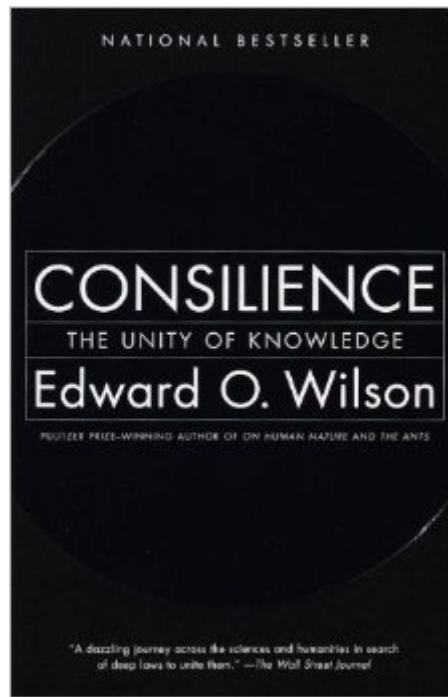# Consilience: The Unity Of Knowledge

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 ConsilienceÂ Â (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

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (March 30, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 067976867X

ISBN-13: 978-0679768678

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (186 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #46,752 in Books (See Top 100 in Books)   #3 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Philosophy > Epistemology   #24 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Epistemology   #29 inÂ Books > Science & Math > Reference

Customer Reviews

In this ambitious work, Edward O. Wilson, one of the most distinguished scientists of our times, and a man I greatly admire, goes perhaps a bit beyond his area of expertise as he envisions a project that is perhaps beyond even the dreams of science fiction. "...[A]ll tangible phenomena," he writes on page 266, "from the birth of stars to the workings of social institutions, are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and tortuous the sequences, to the laws of physics."This in a nutshell is his dream of "consilience." It is also the statement of a determinist. My problem with such a laudable endeavor (and with determinism in general) is this: even if he is right,

that the arts and the humanities will ultimately yield to reduction, how do we, limited creatures that we are, do it? It seems to me that in the so-called soft sciences like sociology, economics, and psychology, for example, and even more so in the world of the humanities and the arts, reduction is so incredibly complex that such an attempt is comparable (in reverse order) of putting Humpty Dumpty back together again. It's ironic that Wilson uses almost exactly this metaphor on page 296 to explain why once the rain forests are chopped down, they're gone forever. He notes, "Collect all the species...Maintain them in zoos, gardens, and laboratory cultures...Then bring the species back together and resynthesize the community on new ground." Will this work? Wilson's answer is no. He writes, "...biologists cannot accomplish such a task, not if thousands of them came with a billion-dollar budget. They cannot even imagine how to do it.

As an undergraduate in the early 1980s I was profoundly influenced by the paradigm-shifting academic movement begun by Professor Wilson in his work, Sociobiology. The idea that human social behavior was the product of thousands of years of ancestral genetic competition was a refreshing rejoinder to the dogma espoused at that time in conventional Sociology and Anthropology courses. In the years after university I have watched as Wilson's thesis has gradually achieved greater acceptance. Even many feminists and psychologists who once viewed Wilson's work as an anathema have come to realize that the ideas he popularized have changed forever their fields of study.It was with this background that I jumped into Consilience, hoping for new insight. What I discovered was a cogent argument for the need to break down the very same academic barriers that I recognized years ago as an undergraduate. In another book I read recently, Darwin's Dangerous Idea, the philosopher Daniel Dennett argued that the fallout from Darwin's work on evolutionary natural selection has completely disrupted and changed forever the intellectual landscape in which we live. Wilson makes essentially the same argument, but his book is more often prescriptive than diagnostic. He argues that the same synthesis which has been tenuously achieved in "hard" sciences such as physics, chemistry and molecular biology can be achieved in all branches of learning. He suggests roadmaps for achieving this integration in the social sciences as well as the arts and religion.Most interesting of all is Wilson's discussion of the need for greater understanding of the biological underpinnings of morality and ethics.

E.O.Wilson has come up with an arcane word for the title of his book, the meaning of which you will not find in your regular OED. I eventually read elsewhere that CONSILIENCE is the convergence, jumping, or bringing together of knowledge. The long time spent in frustrating dictionary searches

has caused me to yield to temptation and toss an equally odd word at Wilson's book in this review. Is it indeed Procrustean by being a created and arbitrary standard that he demands intellectual conformity to, or is he simply ahead of his time and has a real vision of a coming "unity of knowledge"? For persons in the humanities and social sciences this book may sting a little. Wilson is used to criticisms of his own work because of his insistence on using sociobiology as the lens through which he sees all. Long ago after having a jug of water dumped on his head and being told he "was all wet", Wilson seemingly realized that in order to be read he would have to develop a moderate, well reasoned, and mild writing style. You'll never read one of his books and come away thinking "diatribe" or "polemic". He even writes with a recognition and acknowledgement of his own biases. He says here that "ethics is everything" and for Wilson this largely means environmental ethics, and if after reading his book, critics want to say he's a reductionist, Wilson admits he's "guilty, guilty, guilty." Wilson however is quite able to give as good as he gets and the subject of his critical penmanship is the arts, humanities, and social sciences, and their "ideological committments" and lack of a "web of causal explanation." He thus sees them as weak in comparison to the natural sciences and poor templates for explaining all we see around us.

Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge Unity in Action: Multiplatform Game Development in C# with Unity 5 Unity 5 From Zero to Proficiency (Foundations): A step-by-step guide to creating your first game with Unity. Anatomy & Physiology: The Unity of Form and Function: Anatomy & Physiology: The Unity of Form and Function Organising Knowledge: Taxonomies, Knowledge and Organisational Effectiveness (Chandos Knowledge Management) Knowledge Stew: The Guide to the Most Interesting Facts in the World, Volume 1 (Knowledge Stew Guides) Oku: Sports Medicine 3: Orthopaedic Knowledge Update (Orthopedic Knowledge Update) Knowledge Development in Nursing: Theory and Process, 9e (Chinn,Integrated Theory and Knowledge Development in Nursing) Foundations of Museum Studies: Evolving Systems of Knowledge: Evolving Systems of Knowledge Configuring Cisco Unified Communications Manager and Unity Connection: A Step-by-Step Guide (2nd Edition) (Cisco Press Networking Technology) Configuring Cisco Unified Communications Manager and Unity Connection: A Step-by-Step Guide (Networking Technology: IP Communications) Unity 5 Coroutines: Beginner Holistic Mobile Game Development with Unity Criando Jogos Com Unity E Maya (Portuguese Edition) Learn Unity3D Programming with UnityScript: Unity's JavaScript for Beginners Unity Of Mistakes: A Phenomenological Interpretation Unity Struggle; Fiscal Crisis 1975: The Grenada Chronicles (Volume 7) Unity and Discontinuity: Architectural Relationships between the Southern and Northern Low Countries (1530-1700)

(ARCHITECTURA MODERNA) A History of the Roumanians: From Roman Times to the Completion of Unity The United Arab Emirates: A Venture in Unity (Nations of the Contemporary Middle East)