and have a massive amount of information at our fingertips. Yet biologist E. O. Wilson observed the sad reality that “We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom” (*Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, 269). We won’t grow wiser unless we apply what we’ve learned to lead more fulfilling lives.

In addition, the sciences and the humanities offer a wealth of specialized knowledge on a wide variety of subjects:

- *Natural Sciences*: Life on earth, nature, and the universe.
- *Social Sciences*: Our individual and social lives.
- *Humanities*: Art, religion, and other diverse aspects of human life.

Those three sources of knowledge have largely fragmented into highly specialized disciplines and subdisciplines. We risk getting lost in the details, not seeing the big picture, and becoming more confused than wise.

In *Creating Beautiful Lives*, I identify, simplify, and connect key ideas from the sciences and the humanities about life, nature, art, and religion.<sup>1</sup> I seek to understand how we can use that knowledge to fulfill our animal nature while releasing our higher human potential, in order to solve our problems.

Let's begin with our animal nature. We all belong to one animal species: *Homo sapiens*. Like other animals, we obtain living space and food. We court mates and reproduce. We groom ourselves, play, build, form social groups, fight and flee, and rest and sleep. Our daily lives depend largely on how we modify those types of behavior.

I theorize that we can best refine each of those behaviors as we engage in them by seeking the ancient ideals—beauty, truth, and good. For thousands of years, people have considered them our highest ideals, sometimes called *transcendentals*. We can seek them in all we do, including in our relationships with one another and with other species and nature.

I theorize that we best seek those ideals through art, science, and religion; that is, with *artistic* skills, *scientific* knowledge, and *religious* devotion and inspiration. I suggest that our most refined skills are *artistic*, our most reliable knowledge is *scientific*, and our deepest devotion and inspiration are *religious*. Art can provide a path toward beauty, science can furnish a path toward truth, and religion can present a path toward good. Moreover, each path can eventually lead toward the unification of all three ideals.

As we engage in our basic behaviors, we can seek the ancient ideals with *everyday* forms of artistic skill, scientific knowledge, and religious devotion and inspiration. *Specialized* forms—fine art, social and natural science, and organized religions—can also help us. Sometimes we stop and rest, and deep enough rest fosters mystical experiences: peace of mind and body, heightened awareness, and an intuition of underlying unity. Those experiences occur during our mystical, artistic, and scientific creative endeavors and when we feel religiously devoted and inspired.

Let me summarize the ideal life: We refine our animal behavior, create beautiful lives, and fulfill our animal nature. We lead more meaningful lives. The beauty in our lives becomes part of nature's beauty. The human species becomes one human family, at home on Earth and in the universe. Everyone enjoys deep, lasting peace of mind. We finally deserve the name given to us so prematurely: *Homo sapiens* ("wise human").

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The preceding theory of beautiful lives deserves our serious consideration for numerous reasons:

- We already experience aspects of the ideal way of life. Don't we often seek and enjoy the ancient ideals? Don't we learn skills in at least some of the arts of daily living? Don't we sometimes attain scientific knowledge and pursue goals religiously?

- We can create beautiful lives simply by sufficiently expanding what we do now, in any manner and at any pace we choose. The simple underlying patterns in the ideal way of life can manifest in an amazing variety of complex beautiful lives.

- The vocabulary and the conceptual framework in *Creating Beautiful Lives* enable us to appreciate what we have done and what we imagine we might do.

- Countless writers celebrate the arts of daily living and inspire us to create beautiful lives. *Creating Beautiful Lives* contains quotations from renowned authors on the beauty we can create while engaging in our basic behaviors.

- Beautiful relationships with people, with other species, and with nature are deeply moral. Albert Einstein said, "The great moral teachers of humanity were, in a way, artistic geniuses in the art of living" (*Ideas and Opinions*, 51). In *Creating Beautiful Lives*, I describe the deep morality of beautiful relationships.

- The whole of art, science, and religion is more than the sum of its parts. Each can help the other two. Einstein wrote, "All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life" (*Out of My Later Years*, 9).

- Many people advocate uniting art, science, and religion. For example, in an informal talk with apprentices, architect Frank Lloyd Wright said, "Civilization has got to be more than it has been if it's ever going to be the great blessing and joy that it might be, where art and religion join hands with science and all three were to get together, it would really make life beautiful." Educator Phillip Coggin wrote, "Art, like science, is a religious activity, because it is concerned with an aspect of reality. . . . when they come together so that the individual self responds to the whole of its environment, religion appears in all its fullness" (*Art, Science, and Religion*, 83). A number of people have said substantially the same thing.

- Art, science, and religion were unified in the distant past. Physicists David Bohm and F. David Peat wrote, "Originally, science, art, and religion were not distinct but were inseparably

united. Considering that these three have such a deep significance through human history, it seems clear the present gulf between them must have a harmful effect” (*Science, Order, and Creativity*, 265). We reunite them every time we learn an artistic skill with help from science and religion.

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We can evaluate the theory of beautiful lives based on the experiences we have had in the past and choose to have in the future. If enough people find the theory adequately reliable, it will become a body of scientific knowledge. We will have a science of the art of living and of the ideal way of life. That would have major implications:

- *As a Paradigm Shift.* A paradigm shift would occur in the social sciences. Each social science would focus on the ideal way of life and how people grow toward it or fall away from it.
- *In Biology.* What biologists have learned about animal behavior would provide a context for understanding human behavior as animal behavior.
- *In Physics.* What physicists have learned about the underlying physical realities in the universe would provide a context for understanding those realities in human life. One is the law of entropy (the second law of thermodynamics), which describes the tendency for order to decrease (and for heat to dissipate). We see it in stars and galaxies, in nature, in life on earth, and in human lives. In *Creating Beautiful Lives*, I theorize that we maximize order in our bodies and our lives by seeking harmony, a quality of both order and beauty.
- *In Social Science as a Natural Science.* With input from biology and physics, the new social science would become a branch of natural science. The scientific story of human life would become part of the scientific story of life on Earth and in nature.
- *In Science and Religion.* Linking art, science, and religion would help resolve the relationship between science and religion.<sup>2</sup> Science and religion would come together completely and naturally by serving art—that is, by helping us create beautiful lives.
- *In Interdisciplinary Studies.* Combining art, science, and religion would link science with two key humanities: art and religion. Interdisciplinary studies linking the sciences and the humanities have been a top priority in academia for some time. Professor of English Louis

Menand wrote, “There are few terms in twenty-first-century higher education with a greater buzz factor than ‘interdisciplinarity’ (*The Marketplace of Ideas*, 95). But he also wrote, “What true interdisciplinarity might look like no one really knows” (*Marketplace*, 87). The theory of beautiful lives may show what those studies look like.

- *In Big History*. The new social science would add to *big history*, an exciting new field of interdisciplinary studies that integrates scientific knowledge about the history of the universe, of life on earth, and of the human species.<sup>3</sup>

- *In Global Unity*. Seeing who we are (the human species) and where we are (at a turning point) would enable us to make wiser choices. Historian Jacques Barzun said we live in “an age of travail toward global unity or global chaos” (*What Man Has Built*, 7). The new social science would help us choose global unity. We would seek global unity by honoring our common humanity as the human species, by recognizing our shared interests, by pursuing our common goals and ideals, and by negotiating and resolving disagreements peacefully. This global unity would limit no nation’s sovereignty or any individual’s freedom.

- *In the Nature-Nurture Debate*. The old nature-nurture debate concerns whether our animal nature or our ability to nurture exerts more influence on our lives. The consensus today in the scientific community is that nature and nurture interact as we learn and grow. The theory of beautiful lives will, if verified, complete that consensus by reconciling our animal nature with how we nurture our higher human potential.

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The history of the human species abounds with tremendous achievements in art, science, mysticism, and religion. Yet our history also reveals stunning failures in our relationships with one another and with other species and nature. Historians Will and Ariel Durant emphasize that through our creative endeavors, we can make “history forgivable by enriching our heritage and our lives” (*Dual Autobiography*, 406). Let’s redeem ourselves and the human species with our creativity. Let’s create more beautiful lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Lovett, Tom. *Creating Beautiful Lives: The Ideal Way of Life*. St. Petersburg, FL: BookLocker, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology is an excellent source of information on efforts to link religion and the science of ecology.

<sup>3</sup> See the Big History Project website and the Wikipedia article on big history. The Journey of the Universe website contains a similarly wide perspective on history.