

Short Summary

Creating Beautiful Lives: The Ideal Way of Life

by Tom Lovett

We already create beautiful lives, at least to some extent. Yet we don't have a vocabulary and a conceptual framework for appreciating how beautiful our lives are. The needed vocabulary would contain key words and definitions, and the conceptual framework would fit those words into a meaningful pattern. Such frameworks are called *mental maps* because they organize the contents of our minds.

In *Creating Beautiful Lives*, I present a mental map for appreciating the beauty in our lives. Its vocabulary includes *art*, *science*, *religion*, and *mysticism*. Those words fit into a conceptual framework based on a circle symbol, with *mysticism* at the center and *art*, *science*, and *religion* extending away from it. The edge of the circle represents the boundary of knowledge from those four sources.

The proposed mental map is part of a theory that states creating beautiful lives is the ideal way of life. In this theory, we create beautiful lives by doing three things:

1. *We seek the ancient ideals: beauty, truth, and good.* People have sought these universal human ideals for thousands of years. Although we may try to attain them today, we can do so much more.

2. *We seek these ideals through art, science, and religion.* The theory is that our most developed skills are *artistic*, our most reliable knowledge is *scientific*, and our deepest devotion

and inspiration are *religious*. Art is a path toward beauty; science, a path toward truth; and religion, a path toward good. Each path eventually leads to all three ancient ideals. Following those paths, we sometimes experience mystical states of mind.

3. *We seek the ancient ideals while we engage in our most basic animal behavior:* acquiring living space, obtaining food, eating, courting, having sex, parenting, grooming, playing, building, resting, sleeping, protecting, and forming social bonds.

We can modify these forms of behavior in an unlimited variety of ways: good, bad, or a mix. In theory, the best way would be to engage in them using artistic skills, scientific knowledge, and religious devotion, thus seeking the ancient ideals. Ask yourself: Do you engage in any behavior skillfully, with *artistic* skills? Does *scientific* knowledge help you learn those skills? Do you learn skills with a *religious* level of devotion? Do you have *mystical* experiences? Your answers will help you assess how beautiful your life is, in the context of my description of *beautiful lives*.

We are already busy creating beautiful lives. Consider these examples. When we form social bonds, don't we value beautiful relationships? Don't we appreciate the beauty in our homes, our buildings, our gardens, our food, and any aspect of our lives? Don't we often use the word *beautiful* to describe superlative experiences? Wouldn't we all create more beautiful lives if we better recognized the beauty in them now?

What are *mystical* experiences? Common definitions and connotations led me to think the essential *mystical* experiences are deep peace of mind, heightened awareness, and profound intuitive insight. We can have mystical insights during any experience. Supreme mystical intuitive insight is described as union with an ultimate reality (material, spiritual, or both).

Countless authors celebrate the art of daily living and inspire us to create beautiful lives. Many people say all aspects of our lives can become beautiful. Highly respected writers describe artistic skills we can learn through our basic behavior. In *Creating Beautiful Lives*, I integrate key suggestions from many of these writers. I also link discoveries from natural science about our animal behavior, concepts from social science about individual and social beauty, and theories from the humanities about art, science, religion, and mysticism. The overall view takes old ideas and puts them into a new framework.

In the proposed ideal way of life:

- We gradually expand on the beauty in our daily lives. We freely create an unlimited variety of complex and diverse beautiful lives. We do this at any pace and through any sequence of growth that works for us.
- We become as creative as possible by using our intuitive and reasoning abilities in our daily endeavors. The ideal life is also *the creative life*.
- We release our potential for engaging in both *everyday* and *specialized* forms of art, science, religion, and mysticism. In our daily lives, we unite the everyday forms. They interrelate beneficially with *specialized forms*: fine art, social and natural science, organized religion, and various schools of mysticism. Art, science, and religion were united in the distant past, and numerous writers encourage us to unite (actually, *reunite*) them today.
- We serve ourselves and others as well as we can by releasing our highest individual and social potential. In doing so, we reconcile our individuality and sociality, thus transcending the difference between selfishness and unselfishness. The ideal life is *the moral life*.

- We enjoy simplicity and complexity. Simple underlying patterns in beautiful lives can manifest in an infinite variety of complex ways. Beneath that variety and complexity, the ideal life is *the simple life*.
- We refine our animal behavior and fulfill our animal nature. We enjoy peace and harmony in our individual lives and in our relationships with one another, with other species, and with nature. The human species becomes one human family.
- We reconcile idealism and realism: idealism regarding our unlimited human potential and realism related to our animal nature.

How can we test the theory that creating beautiful lives is the ideal way of life? A formal research project cannot test so complex a theory, and logic cannot prove or disprove it. Therefore, we need to test it in our daily lives by analyzing our past and current experiences of the ideal life, gradually adding to those experiences, and evaluating our results. Do we, over time, lead more meaningful and fulfilling lives? That's the test.

Let's test the theory and see whether it works, in whole or in part. Our testing may require us to revise, add to, or reject parts of the theory. If this theory (with any corrections) works, we will have a science of the art of living and of the ideal way of life. The mental map will become a scientific model. We will then better appreciate the beauty in our lives, and we can imagine creating more beautiful lives.