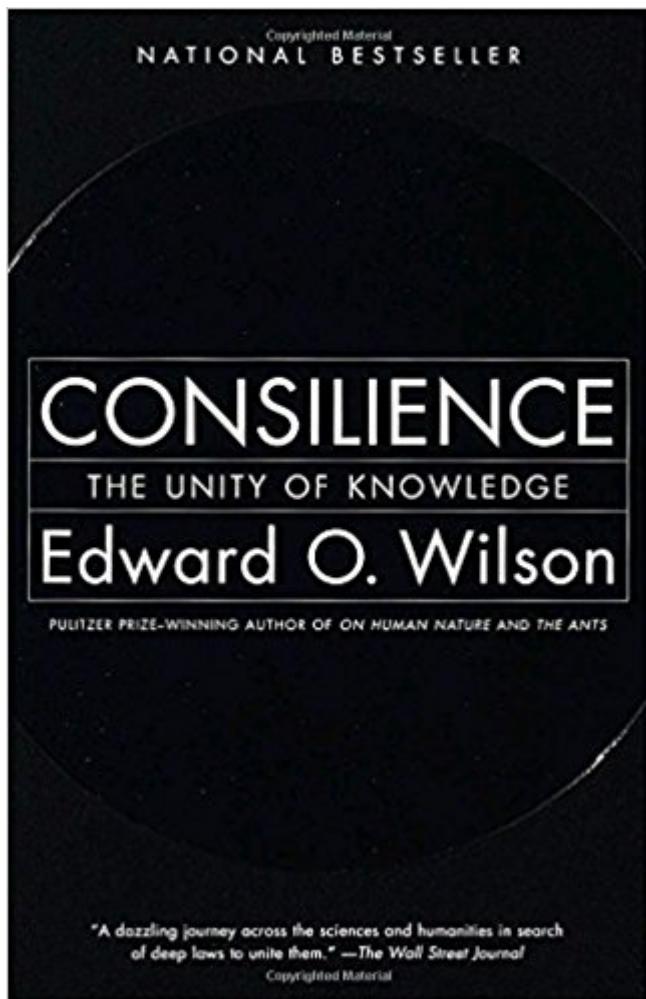


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# Consilience: The Unity Of Knowledge



## **Synopsis**

"A dazzling journey across the sciences and humanities in search of deep laws to unite them." --The Wall Street Journal One of our greatest living scientists--and the winner of two Pulitzer Prizes for On Human Nature and The Ants--gives us a work of visionary importance that may be the crowning achievement of his career. In *Consilience* (a word that originally meant "jumping together"), Edward O. Wilson renews the Enlightenment's search for a unified theory of knowledge in disciplines that range from physics to biology, the social sciences and the humanities. Using the natural sciences as his model, Wilson forges dramatic links between fields. He explores the chemistry of the mind and the genetic bases of culture. He postulates the biological principles underlying works of art from cave-drawings to *Lolita*. Presenting the latest findings in prose of wonderful clarity and oratorical eloquence, and synthesizing it into a dazzling whole, *Consilience* is science in the path-clearing traditions of Newton, Einstein, and Richard Feynman.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The biologist Edward O. Wilson is a rare scientist: having over a long career made signal contributions to population genetics, evolutionary biology, entomology, and ethology, he has also steeped himself in philosophy, the humanities, and the social sciences. The result of his lifelong, wide-ranging investigations is *Consilience* (the word means "a jumping together," in this case of the many branches of human knowledge), a wonderfully broad study that encourages scholars to bridge the many gaps that yawn between and within the cultures of science and the arts. No such gaps should exist, Wilson maintains, for the sciences, humanities, and arts have a common goal: to give

understanding a purpose, to lend to us all "a conviction, far deeper than a mere working proposition, that the world is orderly and can be explained by a small number of natural laws." In making his synthetic argument, Wilson examines the ways (rightly and wrongly) in which science is done, puzzles over the postmodernist debates now sweeping academia, and proposes thought-provoking ideas about religion and human nature. He turns to the great evolutionary biologists and the scholars of the Enlightenment for case studies of science properly conducted, considers the life cycles of ants and mountain lions, and presses, again and again, for rigor and vigor to be brought to bear on our search for meaning. The time is right, he suggests, for us to understand more fully that quest for knowledge, for "Homo sapiens, the first truly free species, is about to decommission natural selection, the force that made us.... Soon we must look deep within ourselves and decide what we wish to become." Wilson's wisdom, eloquently expressed in the pages of this grand and lively summing-up, will be of much help in that search. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Historically, all of the sciences were once united under the rubric of "natural science." Over time, they became fragmented and specialized. Nevertheless, Wilson argues that there is a genetic and neurological basis for knowledge and that all subjects of human inquiry can be reunited under the umbrella of "consilience." Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Consilience is a wonderful thought provoking read! It goes right to the heart of the matter of figuring out what is going on and what role do we as humans play in the Universe. It is somewhat dated, being written at the turn of the century, but the big questions it poses remain. What do we actually know? How do we really know anything? How can we find out the answers? How does everything fit together? I loved this book by E. O Wilson.

A truly remarkable scientific and philosophic analysis of the relation of science to the humanities, of individuals to society, and the combination of both to the future of humanity and everything on our planet. Plan on spending a lot of time thinking about what Wilson presents in this book. Then when you're finished, pick up Keith Sewell's "Leaving Truth" to further stretch your perceived ideas about Knowledge.

The purpose of this book is to explore the possibilities of synthesis of the various branches of study

from the "hard sciences" to the arts. As can be imagined, this is a daunting task, but Wilson makes real progress in this book. We live in a complicated world, but Wilson makes a wonderful case for the ability of the human mind to make sense of it. He is at his best when he discusses the failure of the ideals of the Enlightenment, brain chemistry and the genetic connection to culture. He is less successful in connecting the natural sciences model to artistic expression. This book is a thought-provoking read and is challenging, but these are important ideas and worth devoting time and attention to exploring them. Wilson is a man of both depth and breadth of intellect and is courageous enough to use those talents to attempt to discover the possibilities of connecting our theories of various disciplines. Sure, it's speculative, but it is also amazing the power that he brings to his argument that the various areas of human understanding can be subjected to universal principles of understanding. Highly recommended!

I was intrigued with the idea that he would talk about ways for ideas from the humanities and arts would come together with science, now that we've had some time for evolution and relativity to sink in. Unfortunately, Wilson expects the arts to come to see things the way science sees things. He also comes out too much in favor of progress. He dismisses the entirety of Eastern philosophy with one wave of the hand saying, "They never accomplished anything." Huh. The problem being that progress itself is not without many problems. To counter Wilson, one might say that something like Taoism, that says "Not achieving is achieving," might be the answer for many of the things that ail us.

A challenging book, yet not TOO difficult. I'm engrossed after just a few chapters... so many things to mark!

Seminal.

As an earlier reviewer (Howard Taylor) probably correctly points out, there are many mysteries reductionist science may never lead us to fully understand. That is, assuming that we are even competent to achieve this mysteriously exalted state: assuming the human mind is not just another circumscribed object with no more of a chance to encompass a full understanding of anything else than any other object in the Universe. Anyhow, be that as it may, our very awareness of these unresolved mysteries is to a large extent the result of reductionist science. Getting to a point where you know something is complex or even intellectually intractable is a sort of understanding. Seen in

that light, it's hard to argue that reductionist science has failed to increase our understanding. In my opinion, reductionist science has gotten us a lot further than have the millions of transcendentalist mystics who ever sat cross-legged humming on some mountain top; or the legions of true believers who ever pressed forehead to tile in abject submission to unconquerable ignorance. And a capitulation to complete ignorance is what transcendentalism finally boils down to. You may get a nice wooly-headed buzz from it, but it doesn't help you to know that you don't know. Reductionist science will, at very least, get you that far. E.O. Wilson is, if not on the right track, quite possibly on the only viable one available to our poor species at this point in time.

Wilson's mind and vision are refreshing. His passion for the mystery of patterns is an inspiration.

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